

DISSERTATION

THE EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS RETURNING
FROM ACADEMIC SUSPENSION AT A FOUR-YEAR RESEARCH INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

THE EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS RETURNING FROM ACADEMIC SUSPENSION AT A FOUR-YEAR RESEARCH INSTITUTION

More students are beginning their higher education journey at community colleges with the intent of transferring to a four-year college or university. The purpose of this study was to attempt to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree. The study used a qualitative, narrative inquiry research design to answer research questions related to how critical events in the lives of four community college transfer students affected their persistence at a four-year institution. A series of in-depth interviews allowed participants to share their experiences surrounding barriers to persistence, critical events which occurred during their suspension period, and factors that facilitated their persistence towards baccalaureate degree attainment once they returned from academic suspension. The narratives of the participants were analyzed using holistic content analysis to give further voice to the challenges the participants faced in their higher education journey.

Four emergent themes developed across the participant narratives which were (a) Reluctance in Seeking Support, (b) Familial Influence, (c) Perseverance, and (d) Maturation. A discussion of the findings of this study indicated several implications for practice including an understanding that interventions for students facing academic difficulty must be invasive, realistic, yet hopeful, and assessed regularly for effectiveness.

DEDICATION

To Ricchard for your uncompromising support and unconditional love which kept me afloat during this journey. Amari, mommy thanks you for being my biggest cheerleader and for understanding when I had to be in class instead of playing Barbie dolls. And finally to baby RJ, whose smile makes it all so worth it.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Purpose of Study.....	6
Research Questions.....	6
Significance of Study.....	7
Researcher’s Perspective.....	9
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	12
Introduction.....	12
Background.....	13
Barriers to Academic Success of Community College Transfer Students.....	15
Demographic Characteristics.....	15
Transfer Shock.....	18
State and Institutional Policies and Campus Climate.....	19
Academic Preparation.....	20
Academic and Social Integration.....	23
Academic Suspension: A Possible Outcome of Barriers to Persistence.....	25
Student Departure from Institutions of Higher Education.....	26
Factors Facilitating Successful Readmission and Persistence after Suspension.....	28
Impetuses for Successful Academic Persistence.....	29
Non-Cognitive Factors.....	30
Academic Preparation.....	32
Academic and Social Integration.....	32
Institutional Support.....	34
Learning Opportunities for Transfer Students.....	37
Conclusion.....	38
CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	40
Introduction.....	40
Research Design and Rationale.....	41
Site and Participant Selection.....	42
Data Collection.....	47
Data Analysis.....	48
Trustworthiness.....	50
Parameters.....	51
Conclusion.....	51
CHAPTER 4: EXPLANATION OF FINDINGS.....	53
CHAPTER 5: DANIEL.....	57
Daniel’s Story.....	57
First Generation in College.....	58

Distinctive University.....	62
Returning from Academic Suspension.....	72
Reflections.....	76
Analysis.....	82
Cultural Fears and Expectations.....	82
Misplaced Blame and Anger.....	85
Spiritual Strength.....	87
Building a Legacy.....	89
Chapter Summary.....	90
 CHAPTER 6: LIBERTY.....	 92
Liberty's Story.....	93
Early Childhood.....	93
Middle and High School.....	95
Young Adulthood.....	102
Young Adulthood - Community College and Marriage.....	104
Young Adulthood – Distinctive University.....	109
Adulthood – Relationships and Academic Suspension.....	113
Adulthood and Maturity.....	120
Conclusion.....	125
Analysis.....	126
Acting Out as a Response.....	126
Accepting Flaws.....	129
Dependency and Naiveté.....	131
Self-Awareness and Maturity.....	134
Chapter Summary.....	136
 CHAPTER 7: SHANE.....	 137
Shane's Story.....	138
Introduction.....	138
Life without Dad.....	138
Playing College.....	144
The Prodigal Father Returns.....	146
Coming Together and Falling Apart: Distinctive University.....	149
Reflections of his Former Self.....	156
Conclusion.....	160
Analysis.....	163
Projected Bravado.....	164
Wandering towards Success.....	167
Accepting Shortcomings.....	170
Chapter Summary.....	172
 CHAPTER 8: MANNY.....	 173
Manny's Story.....	173
Manny in the Middle.....	174
The Four-Year AA Plan.....	179

Distinctive University.....	184
Conclusion: Feeling Myself a Little More.....	194
Analysis.....	197
Marginalization.....	198
Coping Mechanisms.....	200
Coming of Age.....	201
Chapter Summary.....	204
 CHAPTER 9: COMPOSITE ANALYSIS.....	205
Reluctance in Seeking Support.....	205
Familial Influence.....	208
Perseverance.....	209
Maturation.....	211
Conclusion.....	213
 CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION.....	216
Summary of the Study.....	216
Discussion of Findings Similar to the Literature.....	218
Academic Preparation.....	219
Academic and Social Integration.....	220
Institutional Support.....	221
Discussion of Findings not Found in the Literature.....	222
Help-Seeking and its Impact on Student Outcomes.....	223
Working with Students Facing Academic Difficulty.....	226
Summary of Findings Relevant to the Research Questions.....	228
Research Question One.....	229
Research Sub Question A.....	230
Research Sub-Question B.....	232
Research Sub-Question C.....	234
Implications for Practice.....	235
Recommendations for Future Inquiries.....	238
Personal Reflection.....	240
 EPILOGUE.....	242
 REFERENCES.....	243
 APPENDIX.....	251
A. IRB Approval Letter.....	251
B. Email Invitation to Gatekeepers.....	252
C. Email Invitation to Participants.....	253
D. Statement of Informed Consent for Gatekeepers.....	254
E. Statement of Informed Consent for Participants.....	257

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview to the prevalence of community college transfer students moving from two-year degree granting institutions to four-year degree-granting institutions in the United States. A background and history of the community college student, trends in transfer from two-year community colleges to four-year colleges and universities, and implications of transfer for four-year institutions of higher education are presented. The purpose of the study, research problem, and research questions are defined. The significance of the study is presented from the researcher's perspective.

Background

Access to higher education has increased dramatically over the last decades. Between 1990 and 2000, enrollment at institutions of higher education increased over 11%. Between 2000 and 2010, enrollment at institutions of higher education went from 15.3 million to 21.0 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Community colleges have played a major role in increases in enrollment at institutions of higher education. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2013), over 13 million students were enrolled in the 1,132 community colleges in the United States in the fall of 2011; this constitutes roughly 45% of all undergraduates enrolled in institutions of higher education.

Community colleges have long-held comprehensive missions of open access and low tuition that have historically provided access to students who may not otherwise have pursued higher education. Cohen and Brawer (2008) identified populations of students who historically had been excluded from participating in traditional higher education:

...now colleges were opened to ethnic minorities, lower-income groups, and those whose prior academic performance had been marginal. Of all the higher education institutions, the community colleges contributed most to opening the system. Established in every metropolitan area, they were available to all comers, attracting the 'new students': minorities, women, people who had done poorly in high school, those who would otherwise never have considered further education. (p. 31)

Cohen and Brawer (2008) indicated that the community aspect of community colleges impacted its growth as well. "Hence, the advent of the community college as a neighborhood institution did more to open higher education to a broader population than did its policy of accepting even students who had not done well in high school" (pp. 16-17). As more students began attending community colleges, it was likely that the number of students transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions would also increase.

There are many reasons why students begin their higher education journey at one institution only to finish at another. Financial concerns and restraints, personal growth, academic goals, and fulfilling career aspirations are some of the reasons students transfer from one institution of higher education to another (Duggan & Pickering, 2008). According to Townsend (2008), the percentage of students on the path to attaining a baccalaureate degree who attend more than one institution is forty.

Hagedorn, Cypers, and Lester (2008) identified a major role of community colleges to be an "access bridge" to other levels of postsecondary education" (p. 644). Despite the record numbers in enrollment at community colleges, and the fact that many community college students have high aspirations for academic achievement, the percentage of these students transferring successfully and actually earning a BA or BS is low according to Cuseo (1998). Cuseo (1998) referred to the "baccalaureate gap" which is the phenomenon whereby, on average, transfer students initially matriculating at community colleges earn 15% fewer bachelor's

degrees than students who initially enroll at four-year institutions of higher education (p. 3). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that students who begin their academic career at community colleges “continue to be at a disadvantage in reaching their education goals compared with similar students entering a four-year college or university” (p. 381).

There are many barriers to the success of transfer students at four-year colleges and universities. Success in this dissertation is not defined as successful matriculation to the transfer institution; rather it is defined as persistence from one semester to another at the four-year institution, and the ultimate attainment of a baccalaureate degree. Transfer students can be different from the traditional first-time-in-college student because they tend to balance work, family, and community obligations with their educational goals (Duggan & Pickering, 2008). Therefore, the barriers to attaining a baccalaureate degree are distinct from their first-time-in-college counterparts. Research has shown that student demographics such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status affect community college transfer student persistence, and that community colleges tend to enroll students who are more likely to be women, minorities, and come from lower social classes. This is a concern because studies have shown that these demographics are related to lower persistence rates and lower educational attainment (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Lee & Frank, 1990; Wang, 2009).

Other barriers to persistence and degree attainment include lack of social integration and academic preparation. Socially, Velez and Javalgi (1987) found that living and working on campus are strong predictors of academic success, and many transfer students are also commuter students with work and family obligations outside of school. This population of students is less likely to be able to interact with faculty outside of the classroom or to participate in co-curricular

activities that have been found to be important in academic and social integration as much as non-commuting students (Townsend & Wilson, 2009).

According to Townsend (1993) transfer students have identified four-year classroom experiences as competitive and more stressful versus community college classrooms. Wang (2009) found that transfer students who successfully completed courses in chemistry, economics, or biology at a community college were twice as likely to attain a baccalaureate degree as those who took remedial courses. Socially, some transfer students, especially non-traditional students, are not fully integrated into the transfer institution because they spend less time on campus.

Encountering difficulties at the senior or four-year institution can often culminate in the student's departure. While there is much research on the barriers affecting the persistence of community college transfer students, little research was found on the community college transfer student who reenrolls at the same transfer institution from which the student departed. Tinto's (1993) theory of individual student departure, which described how events within an institution can impact student departure, has been the foundation for studies that have examined student stop-outs, or those students who "after leaving college, re-enter at a later time to complete their degrees" (pp. 25). Tinto's theory distinguished between the individual who leaves higher education permanently from the student who transfers or "stops out." Researchers have found, similar to Tinto's findings, that the difference between those students who drop-out permanently and those who stop-out and return is largely based on goals (degree attainment), institutional experiences, and integration (Woosley, 2004; Woosley, Slaubaugh, Sadler, & Mason, 2005). Hoyt and Winn (2004) found that among students who drop-out, age, low GPA, and having dependents were significant factors in departure.

While Tinto's work recognized the different patterns for departure and return, his research only briefly touched upon the student who is involuntarily withdrawn from a university based on academic suspension. According to Tinto (1993), less than 25% of student departures are in the form of academic suspension. Tinto posited that while academic dismissal is typically the result of academic demands being too great for a student, some academic dismissals are in fact voluntary because the student has deliberately chosen not to "invest the time and energy needed to maintain minimum academic standards" (p. 117).

A further review of the literature surrounding academic dismissal found very few empirical studies on the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who were academically dismissed from the four-year transfer institution and reenrolled at a later point. Much of the limited research focused on college students who had been suspended from institutions of higher education, but not specifically community college transfer students who were suspended from the four-year college to which they transferred. Santa Rita (1996), in a study of 53 students who returned to Bronx Community College after an academic suspension, found that those students who were married, had financial constraints, and stayed active during their suspension period had an "incentive" to be successful after reenrollment. Goldman, Blackwell, and Beach (2003), in a study of freshman and sophomores who were readmitted from suspension at a Midwestern university, found that students who indicated they "loafed" or did nothing during their time away from the university had failing GPAs (below a C average) after returning from suspension.

Purpose of Study

Despite decades of research on community college transfer students and the factors that impede and facilitate persistence there is still more to learn about the persistence of these students, and how they make meaning of their academic experiences. Further, very little research was found on community college transfer students who experienced academic difficulty at and were subsequently academically dismissed from the four-year institution. There is a need to document the stories behind the academic difficulties community college students face when they transfer to four-year institutions of higher education. The purpose of this study is to attempt to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was guided by an overarching research question and three sub-questions.

1. What were some of the experiences of two-year community college students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree?
 - a. What were the initial barriers to persistence towards a baccalaureate degree prior to academic dismissal?

- b. What critical incidents occurred during the academic dismissal period that enhanced or impeded the students' reenrollment at the four-year institution?
- c. What were the factors that influenced persistence after return from an academic suspension dismissal?

Significance of Study

The academic success and persistence of college students has been the focus of research for many decades. Unfortunately, much of the theory and research has been applied to traditional aged, White, first-time-in-college students. Townsend and Wilson (2009) stated that Tinto's theory on student retention has "rarely been used to examine the long-term persistence of students after they transfer from the community college to a four-year institution" (p. 407). Townsend and Wilson also stated that current research on community college transfer student success has largely been from a quantitative angle, focusing on performance, time to degree after transfer, demographic variables, and behavioral variables such as enrollment and employment status, thus stating an implied need for qualitative research on the subject.

Literature has defined the barriers that transfer students have faced, but more research is critical for understanding the unique challenges of the community college transfer student as well as to assist in informing programming and support for this population. Townsend (1993) concluded that "little attention has been paid to the academic environment at the four-year college or university from the perspective of the community college transfer student" (p. 176). Additionally, Wang (2009) noted that there is significant research confirming that transfer students perform less satisfactorily than "native" students, but "not as much empirical attention

has been directed towards studying community college transfer students in their own right to examine what exactly influences their attainment” (p. 571).

The focus for retention programming at four-year college and university campuses has largely been on first-time-in-college students as well. Zhu (2005) argued that in contrast to the attention universities pay to their freshman students, “transfers are left in the situation of coming and going at their own wish and pace” (p. 6). With the number of community college students who will eventually transfer to a four-year institution of higher education increasing, it is imperative that colleges and universities give more attention to the community college transfer student population in regards to persistence and graduation.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on the community college transfer student experience at four-year institutions while giving a voice to community college transfers who pushed through the initial barriers to degree attainment and persisted towards a baccalaureate degree. Taking into account the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, and who experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and then returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree will assist higher education professionals in meeting the needs of community college transfer students. The intent of this study was to have an impact on creating a more effective, passionate, and caring academic environment for community college transfer students. The research presented in this study may influence practices and procedures surrounding the community college transfer student by giving student affairs professionals unique glimpses into the students’ experiences.

Researcher's Perspective

I work as an Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at Distinctive University (a pseudonym). In this position, I supervise an academic advising unit which provides academic support and career assistance to over 3000 students in the College of Technological Advancement (a pseudonym). As an Assistant Dean, my role is to be an advocate for students while implementing and articulating academic policies and procedures. I serve as a liaison to the faculty and the larger university community in assessing efforts that impact recruitment, retention, and graduation.

My initial interest in higher education stemmed from undergraduate work in federal TRIO programs including Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Special Support Services. Through this work I became passionate about access to higher education for all students. I worked in admissions at both public and private universities, and continued to focus efforts on students of color, first-generation students, and students from lower socio-economic status by working with multicultural recruitment, special admissions programs, and doing community outreach for parents of college-bound students. After my first job in academic advising, I became interested in issues related to student persistence, retention, and graduation. In my capacity as Assistant Dean, I am able to work closely with students on academic probation and students returning from academic suspension. Distinctive University's population is largely made of students who begin their academic careers at community colleges. It is not rare for me to often encounter students who performed well at the community college but who encountered academic difficulties after transfer to Distinctive University.

I am interested in the community college transfer student population because I believe large universities like Distinctive University do not provide enough academic and social support for a population of students who have different concerns and needs from the traditional first-time-in-college student. Distinctive University has invested in retention and transition programming, and other areas of support for traditional first-time-in-college students including living and learning communities, cluster courses, and cohort grouping through the Honors College. Another example of support for first-year students at Distinctive University is our freshman year experience program. Coordinated by Distinctive University's residence life and housing department, the program focuses on providing resources to help students "adjust responsibly to the individual and interpersonal challenges" that may be encountered during their first year in college. Programs like the freshman year experience program continue to expand while a service specific to the non-traditional learning community, the Commuter Services Center, designed to be a supportive environment for non-traditional, transfer, and commuter students, was closed after one year because of funding concerns. I believe administrators at Distinctive University have taken the stance that community college transfers have all of the tools they need to be successful, and that this student population has been left behind in policy and programming efforts.

While quantitative research is vital to defining the parameters of a phenomenon, I believe qualitative research provides a view from an angle that numbers cannot provide. Statistics can show a relationship, but I believe the narrative interviews which were conducted in this study provide a more holistic and tangible exchange between myself as the researcher, the participants, and those reading this study. High school and community college academic performance, demographic variables, and first-year GPA, for example, have all been shown to be important

indicators for the success or failure of students. However, there are factors that cannot be identified on a survey instrument that affect a student's performance and the ultimate attainment of a baccalaureate degree. Stories of students who faced academic difficulty are important, and I believe they have value in student affairs program development. It is my hope that my research and experiences will aid student affairs professionals to adopt a more empathetic and effective approach to community college transfer students who encounter academic difficulty and give support to the creation of programming designed specifically to facilitate the academic success of community college transfer students at four-year institutions.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

For decades, research has been added to the growing body of literature regarding post-secondary students and their successful and unsuccessful transfer from two-year to four-year colleges and universities. Quantitative and qualitative research studies have been conducted by researchers interested in the phenomenon of the transfer student. Kozeracki (2001) said much of the research has attempted to answer questions such as who are the students who transfer; how do they perform academically after transfer, and why do they drop out, ultimately not achieving their academic goals. Additional research has focused on institutional goals and measurements for success. The purpose of this review of the literature is to focus on similar questions related to student persistence which is defined in this study as continuous enrollment towards the attainment of a baccalaureate degree. This review will also focus on the two-year community college student who transfers to the four-year institution and encounters academic difficulty culminating in academic dismissal.

This chapter will begin with a definition of transfer and the prevalence of student transfer from two-year community colleges to four-year institutions of higher education. Barriers to persistence will be defined with an in-depth discussion on how demographic characteristics, transfer shock, state and institutional policies, campus climate, academic preparation, and lack of academic and social integration can negatively affect community college transfer student persistence. A review of literature surrounding student departure from institutions of higher education in the form of academic suspension will be introduced. Characteristics of students who successfully return from academic suspension and student-centered policies on readmission

from suspension will be discussed. Finally, research discussing the impetuses for community college transfer student success will be presented.

The factors found in this review of the literature that impact the successful academic persistence of community college transfer students are non-cognitive variables (Wang, 2009), academic preparation (Hagedorn, Cypers, & Lester, 2008), academic and social integration (Townsend & Wilson, 2009), institutional support (Flaga, 2006), and diverse learning opportunities (Tinto, 2003).

Background

According to Cuseo (1998) “transfer” is typically defined as a student’s movement from one institution of higher education to another. Vertical transfers are those students who move from two-year to four-year institutions; those who move from four-year to four-year institutions are horizontal transfers. Kozeracki (2001) pointed to other definitions which stress the complex movement of transfer students:

...[R]esearchers have expanded the concept of transfer to include the phenomena of “reverse transfer” and “transfer swirl,” which describe the movements of undergraduate students who begin their studies at four-year institutions and then transfer to a two-year institution, those who take community college classes while they are enrolled at a four-year institution, and four-year college graduates who enroll at a community college for personal development or career improvement. (p. 66)

A study by the National Center for Educational Statistics tracked students entering a four-year institution of higher education over a six-year period and found that one-third of them had transferred (horizontally or vertically) at some point in their higher education career (Jacobs, 2004).

There are many reasons why students begin their higher education journey at one institution and finish at another. Financial concerns and restraints, personal growth, academic goals, and fulfilling career aspirations are some of the reasons students transfer from one institution of higher education to another (Duggan & Pickering, 2008). At least 40 % of students on the path to attaining a baccalaureate degree attend more than one institution (Townsend, 2008).

Since the 1960s enrollment at community colleges increased at a much higher rate than enrollment at four-year colleges and universities in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), in the fall 1968 public four-year institutions of higher education enrolled over 2.1 million more students than community colleges. By the fall 2006, public four-year institutions enrolled only 729,893 more students than community colleges, up from a gap of only 211,233 in the fall 2002. Despite the record numbers of enrollment at community colleges, and the fact that many community college students have high aspirations for academic achievement, the percentage of these students transferring successfully and actually earning a BA or BS tends to be low. Cuseo (1998) referred to this phenomenon as the “baccalaureate gap” whereby, on average, community college transfer students earn 15% fewer bachelor’s degrees than “native” students who started at a four-year institution of higher education (p. 3). Further, Cuseo argued that “approximately one-half of all students who attend community college and have aspirations to attain a baccalaureate degree actually go on to transfer to four-year institutions – with or without an associate degree” (p. 3). More recently, Solorzano, Rivas, and Velez (2005) reported that even though over 70% of Latino students who enter community college have aspirations of attaining a baccalaureate degree, only seven to 20% do so.

Barriers to Academic Success of Community College Transfer Students

There are many barriers to community college transfer student success which have been discussed throughout the literature. Success in this literature is not defined as successful matriculation to the four-year institution; it is defined as the long-term academic and social success at the four-year institution to which the student transfers. Ultimate success for the community college transfer student is the attainment of a baccalaureate degree. The student who transfers from the community college to the four-year institution can face a number of challenges: psychological, academic, and environmental (Laanan, 2001). According to Duggan and Pickering (2008), transfer students tend to balance work, family, and community obligations with their educational goals; the barriers to attaining their degrees are distinct from those that first-time-in-college students might encounter. In reviewing the literature on community college transfer students, demographic characteristics have also been found to have an impact on academic persistence.

Demographic Characteristics

Much of the increase within the undergraduate population at institutions of higher education “will be accounted for in new immigrants to the United States and domestic people of color, especially students of Hispanic origin” (Reason, 2003, p. 175). Transfer students themselves are a dynamic and diverse population. Dennis, Calvillo, and Gonzalez (2008) said that more ethnically diverse students, older students, and those working full-time jobs are enrolling in undergraduate programs and “are more likely than White, middle-income recent high school graduates to attend two-year institutions before transferring to a four-year university” (p. 535). Demographic variables such as race, gender, socio-economic status, and

age have been proven in the literature to be factors affecting persistence rates and degree attainment for community college transfer students.

With a commitment to open access, community colleges are enrolling more students from diverse ethnic backgrounds with wide-ranging ages and varied employment status (Dennis et al., 2008, p. 535). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, women and minorities have been enrolling at high rates in the community college (AACC, 2013). Further, in the fall of 2005, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 19% of community colleges in the United States had minority enrollments that were 50% or more (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Even with the higher enrollment numbers, some research has indicated that minority and female students who begin their education at a community college are less successful academically than those with equal ability who enroll initially at a four-year institution (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Lee, Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993; Lee & Frank, 1990). Cohen and Brawer (2008) did advocate that even though it is true that minorities at community colleges earn associate's degrees and transfer less than other ethnic groups, often the bigger question is what would be the alternative if these students did not attend community college. Therefore, the mission of the community college to provide access is still being met.

Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) and the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS), Wang (2009) found that gender and socioeconomic status affect baccalaureate degree attainment. Females earn baccalaureate degrees 2.46 times higher than males, and the odds of obtaining a baccalaureate degree increase 1.28 times for every increase of one quintile in socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic status not only affects who may start their higher education career at a community college, but it also affects persistence. Cuseo (1998) also referred to a “cutback in scholarships and grants” which is an additional barrier to economically disadvantaged students. Zamani (2001) indicated fewer grant dollars are being given to students, while loan opportunities have increased, which places a burden on students from low-income backgrounds. Cejda (2004) pointed to a survey of minority students who had transferred to a four-year institution which indicated that “one-third could not have transferred had they not received a scholarship” (p. 170).

Research has shown that age is a factor in predicting success as well. Zhai and Newcomb (2000) in a quantitative study, identified factors related to academic performance and retention of students who transferred into The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, and found transfer students’ age had a significant negative low association with retention, $r(230) = -.19, p < .05$, which according to the researchers, revealed younger students were more likely to continue their academic career at Ohio State University.

Eggleston and Laanan (2001) pointed to research which defined the typical transfer student as a 26-year old female working part-time. According to Cohen and Brawer (2008) 60% of students who started college in their thirties began their academic career at a community college. Wang (2009) pointed to research that showed “older community college entrants are much less likely to transfer than students entering college right out of high school, and this gap is explained mostly by the lower educational aspirations of older students and external demands” (p. 575).

Transfer Shock

A second barrier to the academic persistence of community college transfer students occurs after matriculation at the senior institution. In a review of pinnacle studies related to the academic performance of community college transfer students at four-year institutions, Hills (1965) found most community college transfer students in the studies presented experienced a severe drop in performance upon transfer, which he referred to as transfer shock (p. 202).

Transfer shock occurs when there is “a dip in transfer student’s grades during the first semester after transferring to a four-year institution” (Ishitani, 2006, p. 404). According to Ishitani past studies have shown that although cumulative GPAs increase by class in both native (students who remain at the institution they first enrolled in) and transfer students at the same institution, transfer student GPAs are lower than native students. In Ishitani’s longitudinal study of transfer student (from both two- and four-year institutions) behavior at a four-year institution, it was found that transfer shock had a significant effect even after the first semester. A dip in GPA was also associated with “reducing a student’s chance to return for the second semester” (p. 412).

Townsend’s (2008) research of students who transferred to new institutions from smaller campuses, especially community colleges, illustrated that factors like institutional size, faculty and student interaction, or lack thereof, and academic expectations can lead to this dip in grades. Because community college transfer students enter four-year universities with previous academic experience, there is an expectation that they already have the tools to be successful in their new academic environment. Townsend argued that many of these students “feel like a freshman again” because of the lack of knowledge about certain aspects of the new institution (p. 73). Dennis et al. (2008) also contend that confusing institutional policies, lack of centralized

information and “less faculty attention, concern and interaction” add to the frustration of new community college transfer students (p. 535).

While transfer shock does negatively affect the success of transfer students from community colleges, it is important to note that there is also research that shows, with the proper support, students can recover. Laanan (2001) referred to an in-depth analysis of transfer shock that showed that in most cases, the magnitude of the GPA change is one half of a grade point or less. The majority of the respondents in the study (67%) recovered from transfer shock within the first year (p. 8). Even though transfer shock can be a barrier to the academic persistence of community college transfer students, it is important to point out that there is conflicting research that shows the opposite of transfer shock can occur for the community college transfer student as well. “Transfer ecstasy” is a term used to describe an increase in a student’s GPA after they have transferred from the two-year community college to a four-year college (Laanan, 2001).

State and Institutional Policies and Campus Climate

Cuseo (1998) referred to many institutional barriers such as confusion over or lack of state articulation policies; curricular rigidity on the part of the senior institution; curricular changes without communication to community colleges; requiring transfer students to register last: “transfer students are ‘welcomed’ to the university with a long list of closed classes;” and denying academic honors to community college transfer students (p. 4-5). Townsend (1993), while conducting a qualitative research study at a large, urban four-year institution, found that many aspects of the university culture impeded the success of transfer students. Students in the study pointed to the competitive nature of peers, the imposed pressure from faculty, and the feeling that help was unavailable from either of the mentioned sources.

Laanan (2001) suggested that the research does show a relationship between institutional characteristics and student adjustment to college. The academic competitiveness of a college can have implications such as “distinct racial climates,” (p. 10). Additionally, Zamani (2001) referred to campus climate and culture as having an impact on undergraduate retention and matriculation. According to Eggleston and Laanan’s (2001) research showed that institutions are making a small attempt at addressing the needs of their transfer population, but many others are not responsive at all. In an e-mail based study to 38 institutions of higher education, nearly one-third of the respondents reported having no special programs for community college transfer students.

Hagedorn et al. (2008) indicated a number of institutional policies that create barriers to the success of a community college transfer student. Students often lose credit during transfer because of their enrollment in courses which are non-transferrable. Lack of academic advising at the community college and the four-year institution results in frustration about articulation, course schedules, and registration.

All of these institutional barriers have the ability not only to impact how a student matriculates, but how successful they are at persisting towards their academic goals. Four-year institutions are now recognizing the need for special programming and are implementing support programs for community college transfers, which will be discussed in the latter part of this review.

Academic Preparation

Lack of academic preparation can be a hindrance to any student’s academic progress in college. Several studies have shown a relationship between the previous academic performance

of students at the community college and their performance at the four-year institution of transfer. Even students who have typically succeeded academically at community colleges can experience academic difficulty at four-year institutions. According to Townsend (1993), the academic culture at four-year colleges is sometimes a contrast to the academic culture at the community college. In Townsend's qualitative research study of community college transfer students to a large, urban university, she found transfer students were not prepared for the competitive interactions with faculty and classmates. Townsend's research told of one community college transfer student who sought assistance from faculty, only to be told "that if I couldn't understand it, I should get out of his class" (p. 2).

Additionally, Townsend pointed to a classroom atmosphere at the four-year institutions that were competitive and full of pressure. One student in Townsend's research indicated a reluctance to ask a question because of a fear that fellow students would see them as "dumb" (p. 4). Both the academic preparation students are receiving at the community colleges and the students' perception of their academic preparation can be a barrier to their academic success and persistence.

Zhai and Newcomb's (2000) research on transfer students to The Ohio State University showed a significant relationship between GPA at the community college, GPA at the current institution, and retention. GPA at previous institutions was found to have a significant low association with retention, $r(209) = .22, p < .05$ (p. 8).

Equally important is the type of community college a student attended. In Zhai and Newcomb's (2000) research, they found that students who transferred from a technical college had lower GPAs than students who transferred from other two- and four-year colleges. Clark

(1960) referred to a criticized activity of community colleges called “cooling out,” which he defined as the “‘gradual disengagement’ of a student from his/her professed academic goal, accomplished primarily through the substitution of lesser avenues of achievement perceived to be more appropriate to a given student’s preparation, skills, and abilities” (p. 575). Jacobs (2004) referred to cooling out as a way to track lower-ability students into remedial classes which thus, tracks students out of the transfer curriculum. The lack of adequate academic preparation seems to affect not only a student’s ability to transfer, but also their persistence.

Hagedorn et al. (2008) conducted a survey of community college transfer students and found that successful transfer depended highly upon successful completion of courses designated for transfer. In their study, students who had higher English and math placement scores transferred at higher levels. Additionally, students who successfully transferred were twice as likely to have passed chemistry, economics or biology courses. According to Hagedorn et al., students who took remedial courses and spent more semesters in community college were less likely to transfer. Wang (2009) found that academic preparation at the community college is a significant predictor of academic persistence at the four-year transferring institution. Using data from 786 transfer students who entered community college immediately out of high school, Wang found that students who took courses in an academic curriculum were more likely to attain a baccalaureate degree than those who took a vocational or other track (p. 582). Wang also indicated that collegiate remedial coursework seemed to “redirect community college transfers from attaining a baccalaureate degree, probably by prolonging coursework and reinforcing negative academic self-efficacy” (p. 584). Crisp and Nora (2009), in their quantitative study on Hispanic community college students and persistence, found students not taking developmental courses had a significantly higher GPA in the first year of college, $t(570) = 2.56, p < .05$.

Academic and Social Integration

Academic and social integration was found to be a strong reoccurring theme in research on community college transfer student persistence. The definitions of integration of community college transfer students at four-year institutions have varied from study to study, but the concept has consistently shown to be vital in ensuring the success of this population of students. Velez and Javalgi (1987) conducted research on community college transfer students from the City University of New York (CUNY) community college system and found that living and working on campus are strong predictors of academic success (p. 90). Some transfer students, especially non-traditional students, do not have this opportunity for engagement with their peers.

Astin (1993) found that academic development is indeed enhanced by involvement with faculty and specific learning experiences. Astin, in his study on the effects of involvement, found strong positive correlations between faculty-student and student-student involvement and student outcomes, including intellectual and personal growth, degree attainment and graduating with honors. Kuh (2003) discussed how results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) showed that transfer students, whether from community colleges or other four-year institutions, are less engaged than native students. According to 2002 data, over 40 % of the responding seniors indicated they started their academic careers at a different institution. NSSE results indicated that transfer students are less engaged in areas of “active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and supportive campus environments” (p. 29). Kuh indicated that “transfer tremor” might be the cause of the disengagement of the transfer student, which is “managing the challenges that come with learning how to negotiate the cultural pathways of their new institutions” (p. 30). Kuh, like

many other researchers, indicated that colleges and universities must find a way to better integrate transfer students into their academic and social experiences.

Hurtado, Han, Saenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, and Cerna (2007) conducted a quantitative research study that explored key factors that had an impact on the college transition of underrepresented minority community college transfer students, including dimensions of academic and social engagement. Hurtado et al. found that interacting with upperclassmen, including peer advising, had a significantly positive effect on academic success, $\beta = .05$, $p < .05$ (p 865). Interacting with peers of diverse backgrounds was a positive predictor of sense of belonging for these students, $\beta = .11$, $p < .001$ (p. 873).

Townsend and Wilson (2009) used Tinto's theory of student retention to determine whether his conclusion that "undergraduate students' persistence is not only influenced by their own characteristics, goals, and commitments but also by their experiences academically and socially within the institution" (p. 406). Townsend and Wilson defined academic integration as "interaction with faculty and staff both inside and outside of the classroom" and social integration as "formal or institutionally provided co-curricular or 'student-life activities'" (p. 406). While much of the research done applying Tinto's theory has been done on traditional, first-time-in-college students, Townsend and Wilson's research was done on community college transfers to a large, four-year institution. Townsend and Wilson found that the students who had academic difficulties in their first semesters after transfer had also experienced academic and social isolation. In their study, students indicated differences in teaching styles, social isolation and lack of support as reasons for their initial academic difficulties.

Townsend and Wilson's (2009) work also indicated that because community college transfer students may be dealing with issues traditional students do not necessarily face, such as childcare, working full-time, and commuting, they are a population that is inclined to be less academically and socially integrated. While much research indicated the importance of social integration, Townsend and Wilson found that with students who persisted academically at the four-year transfer institution, many did not engage socially and yet were still considered successful. The researchers interviewed students who indicated they "were not interested in making social connections," were attending college to get a "college education culminating in a bachelor's degree as opposed to having the collegiate experience," or already had "a well-established social life outside of the university." (p. 417). Townsend and Wilson also pointed to research that said social integration may not be as important because the community college they came from did not have the typical "student-life activities" so participation was less desirable.

Through decades of research, lack of academic and social integration has been proven to be a significant barrier to the academic persistence of community college transfer students. Student departure from the four-year institution can be the unfortunate outcome of a student's academic experience at the senior institution.

Academic Suspension: A Possible Outcome to Barriers to Persistence

While some community college transfer students continue to persist toward baccalaureate degree attainment at the transfer institution, there are others who cannot overcome the barriers placed in front of them. Students who leave college and re-enter at a later time to complete their degrees are considered "stop-outs," versus "drop-outs," who leave a college and never return

(Tinto, 1993). Drop-outs are students eventually leave the university either on their own accord, or by academic suspension dismissal.

Student Departure from Institutions of Higher Education

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure from institutions of higher education provides a framework to assist in understanding why students leave college. While his work centered on all students in the higher education system, his theory is very much applicable to the community college transfer student as well. Tinto's theory attempted to explain how events within an institution can impact student departure. The theory of individual departure takes into account how "adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, learning, and external obligations and commitments come to influence differing forms of student departure from campus" (p. 112). Within the theory, Tinto (1993) presented a model of student departure from institutions of higher education:

Broadly understood, it argues that individual departure from institutions can be viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the institution. (p. 113)

The barriers to the academic persistence of community college transfer students presented earlier in this review can lead a student to depart from the institution on their own volition. Tinto's (1993) theory on departure suggested six processes that affect student departure:

- *pre-entry attributes* – demographics such as ethnicity and socio-economic status;
- *goals and commitments* – a student's academic aspirations and community support or lack thereof;

- *institutional experiences* – difficulty adjusting to new academic rigor and climate;
- *integration* - academic and social isolation;
- *goals and commitments during college* – work and family obligations; and finally
- *outcome* - the departure, whether voluntary or involuntary (pp. 114-116).

Although Tinto (1993) stated that while less than 25% of student departures are academic suspension departures, or involuntary, it is important not only to address why students encounter academic difficulty, but also how readmission from suspension happens, and which students are successful after a return from academic suspension. The student who involuntarily stops-out due to academic failure and subsequent suspension has rarely been the focus of empirical research. Some researchers have attempted to look at the factors that contribute to student suspension, as well as the factors that enhance the possibility of a student's return and his /her subsequent persistence towards a baccalaureate degree. While much of the research has not been exclusive to community college transfers, the literature is important to gain an understanding of student departure.

In a small study of community college students at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY) returning from academic suspension, Santa Rita (1996) found that of the 86 students readmitted after an academic suspension dismissal, 47 failed to achieve a C average at the end of the first semester term. Those students who failed academically were non-married, reported no financial concerns, encountered many personal problems, loafed during their suspension period, and tended to be more dissatisfied with instructors and academic advising than students who achieved above a C average.

Goldman, Blackwell, and Beach (2003) in a study of 6,993 first-year students at a mid-size research university, found that 10% were academically suspended within a six-year time span. Of the students who were readmitted from suspension to the university, only 6.2% persisted and earned degrees within that time period. It is pertinent to note that a larger percentage, 18.8%, of minority students was suspended versus 8.2% of the non-minority population.

Factors Facilitating Successful Readmission and Persistence after Suspension

Studies also have shown that students who complete the readmission process and return from academic suspension are aided not only by their own commitments and behaviors, but also by the support of the four-year institution to which they are returning. In Santa Rita's (1996) study those students who were successful after readmission from suspension were active during their time away from campus, were married, and reported financial concerns. These findings may indicate students who were successful had more of an incentive to pass than those who were not successful.

Several studies indicate institutional support plays a significant role in the success of students returning from academic suspension. Advising and counseling centers, mentoring programs, and workshops aiding students in the transition back to college all provide support to community college transfer students in reaching their academic goals after an academic suspension (Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009; Woodard & Suddick, 1988).

Research has indicated that a centralized location to receive support for community college transfer students returning back to campus after encountering academic difficulties is vital. Woosley, Slaubaugh, Sadler, and Mason (2005) found that simple and personal reentry

processes can enhance a student's educational and institutional bond. They further support Tinto's (1993) belief that institutional goals and commitments play an important role not only in departure from an institution of higher education, but also in a student's return to that institution. A weak institutional commitment to a student attempting to reenroll after experiencing academic difficulties can lead to feelings of negativity and uncertainty within the student (Woosley et al., 2005).

Wang and Pilarzyk (2009) found that retention initiatives for students returning from academic suspension that included workshops to improve academic skills, and soft skills such as time and crisis management had a positive impact on student academic outcomes. Dill, Gilbert, Hill, Minchew, and Sempier (2010), in their research on an early readmission program for students suspended from Mississippi State University, found that 75% of students who participated in the program since its inception maintained a minimum 2.0 GPA. Students who participated in the program were required to meet with faculty and advisors, complete a skills course, and maintain a 2.0 or higher semester GPA (Dill et. al, 2010).

It is evident from the literature that clear policies on readmission from academic suspension, knowledgeable and encouraging academic advisors, thoughtful retention programming, and career and personal counseling are imperative in order to ensure that the process for returning from academic suspension is an impetus for future persistence and academic success for all students.

Impetuses for Successful Academic Persistence

Recognizing the factors that impede the success of community college transfer students is important for both two-year and four-year colleges. As administrators, once we recognize these

barriers, we can use the methods proven by research to facilitate academic success and persistence. We can create programs, policies, and procedures to facilitate successful transfer and successful academic persistence of community college transfer students at our institutions. There are a number of factors which have a positive influence on the persistence of community college transfer students, including non-cognitive and psychosocial variables , academic preparation and integration, and institutional commitment.

Non-Cognitive Factors

Self-efficacy, which refers to one's belief that one can successfully complete a task, has consistently been found to have a positive effect on college student success. Hsieh, Sullivan, and Guerra's (2007) study on undergraduate students at a four-year university found that students' self-efficacy judgments, goal adoption (the motives that students have for completing academic tasks), and mastery goals (for the development and improvement of one's ability) were significantly higher for those who were in good academic standing versus those on probation .

Dennis et al. (2008) found that among community college transfer students “non-cognitive variables, or those variables relating to motivation, adjustment and student perception, can sometimes be more important than traditional measures of cognitive skills...in predicting retention and GPA among non-traditional college students” (p. 536). Studying over 1100 community college transfer students at a four-year institution, Dennis et al. found that the students who persisted and achieved academic success had relatively high scores on psychosocial variables like academic self-efficacy, college commitment, personal/career motivation, and peer support. This group had GPAs above 3.0, maintained low dropout rates, and 64% graduated after three years.

A student's perceived locus of control, or "a person's sense of control (internal locus of control) or lack of control (external locus of control) over his or her environment," was also found to be an important indicator of academic persistence (Wang, 2009, p. 573). According to Wang the more a student believed his or her locus of control was internal, the more likely that student would persist in an institution of higher education (p. 580). Wang's research on community college transfer student persistence showed that for a one-point increase on a locus of control scale, the odds for persistence of these students increased by a factor of 1.18. On the other hand, Hawley and Harris (2005) showed that some students with expectations of barriers such as finances, transportation, or family obligations (which lend themselves to an external locus of control) tended to persist because they have planned for the unexpected and "move forward in spite of them" (pp. 131-132).

Students' overall academic goals are also very important in their academic persistence. Townsend and Wilson (2009) conducted a qualitative study at a large, four-year institution and found that ultimately the desire to achieve a baccalaureate degree facilitated community college transfer students' academic integration and success. Zhai and Newcomb's (2000) survey of students at the Ohio State University found that those students who aspired to higher educational goals (i.e. earning a Master's degree) earned higher GPAs. Wang (2009) discussed the expectancy-value theory when determining that community college transfer students who started off aspiring to earn a bachelor's degree in high school had better chances of earning a four-year degree. Expectancy-value theory states that for goal-oriented individuals who place value on a task, their perceived success determined the effort they would exert in trying to complete the task (Wang, 2009).

Academic Preparation

Academic behavior before transfer significantly impacts the persistence of transfer students at four-year institutions. Work done by Velez and Javalgi (1987) showed that community college students increased their odds of successful transfer by 20 % with an A average versus a C average. The number of hours a student has earned before transfer has also been found to have a significant impact on persistence and ultimate attainment of a baccalaureate degree. According to Lee and Frank (1990), transfer and attainment of a degree is strongly related to the accumulation of credits. According to their research, students who successfully transferred earned almost twice as many credits during their first two years of college, spent more time enrolled full-time, and took more academic courses like math and science. More recent research indicated a college prep track has consistently been shown to increase academic preparation for high school students entering college; this holds true for community college students as well. In a study of community college transfers, Hagedorn et al. (2008) found that students who successfully transferred had completed more courses designed for transfer, passed 18% more courses successfully, and took a higher number of courses per semester than those who did not transfer successfully. Zhai and Newcomb (2000) in their research of students at The Ohio State University found that students who were retained had an average GPA of 2.72 and 85 hours upon transfer, thus implying a higher transfer GPA will impact future GPA and persistence.

Academic and Social Integration

As previously discussed in this review of literature on community college transfer student persistence, academic integration has also been found to be an important factor in the success of

transfer students. Volkwein, King, and Terenzini (1986) conducted a study on community college transfer students to the State University of New York (SUNY) Albany and found that faculty-student contact had a significant impact on the intellectual development of transfer students (p. 425). Further, Volkwein et al. found that involvement in the classroom and enjoyment in classroom activities had a positive impact on growth. The study suggested that when students are engaged with faculty in productive academic relationships that include intellectually stimulating discussions, meaningful assignments, encouragement, and a genuine interest in student intellectual development, there is a direct benefit to community college transfer student success.

Townsend and Wilson (2009) found that academic integration was the best indicator for community college transfer student success. Using Tinto's model of student persistence, Townsend and Wilson (2009) showed that students who transfer in with an average of 60 hours, which has been shown to already have a positive effect on persistence, had the ability to integrate academically by immediately taking courses within their major. This allowed students to take classes with smaller enrollments and have greater access to faculty and research opportunities, which facilitated their success. One student in the study indicated that working with a faculty member on a research project made her feel "...a part of something bigger than my courses" (p. 415).

While the importance of social integration was questioned in their research, Townsend and Wilson (2009) did find that for some community college transfer students joining clubs was important to connect with others. They found that involvement in fraternities or honor societies within a student's major facilitated academic as well as social integration.

Institutional Support

While success in this literature review is defined as long-term academic persistence, easing the initial transfer process itself can have a positive impact on the overall academic success of a transfer student. Cuseo (1998) discussed clear tactics for easing the transition for community college transfer students and what institutions of higher education can do to facilitate the success of these students. Institutions can place barriers to transfer students, as discussed earlier, in the registration and articulation process. To ease these obstacles Cuseo (1998) suggested a partnership between two-year and four-year institutions that would “enrich” community college courses to ensure proper academic preparation and transferability of courses; clear articulation agreements supported by faculty; and “co-registration” to ensure availability of courses for new transfer students.

Cuseo’s research is over ten years old, yet current research also shows that “a variety of institutional support services influence student satisfaction and persistence” (Alpern, 2000, p. 17). Alpern’s (2000) study on community college transfer student satisfaction with their baccalaureate institution indicated community college transfer students desired better communication of policies and procedures, more information about financial aid, more contact with advisors and faculty, and “a greater cooperation between the community college and baccalaureate institution in providing institutional support services” (p. 19).

Berger and Malaney (2003) found that students who actively prepare for transfer by seeking information about the transfer process and requirements are more likely to be successful at the transfer institution. Thus, it is important that faculty, advisors, and other professionals at both the community college and the four-year transfer institution be knowledgeable about

university practices regarding transfer students. Administrators at four-year institutions have a responsibility to engage with administrators at the two-year colleges in the best interest of transfer students (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Bell (2004) indicated that the transfer process itself can be “difficult and discouraging” for a number of reasons and effective advising starts with an understanding of what transfer needs are. In addition to being knowledgeable of core curriculum issues, transferrable credit, and articulation agreements, Bell posited that advisors should be sensitive to the emotional issues transfer students encounter, including financial concerns, fear, and self-doubt.

Transfer centers at both the community college and the four-year institution can be a wealth of information for transfer students. Pope (2004) showed that transfer centers were important in encouraging students to transfer; assisting with transfer applications; monitoring and providing support through a referral process; and involving faculty and staff in curricula and articulation.

Orientation programs designed specifically for transfer students are a manifestation of a commitment by the four-year institution to community college transfer student success. According to Kuh (2003), many of the initial experiences students get from an orientation or welcome week, are designed for new, first-time in college students and are not necessarily made available to transfer students. Transfer students are unique in their needs, and sometimes come to campuses thinking they do not need to be oriented. Roof and Cawthon (2004) reported that orientations should be designed with a set of key characteristics, according to the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS), including, but not limited to:

- being based on goals and objectives;

- being coordinated with the relevant programs and activities of the institutional units;
- assisting new students in understanding the purposes of higher education and the mission of the institution;
- providing new students with information about academic policies, procedures, requirements and programs sufficient to make well-reasoned and well-informed choices;
- informing new students about the availability of services and programs; and
- providing intentional opportunities for new students to interact with faculty, staff, and continuing students (pp. 54-55).

It is important to include all of these components in a transfer orientation primarily because it encourages both academic and social integration, which has been noted throughout this review of the literature as crucial in the academic persistence and success of transfer students to four-year institutions.

Having academic advising available at both the two-year and four-year institutions and transfer centers clearly indicates institutional support of transfer students. Flaga (2006), in a study conducted at Michigan State University, found that increased communication between the two-year and four-year institutions would help academic advising be more beneficial. Relevant up-to-date information about programs, transfer credits, policies and procedures can be articulated more clearly to community college advisors, and in turn to the community college student. Flaga also noted that community college advisors should feel comfortable contacting university advisors for information; for some, this is a change in culture. Proper advising on the front end can play a positive role in the persistence of a student after transfer.

Learning Opportunities for Transfer Students

As an introduction to learning opportunities for community college transfer students, research has shown that many of the learning opportunities related to persistence are designed with first-time-in-college students in mind. Learning communities, although typically unique to the freshman experience, can have a positive effect on the academic and social success of transfer students. Tinto (2003) described learning communities simply as an opportunity to “link students together” by taking a series of relevant courses together. Learning communities can look many different ways, including living-learning communities, small break-out discussions from large lectures, or the linked courses taught over the course of a semester that a group of students enroll in. Additionally, some learning communities involve service learning opportunities, which, according to Tinto, allows for a shared experience between students and faculty that promotes classroom learning as well as development and responsibility.

The option of living on campus is different for transfer students depending on the four-year institution they attend, their personal commitments, and their financial situation. For the traditional community college transfer student (entering community college directly out of high school), even though a living-learning community might not be as desirable, research shows they are beneficial. Although the concept might be different for a community college transfer student who comes in with varied hours and completed courses, a learning community experience for transfer students would have the same overall benefits. Tinto (2003) concluded that student who partake in a learning community experience: (a) spend more time together out of class, which creates an informal support system; (b) become more actively involved in classroom learning; (c) have an enhanced quality of learning; and (d) see themselves as being more engaged in the academic and social opportunities on campus, which has a positive effect on persistence (p. 5).

Flaga (2006) indicated transfer students can benefit from a living-learning community because they allow for “out-of-class experiences to influence student learning” (p. 16). Living on campus in general allows for a student to integrate into the campus’ social systems.

Informal learning opportunities can be as important as formal ones. Flaga (2006) noted that research has shown that students rely heavily on information resources such as friends for learning about the “academic, social and physical environments of the university” (p. 15). Institutions can utilize this by relying on the peer-to-peer interactions found within student organizations, mentoring programs, and other networking opportunities.

Community colleges can do their part as well. According to Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno (2007) many two-year colleges have instituted “student success” courses that teach students how to write and take notes, manage time, explore learning styles, and also develop plans for college and careers. Their work has shown that students successfully completing these courses at a community college can increase their chances of earning an Associate’s degree, increase their persistence in college, and increase their likelihood of transferring.

Conclusion

The implications for understanding the factors that both impede and facilitate the success of transfer students are important for higher education administrators, faculty, and staff. Only when we recognize what is hindering the academic success and persistence of this population can we provide the proper support to assist them in reaching their goal of attaining a baccalaureate degree.

One of the most important concepts in researching community college transfer student success is that of academic integration, which overlaps with many of the factors that facilitate

academic success. Wang (2009) pointed to “the positive association between college involvement and baccalaureate attainment,” and stressed the importance of programs and activities that promote the engagement of community college transfer students who arrive at their campus communities much later than native students. Researchers have shown opportunities for engagement and integration such as orientation programs, learning communities and interaction with faculty can positively impact the persistence of transfer students. Additionally, institutions can provide support on the front end of the transfer process with clear transfer policies and procedures, articulation agreements, and academic advising. Retention programs and policies that reduce drop-outs, stop-outs and academic suspensions and designing clear policies on returning after a departure are vital in the academic persistence of community college transfer students. Creating a campus climate that supports the diverse backgrounds and life experiences of transfer students is also important. These efforts will aid transfer students in their academic success and help them avoid some of the barriers such as “transfer shock” and academic suspension, which can derail a student’s academic goals either temporarily or permanently.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter I provide a description of the research design and rationale used to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree.

The rationale for choosing narrative inquiry to answer the overarching research question and sub-questions is described in detail. Following the research design, the site is described. I follow the site description with the procedures I used to determine eligible participants. The academic suspension and readmission process at Distinctive University (a pseudonym) is identified, as well as how gatekeepers were used to assist in participant identification. In this section I introduce the participants as well.

In the data collection section, I explain the process of communicating with gatekeepers and participants to secure involvement in the study. An explanation of the use of multiple narrative interviews with each participant is provided along with the parameters for conducting the interviews. The data analysis section describes how each of the interview transcripts was analyzed using a holistic-content perspective (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Finally, I discuss the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness as well as the parameters used in this qualitative study.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative paradigm was chosen for this study because it serves as a mechanism for “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). In this study I sought to understand the perception the participants have of their situation and their world. Although the participants in this study encountered a similar experience, using a qualitative approach gave the participants a voice to explain their own unique circumstances. Qualitative research is useful when a researcher is attempting “to (1) understand a process, (2) describe poorly understood phenomena, (3) understand differences between stated and implemented policies and theories, and (4) discover thus far unspecified contextual variables” (Merriam, 2002, p. 11). The narrative experiences of the participants who experienced academic difficulty upon transfer to Distinctive University may connect theory and practice in an effort to further support community college students upon transfer, as well as influence the views and behaviors of those who give support to these students in returning from academic suspension.

Glesne (2006) referred to social constructivism as a paradigm that “maintains that human beings construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is ‘right’ or more ‘real’ than another, and that these realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided into discrete variables and analyzed separately” (p. 7). Respecting the constructivist world view led me to use a narrative approach for this study. Narrative inquiry has the ability to “reveal truths about human experience” in a manner that can be familiar, persuasive, entertaining, galvanizing, and engaging (Riessman, 2008, pp. 8-9). Riessman (2008) also stated “telling stories about difficult times in our lives creates order and contains emotion, allowing a search for meaning and

enabling connection with others” (p. 10). The experiences behind the participants’ academic records were best told through a narrative approach.

Considering the intersection between the students’ experience and my background with the problem, the narrative approach was also ideal because of my role as the researcher in narrative inquiry. According to Merriam (2002):

...we retell our respondent’s accounts through our analytic redescriptions. We, too, are storytellers and through our concepts and methods – our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives – we construct the story and its meaning. In this sense the story is always coauthored, either directly in the process of an interviewer eliciting an account or indirectly through our representing and thus transforming others’ texts and discourses. (p. 287)

My position as an assistant dean at Distinctive University allowed me to play a more active role as a storyteller because of my relationship with not only the participants in the study, but with others who are active in the success of community college transfer students at the university.

Site and Participant Selection

The site I selected for my research study was a large, public research intensive university in an urban setting in the United States. Student enrollment at Distinctive University is over 40,000 students and the student body is primarily non-residential. Distinctive University is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as a research university with very high research activity (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2013). The campus is part of a system which includes four universities and two teaching centers. Distinctive University is the largest and most comprehensive institution within the system with over 100 undergraduate major and minor programs, over 125 master’s programs, and over 50 doctoral programs. The university is one of the most ethnically diverse institutions in the

country, and students hail from over 130 nations. According to Distinctive University's Institutional Research and Admissions websites, a majority of students are transfer students; 54% of the fall 2013 entering class was transfer students. Transfer students at Distinctive University are defined as students with over 15 hours of college level work completed after a student has earned a high school diploma. According to admissions policy, students who earn college credit via Advanced Placement or dual credit community college/high school partnership programs are not considered transfer students at Distinctive University.

The process I used to identify participants was two-fold. I needed to identify students who met the research criteria as explained below. Participants were chosen for the study based on two parameters:

- Students who had been placed on academic suspension at Distinctive University and were readmitted back from suspension and enrolled in courses leading to a baccalaureate degree.
- Students who had transferred to Distinctive University from a two-year community college.

At Distinctive University transfer students who do not meet satisfactory academic progress after their first semester are placed on academic probation for the following semester. Good academic standing is a 2.0 cumulative GPA on a 4.0 scale. Students will continue on academic probation if their cumulative GPA is below a 2.0, but their semester GPA is a 2.0 or better. For those students on probation who earn cumulative and semester GPAs below 2.0, they are placed on a first academic suspension. According to Distinctive University's policy on academic suspension the first academic suspension is for one long semester (fall or spring).

After the suspension period, students follow a readmission from suspension process which can vary by undergraduate college, but can include a readmission from suspension application, any updated college-level coursework in the form of an official transcript, and an interview and/or personal statement about the circumstances leading up to the suspension and actions the student plans to take to ensure satisfactory academic progress if readmitted (Distinctive University Office of Admissions, 2013).

After identifying a population of students who were readmitted to the university after sitting out on academic suspension, which will be described in detail, I then identified students who had transferred to Distinctive University from a two-year community college. Students who transferred from other four-year colleges and students who participated in dual credit or AP programs in high school and directly entered a four-year university were excluded. My assumption was high school students who completed college level coursework may have had different experiences than those students who earned college level hours after graduating from high school. Additionally, while some dual credit programs are taught by high school teachers who meet the qualifications to serve as community college adjunct instructors, some educators have questioned whether these students are awarded college credit for an aspect of the high school curriculum (Fontenot, 2003). Program quality has been a concern for some college professors who question the rigor of the programs and their ability to prepare students for the “realities of the college classroom” (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 6). A further reason for excluding dual credit students was that in some dual credit programs the courses are taught at the high school; therefore, a high school student had not had the opportunity to actually be on the college campus for instruction and other interactions (Fontenot, 2003; Rochford & Gelb, 2007).

To increase the richness of the narratives, I desired to choose participants from the different undergraduate majors and across academic classifications, as well as from various community colleges without regard to residency. Gatekeepers were used to identify community college transfer students who were readmitted to Distinctive University after an academic suspension dismissal of one long semester, and who had enrolled for at least one long semester, fall or spring, with a semester GPA of 2.0 or better. College level assistant deans and directors of academic advising centers were chosen as gatekeepers to assist me in identifying participants for the study. Six years ago Distinctive University, under the direction of the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Programs, formed a committee of the academic advising leads of all of the undergraduate colleges at the university. This committee, the Advising Leads Team (ALT), convenes regularly to discuss issues surrounding student success which include academic advising, streamlining policies and procedures, and retention and graduation efforts. Over the years, the ALT has been recognized for leading change and was recently invited to have representation on the university's undergraduate council, which is responsible for implementing changes to the university's undergraduate catalog.

As a member of the ALT, I have working relationships with other assistant deans, directors, and upper level advisors who supervise advising centers across the campus. These gatekeepers also work closely with probation and suspension students. Members of the ALT served as college gatekeepers who were able to identify students meeting the profile I developed. After receiving support from the ALT executive board, I emailed members of the ALT a letter which detailed my study and their requested role in helping me secure participants (see Appendix B). I followed up through phone calls and asked colleagues from six of the academic colleges at Distinctive University for their assistance in identifying students who had returned from

academic suspension and were currently enrolled in coursework in a degree-seeking major. Only three of my colleagues provided names of potential participants. During this time I also researched the readmission from suspension student data in the College of Technological Advancement. I filtered the data for those students who were readmitted from suspension and currently enrolled, looking for those students who were initially admitted to Distinctive University as transfer students. I then evaluated those students' records to verify that they were community college transfers and not transfers from other four-year universities. I also checked their enrollment to confirm their continued enrollment after they returned from academic suspension. I followed the same process for the four students who were referred from other colleges.

After determining the eligibility of participants I sent an email to 12 students who met my criteria. In the email I introduced myself and my research problem and questions, and identified the role of participants in my study (see Appendix C). In the letter I also addressed confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms, and made myself available for any questions or concerns. Being aware of my own biases, students were invited to participate without regard to demographics such as ethnicity and gender. I had initially determined that if I was overwhelmed with potential participants I would conduct a brief telephone interview with each interested student to assess the prospective participant's level of interest in the study as well as gain an initial impression of the student's academic experience. This was not necessary as only four students responded to my invitation. The four students were chosen to participate in my research study; three being from the College of Technological Advancement and one from the Hotel College. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants, as well as other

individuals and locations in the narrative. A rich description of the four participants, Daniel, Liberty, Shane, and Manny is presented in subsequent chapters.

Data Collection

After the four participants were chosen, I emailed each student individually to schedule the first interview. In this email I also attached the informed consent form (see Appendix E) which outlined in detail the purpose of the study, the commitment from participants, participant rights, benefits of participating in the study, contact information, and a signature which acknowledged consent. Each participant was instructed to bring the signed consent form to our first interview.

Over the course of the summer and fall of 2012, I interviewed each participant three times, with each interview lasting a minimum of one hour. During the first interview with each participant, I began with my “grand tour” question (Creswell, 2009) by asking “When did you first realize your aspirations to attend college?” Using a broad grand tour question provided an opportunity to create a level of trust with the participant; allowing the student to guide the initial interview was an intentional attempt to create rapport. During the first interview we began our conversation in a place the participant was comfortable with while I also looked for initial impressions to guide me in preparation for a second interview. The first interview allowed the participant to prioritize what was important, and the initial dialogue allowed collegiality and trust to build between me and the participant. Prescribed questions were not used as a protocol for the first interview; rather I carefully chose follow-up questions that were guided by participant responses to the grand tour question.

Participant interviews took place on campus in different locations. I was concerned that the participants would not feel at ease discussing their life stories with an administrator on campus. In fact, I found the opposite to be true. By the second interview, each of the participants had opened up and shared very personal stories with me. By the final interview, most of them were thanking me for allowing them an opportunity to talk about their experiences. One particular participant, Manny, asked if we could continue talking well after our scheduled time was over. After some of the interviews, I continued the audio tape to voice my initial impression of the participants and documented questions or concerns I had during the interview. Any topics I desired either clarification or more depth were documented. When I did not use the audio recorder to document my impressions, I wrote down similar observations. After the interviews were transcribed I read through them and once again made notes on themes that I wanted to probe further. The second interviews consisted of sharing the impressions I gathered from our first interview together and posing questions that were crafted from the review of the first transcript. During the final interview with each participant I highlighted areas of the transcripts I thought were important and had the participants read their words aloud. I asked for clarification, thoughts, and feedback about those specific data. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for the analysis process.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the narrative interviews, the transcripts were analyzed using a holistic-content perspective. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) indicated this perspective “takes into consideration the entire story and focuses on its content” (p. 15). Holistic-content analysis was chosen based on my own experiences conducting a pilot study which will be discussed in chapter four. I realized during my interactions with my pilot study participant the

entire life story of students encountering academic difficulties was important in understanding how they made meaning of their circumstances.

The process Lieblich et al. (1998) identified for reading for holistic content was used to analyze the rich data provided by the four participants of the study. During the first stage of analyzing data, Lieblich et al. indicated “there are no clear directions for this stage” and the text should speak to the researcher. At this point I read and reread the transcripts of each participant. Secondly, Lieblich et al. stated that “initial and global impressions of the case” should be put into writing (p. 62). Writing and speaking notes after each interview provided an opportunity for me to record my own perceptions of the interview and participants, as well as my role as the researcher. Spending a considerable amount of alone time with each participant’s life narrative, both listening to the audio of the interviews and reading the written transcription of the interviews, I was able to further my relationship with them by writing a global impression.

The final steps in the holistic-content process of analyzing narrative stories are to decide on themes to follow as the participant stories unfolded from beginning to end. As described by Lieblich et al. themes were identified by “the space devoted to the theme in the text, its repetitive nature, and the number of details the teller provides about it” (p. 63). During this stage of analysis I reviewed the tapes, transcripts, and global impressions I had written to establish areas in the stories that evoked emotion, from perhaps both me and the participants, areas that may have appeared contradictory to previous statements and even episodes that I felt the participants may have hesitated to discuss initially. After writing the global impression for each participant, several themes emerged which are detailed in chapter five through chapter eight. After writing the analysis for each participant, I observed several common themes that emerged. I paid close

attention to the moments in the analysis where themes felt familiar across the four stories. I provide a composite analysis in chapter nine.

Trustworthiness

Methods to ensure a “good” survey may differ between a positivist worldview, where researchers seek to “develop relevant, true statements” that can describe a relationship, versus a constructivism worldview, where researchers desire to understand how “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2009, pp. 6-8). Merriam (2002) stated what makes a good qualitative study is one that “has been systematically and ethically carried out and whether the findings are trustworthy” (pp. 30-31).

There were a number of procedures I used to ensure trustworthiness in my study. Creswell (2009) defined member checks as taking back parts of the product back to participants to check for accuracy. During the final interview with each participant I highlighted several passages in the transcript to share with them. These passages were areas in their stories that provided contradictions or emotions I desired to follow up on. I had the participants read their words aloud and asked them to elaborate on their thoughts as well as on my interpretation of their words.

I documented my initial thoughts and concerns after the interviews either on paper or by audio-recording. This reflexivity served to satisfy internal validity. Merriam defined reflexivity as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the ‘human as instrument’” (p. 26). Documenting my perspective as a researcher was important in the analysis process and will help readers understand how I came to certain conclusions and made interpretations. I also shared these reflections with colleagues for peer examination and feedback.

Finally, providing “rich, thick description” is a strategy for the qualitative researcher to ensure external validity (Merriam, 2002). Through thoughtful interviews, meticulous record keeping, and a thorough analysis of transcripts, I was able to present data rich enough to allow readers to determine whether their situations relate to the research presented (Merriam, 2002).

Parameters

This research study was delimited to students who transferred to Distinctive University from two-year community colleges. Distinctive University is a largely commuter institution in a large-sized urban city in the United States. The majority of students at Distinctive University are transfer students, which does affect demographics as related to enrollment, employment, dependent status, age, and commuter status of the students.

I chose students initially based on their admission classification: transfer versus first-time-in-college, previous institution attended (two-year community college versus four-year college or university), and their academic profile (currently in good academic standing or consistently enrolled after returning from an academic suspension). Some participants in the study were enrolled in the College of Technological Advancement, where I serve as an assistant dean. The ethical challenges that may have occurred while conducting research at my own university was considered early in the study, and I attempted to preserve confidentiality and trustworthiness at all time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter illustrated the design and rationale used to answer the research questions presented in this study. Qualitative design, more specifically narrative inquiry was utilized because it allowed me as the research the ability to explore how two-year community

college transfer students at Distinctive University made meaning of their academic circumstances. I also described in detail the research site and participant selection. Data collection and analysis procedures were presented as well as a discussion on trustworthiness and design parameters.

CHAPTER 4: EXPLANATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree. This chapter builds on the methods detailed in chapter three by providing an introduction to the narrative stories and analyses of the four participants in this research study. Daniel, Liberty, Shane, and Manny (pseudonyms) all shared the similar experience of having academic difficulties and being suspended from Distinctive University. Their individual stories, however, reflect the nuances of how critical events and personal interactions brought them to academic suspension and subsequent academic success.

The decision to use narrative inquiry to answer my research questions was based on a number of factors, but was influenced most by a pilot study I completed in a narrative research course during my doctoral studies. After years of working in academic advising I have visited with many students in academic turmoil, but I have never had the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time with any of these students. As an assistant dean I am often the person students come to in desperation, seeking a second chance at earning a degree after being academically suspended from Distinctive University. While I have had the opportunity to maintain relationships with a few of those students over the course of their academic career, most leave my office and I never have an opportunity to interact with them again. I pass them on to my advising team for continued support. The desire to pursue a doctoral degree was born in part from a personal and professional need to hear the voices of those students whom I generally see as a conglomeration of academic records and email pleas to return to the university after

suspension. The opportunity to significantly engage with such a student came when I conducted a pilot study in the narrative research course. The pilot study opened my eyes to the diverse set of events that can play a critical role in how a student navigates personal experiences in higher education. I was amazed and saddened by the journey of my pilot study participant whose academic problems were compounded by dangerous and hostile relationships with both her boyfriend and her father. I realized then that I wanted to learn more, not about the phenomenon of academic suspension, but about how students internalized the critical events in their lives and how their academic performance was subsequently impacted.

I began the research portion of this study by reaching out to college gatekeepers to assist in finding eligible participants as described in chapter three. I was surprised that my colleagues' efforts, coupled with my own within my college, only garnered 12 potential participants. After searching academic records I found that many of our students did not meet my criteria because they were not two-year community college transfer students or they had been suspended again and had not reenrolled at Distinctive University. Of the 12 students I contacted, four students responded positively to my invitation to participate in my research study.

After months of interviews and multiple reviews of the transcripts I moved into writing the narrative stories for each participant, which I have previously referred to as the global impression described by Lieblich et al. (1998). I made the decision to present the narrative story, or the global impression, and analysis of each participant as a separate chapter. I selected a format for each chapter that begins with an introduction to each participant, more specifically my initial impression of the participant as we began our first interview. The introduction is followed by a global impression that presents as the participant's life narrative. Finally, each chapter concludes with a holistic content analysis. As I was writing the global impression for the four

participants, I realized that I wanted the participants to have their own personal journeys highlighted. Presenting each narrative as a separate chapter allows the reader to engage with the participant as an individual, and not part of a phenomenon. Narrative inquiry allows for participants to tell their stories, whatever they may be, through their own lens, and I wanted to ensure the reader would be able to engage with each participant exclusively.

The first narrative story I wrote, Daniel's, was by far the easiest to write. Daniel told his story in a chronological manner, and I found the data were best displayed as Daniel's words presented. The following narratives were much more difficult to write because I found myself wanting to present them in the same manner as I had written David's story. While each narrative may have a similar flow, with critical incidents happening during their youth presented initially, I truly believe each set of data are unique and demanded to be presented as such.

In the participant narratives that follow in the successive chapters, the reader will see that each begins with a discussion surrounding the participant's first recollection of his or her aspirations to attend college. I made a conscious decision to engage these participants not with a list of prescribed questions, but with one broad question that would take them back to a place in their youth when they were dreamers. For some, their first thoughts about attending college were to satisfy parental expectations; for another, the thought of college was elusive and vague. Similar to the participant in my pilot study, I was eager to see where the participants would lead our conversation. I was excited to see what themes would emerge from their own voices as they reflected back over their journey to attain a baccalaureate degree. Each narrative story begins with the participants' response to my initial question, "when did you realize your first aspirations to attend college?" Chapter five presents the global impression for Daniel. Daniel is a 28-year-old Hispanic male who had only weeks before earned a Bachelor of Science degree from

Distinctive University. Chapter six introduces Liberty, an almost 30-year-old African American woman who experienced academic suspension twice in her undergraduate career. Chapter seven gives us a glimpse into the life of Shane, a young man of Caribbean descent who was still in the midst of fighting to earn a degree from Distinctive University. And finally chapter eight introduces Manny, a young Hispanic man trying to figure out what doors his baccalaureate degree would open. Following each narrative story is an analysis of the global impression for that participant which introduces several emergent themes from the data. Using holistic-content analysis in the individual analyses provided insight into how factors such as academic preparedness, fear, family influence, finances, mental health, and self-esteem played critical roles in the participants' academic outcomes.

Chapter nine presents a composite analysis of the four participants. I chose to present the composite analysis for all four participants as a separate chapter as well. At the end of chapter eight, the journey through the lives of each participant did not end. Rather, chapter nine allows the reader to engage in a continued expedition where all participants engage one another. Presenting the core themes that emerged across the narratives of Daniel, Liberty, Shane, and Manny, in chapter nine offers an opportunity for the participants to not only share with the readers but with one another the similarities of their circumstances. Four common themes are discussed in detail: reluctance in seeking support, familial influence, perseverance, and maturation.

CHAPTER 5: DANIEL

Daniel was the very first student to respond to my participant email. He responded to my email stating, “Of course I know who you are. You and Mr. Bailey helped me get back in after I was suspended!” Right away I knew his participation in this study would be invaluable. Daniel had just earned a Bachelor of Science in computer engineering technology the previous month. He had not yet found employment so his schedule was open for our meetings. We met in the library on the Distinctive University campus.

Although Daniel knew who I was, I did not remember him quite as well. Daniel is a 28 year old Hispanic male. He was quite imposing in stature – both in height and frame. He came right up to me with a smile and a handshake. Since he had not secured a job yet he met me on campus in jeans and a t-shirt. Daniel’s overall demeanor was friendly and open. After the interviews we shared personal anecdotes and I appreciated his honesty, spirituality, and devotion to family. After our last interview Daniel enveloped me in a big bear hug and promised to keep in touch. To this day he still emails me to see how I am doing. The following chapter presents Daniel’s narrative and follows with a holistic-content analysis of emergent themes from his life story.

Daniel’s Story

This was my first time meeting Daniel, but from his initial response to my request for participants, he stated he was familiar with who I was and would be honored to participate and

tell his story. From the first question presented to him, Daniel was forthcoming, emotional, and candid about his life story and how his experiences have shaped who he is today.

First Generation in College

Daniel is the youngest son in a family of five boys. Daniel's father grew up on a farm in Mexico and his mother grew up in an orphanage in a very poor small town in the Rio Grande near the border of Mexico. Because of their own poor upbringing, it was Daniel's parents' desire to provide a better life for their family in America.

Their dream was to sacrifice their lives, I guess in a way, by working blue collar jobs, to one day to give their sons, their family a better life and to pursue their education; to actually have their child work in a place with a tie, that's how they think of success.

Daniel's parents believed success for their children would not look like the work they, or their parents, did to earn a living. Daniel's father was a construction worker and his mother worked various jobs in factories and in housekeeping. For many years she was a stay-at-home mother until she settled into a position as a high school cafeteria worker. For the most part Daniel felt having his mother as a cafeteria school worker was "not cool" but he did benefit from her position: "some of her friends...they would give me some extra fries and stuff like that but I guess that was cool..." Some of Daniel's earliest memories of his father's work also impacted his own desire to be successful.

I saw my father tired, of course working from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. during the summer, working long hours, coming home, just being exhausted, but happy that he had a roof over his head, food on the table, and everybody was taken care of. We didn't have much but we had a roof over our head.

Daniel's paternal grandparents played a significant role in setting a foundation for the desire of Daniel's parents to see their children achieve the "American dream" but their fears of

an unknown country, of an unknown culture and language also stifled Daniel's parents' success. To this day, Daniels' father still gets "stuck" speaking English; his mother is attempting to improve her English in order to better communicate with her grandchildren. Daniel attributes his parents' resistance to learning English to the fears of previous generations.

*They wanted a better life for my father and for their children, my uncles and so on, but I think in the Hispanic community...my grandpa didn't want my father to drive, he didn't want him to learn how to drive 'cause he was afraid that my dad was going to get into a car accident and you know many things would happen. The point is, fear is what I think kind of held back my grandparents from pushing my parents or pushing my uncles and my dad to do better. It's the fear of the unknown and it's the fear of embarrassment. If I go up to somebody and start speaking to them in English, and they only know Spanish, they're afraid they're not going to know what to say, and they're going to feel humiliated and they're going to shut down. So my father came to this country and he had to learn how to drive, learn the language, learn *Donde está el baño*, where is this at, just stuff that we need to get by. It was a big transition for them and I do admire them for that.*

Struggling with low paying jobs and the instability of construction work, Daniel's parents stressed education as a way to achieve their definition of success. There was the expectation in his household that he and his brothers would perform well in school. While Daniel was the first one to attend college, all four of his brothers graduated from high school and went on to work in corporate America. Daniel remembers that even though he was a good student in high school, he struggled initially because English was his second language.

I struggled academically growing up because of the limited education that my parents had. When you're born and raised in a family where Spanish is a primary language and it's your first language, it's definitely a struggle. It was a little bit easier for me to transition to learning English because of my brothers, because I was the last one. I'd say it was the second grade - that's when I believe I actually broke out of my shell. I actually started doing better in school. I started speaking better English and I felt better about myself.

Even though his brothers did not attend college, Daniel recalls always having the desire to attend college; he just did not know how to get there. Daniel had dreamed of being an

architect early on because of his father's employment in construction, but he took a programming class in high school which cemented a desire to work with computers in some capacity.

I knew I wanted to go to college, and I knew I had to go too but I had no idea what exactly college was about. I didn't know what a major was, what that meant, but I knew in my heart that I wanted to do something with computers.

Daniel continued to do well in high school and eventually graduated with a 3.4 GPA. Being a first generation student, Daniel initiated his college decision making process by visiting his high school counselor and signing up to take the pre-SAT as a junior. From there he began to receive letters from different colleges, but eventually enrolled in a community college. Daniel's family had no idea how they were going to pay for college; he was not aware of the financial aid process and did not know to file for federal student aid using the FAFSA. Ultimately the decision to attend a community college was impacted by his ability to pay for higher education.

Basically it came down to money. I knew out of state, my original goal, was out. After I started looking at colleges, seeing the recruiters at the school handing out pamphlets saying you know, come over here, we have this, we have that. I originally wanted to go to A&M but I knew that was out of the question. My mom wasn't going to let me go; being the baby, she was not going to let me go and of course I guess the most important thing out of everything was the money...so I looked around and I applied. I picked one and said you know what, this one looks good, let me pick that one.

When Daniel first began taking courses at CC Community College he started taking basic core courses. He knew he was interested in computers but was unsure of his major choices. After two semesters, Daniel spoke to an advisor about his options. He initially thought he wanted to be a computer science major, but an informative advisor urged him to look at other options in the computer field.

... I realized there's a difference between computer science and computer engineering. When I realized that I was already like two, two three semesters in and when I talked to an advisor at CC Community College, 'cause I went to ask for more information, and she

goes, well let me just give you this bit of information. Computer science majors there's a flood in that market right now with too many employees, because of the .com bubble. You know everyone wanted to be a computer science major at one point. She goes I would strongly recommend you look into computer engineering a little bit more. And I did, and I saw that computer engineering majors, although the course and curriculum might be a little bit difficult, there are more opportunities out there for that type of field.

Daniel realized computer engineering boasted more opportunities than other computer related fields and began to take courses in the computer engineering technology field. Although he earlier acknowledged he knew the coursework was going to be challenging, he did not expect to earn his first low grades in his academic career. It was in his second year that Daniel hit his first academic "slump" while balancing a job as a grocery sacker.

I hit the slump midway, I guess, after maybe my second semester or maybe the beginning of my third semester. I hated my job. I hated my job, and I focused too much on getting out of my job that I didn't focus on what really mattered, education. I focused too much on trying to get out of there and trying to move into a professional job, trying to get out of the grocery business that I wasn't paying too much attention to my grades and what I needed to do, my studies, my homework and all that. So there came a semester when I think I got like a D, an F, and a C, and that's my slump.

Finding a new job helped put the importance of education in an even clearer perspective. A summer job in a bottling factory made Daniel think he was not living up to his grandparents and parents expectations.

You realize that \$10-\$11 bucks an hour, working long hours, sweating, exhausted, you're falling right back in the same footsteps as your ancestors did, as my father did. I was like, well I think I can do more, I think I can do something better with my life. So that fall I went back to CC Community College. I took two classes only, it was college algebra and another class and you know CC Community College doesn't have plus or minuses. I got a B and an A for that semester. A B and an A or two Bs, but no Cs.

The following spring Daniel decided not to enroll at CC Community College. Instead he continued to work and prepared to transfer to a four-year university.

Daniel's upbringing in a hard-working blue collar family played a significant role in his desire to achieve a higher education. His parents, both native Spanish speakers, encouraged their children to seek higher education because they believed that would ensure their success as adults. As a first-generation college student Daniel knew he wanted to attend college, but he had little guidance in navigating the processes to attend and pay for college. Mainly for financial reasons, Daniel chose to begin his higher education career at a local community college. It was upon the advice of an academic advisor that Daniel started to look into the computer engineering field, and he began to think about transferring to a four-year university.

Distinctive University

Attending Distinctive University meant a lot to Daniel for many reasons. First, he would be the first in his immediate family to attend college. Second, it was at Distinctive University that his grandfather had worked as a groundskeeper.

My grandfather, my ancestor, he worked at Distinctive University...he worked in the grounds. He took care of the lawn, he was a groundskeeper, is that the appropriate word for it? So as I was walking through here at first I would imagine my grandpa working here and how his grandson now comes here and is trying to make a better life for himself.

In the fall of 2006 Daniel was still working a full-time job but decided it was time to transfer to a four-year university and actively pursue a bachelor's degree in computer engineering.

I owed it to my parents, and to myself, to make something out of my life; to not be the construction worker or be the lawn care or the ground keeper, or just to work any job just to make ends meet. My goal was to be successful at something and I was blessed by the Lord, Jesus Christ, with computer engineering technology. As I was getting older and older, I developed a joy of working with computers, but unfortunately coming from a blue collar family we couldn't afford one at the time. When I got my job and I bought my first computer, I started playing with the computer and was like well I like computers, so why not make my life, why not make my major, my every day job working with computers.

Daniel had a few friends who had transferred to Distinctive University for engineering and technology programs. While he initially thought he would major in engineering, he researched programs and Distinctive University and decided computer engineering technology would be a better fit. He had spoken to a few friends who did not have positive experiences in the school of engineering.

I saw there was a college of engineering but heard one too many horrible stories from that school and that's when I found out they offered computer engineering technology. I had a couple of buddies that went to CC Community College and then transferred here and they happened to be engineering majors...but I just looked on the website and said well let me give computer engineering technology, let me give that a shot. And got accepted here and I think my first semester I hit the ground running.

Daniel arrived at Distinctive University with some trepidation. At this time he was working a 40- hour a week management job at a bank and was unsure how to balance this with attending a four-year college.

I was dealing with a new job and I was in a new school, which I mean was intimidating walking into the Distinctive University campus. What was intimidating about that is how big this campus is. How tall these buildings are. Because CC Community College is just one building, and just walking around here, having never been to an actual real university...it was intimidating at first. I didn't have a personal guide, and not that I expected it, it's just I didn't know what building was what. Until this day I still really don't know either, but yeah, intimidated, lost, not knowing where I was going, what I was doing. But I knew there was a college of technological advancement and I was supposed to go to this building two or three times a week.

It was clear that Daniel had not been properly oriented to this new academic experience. At the time Daniel entered Distinctive University, new student orientation was not required for transfer students. Daniel seemed to learn the ropes through existing and new peer relationships, but initially he still experienced a high level of anxiety. The intimidation of attending a new, large, four-year institution was intensified by the same fear that seemed to have crippled earlier generations of his family.

For some reason, in the Hispanic community fear is our worst enemy. I can just give an example, if you speak to somebody who doesn't speak English and they're Hispanic, they will be scared and terrified of you. If you speak Spanish, it develops a comfort, this comfort where they can open up and talk more. The reason I'm saying that is, the Hispanic community has a lot of fear, so coming to a university with like I said big buildings and everything I just mentioned, we're already scared coming and then we're used to going to a high school that's small and so I think transitioning into this role as a college student we have a lot of questions, but no answers.

Looking back, Daniel believed a better introduction for new students would have been helpful.

He indicated a live orientation, phone call, or email from someone at the beginning or middle of the semester could have alleviated some of his angst.

The transition from community college to a four-year college was difficult for Daniel also because of experiences in the classroom. In his first semester at Distinctive University Daniel barely earned a 2.0 because of his perceived differences between community college faculty and four-year university faculty. Daniel believed that faculty at Distinctive University were less available to him than those at CC Community College. His major courses in computer engineering technology were challenging, especially because many of them were taught by teaching assistants and adjunct professors, which were new concepts to Daniel.

In DC circuits I got a C+; it was a challenge for me because I knew nothing of computer engineering, I knew nothing of circuits, and to top it off our instructor was one of those...I call them substitute instructors, he doesn't teach here full time. And it was hard, although he was a nice professor, it was hard to communicate with him because from what I understand he also taught at another community college, so even though I had questions and would email him, there was never a response.

Additionally, Daniel felt it was difficult adjusting to a different style of teaching.

I guess I could say in that community college, when they give you a test, first of all it's a professor, he teaches the course, he gives the test, you take the test in the same room where you've been there past the whole semester. Here, you're in a much larger classroom, which is a bit nerve wracking because you don't want to ask questions that take up the class time. At the same time going to a building, sitting you down, and having the feeling that everybody's staring at you like you're doing something wrong, or they want to catch you doing something wrong. Feeling very uncomfortable when you're taking a test; it's a different testing standard than the community college, where you're in

desk, with the papers in front of you, you're sitting in the same chair that you've been sitting in the whole semester, the professor's there, probably reading a book, he or she is very nice, you know, they probably put the formulas on the board (laughing), it was different. And just like any other student you want to blame the professor, you want to blame him or her for not being available, and then that's when I realized that here, the professors here and the professors at a community college are a little different. Over there their office is there on the same floor or their office is in that building, they're available. Here, they're less available.

Daniel also remembered how difficult it was to take exams in the university's math lab, CASA. Math exams at Distinctive University are given on the computer in a large lab proctored by a teaching assistant. This testing delivery was unsettling to Daniel. He also did not believe it was fair that a TA gave exams, and not the professor, which was different from his community college experience.

Going to CASA and being nervous as it is and then being assigned a seat to sit down, I mean I've never been here...all I have is computer that has half multiple questions and half pre-response that you have to write down on a sheet of paper. The test is on the computer, for example if it's 20 questions, 10 questions are multiple choice, and you better work them out correctly and get the exact answer, because it's multiple choice, the other ten questions are free response and you write those questions down of course on the piece of paper that they give you, you turn that paper in at the end of the day, or at the end of your exam, and from what I understand, a TA grades that paper, which once again I think is not fair. So, being timed and sitting there in front of the computer, there's a clock right here, tick ticking, which I know you have the option of hiding it but there again there's my fear of man, am I going to get behind? All that pressure of sitting there and feeling that everybody's staring at you, or all the people walking around staring at you, yeah, it was ah pretty...it was just different.

After his first semester, Daniel decided not to blame anyone and did a self-evaluation: "I said well you know what, let me evaluate myself, let me see what I did wrong...and then let me take a different approach. Study more, concentrate more." Daniel continued to have difficulties even while trying to take a different approach by studying and concentrating more in class. The following spring semester Daniel enrolled in two major courses and did "horrible." This time he did place the blame on his professors.

[I did] horrible, you want to know why? My C++ instructor was a first time instructor here at the university, Dr. Bill Riley (pseudonym). His first and only semester teaching and it happened to be that semester. Although he had an excellent resume, working at Texas Instruments, real sharp guy, but I don't think teaching may have been his best profession...no connecting with the students. He was doing everything in PowerPoint and we all know when you do everything on a PowerPoint that students doze off, not really paying attention. Like I said, smart guy, it was just, his teaching skills or his teaching, the way he talked and I felt that I was the only student doing bad in the class. When I found out I was not the only student doing bad in that class, in fact a good friend of mine, he ended up failing that class. I passed, but he failed, and I thought he should have passed.

Daniel earned a D in that class. When I asked Daniel if he had been pro-active in getting help with the material, he commented that his work schedule did not allow it.

...because of work, because my time was always committed, I bought books to help me out, for example, C++ for Dummies (laughs). It was sometimes a life saver but there's nothing like somebody showing you hands on how to work.

Daniel did not fare so well in his other class that semester and was beginning to feel disappointed with his academic career.

I had professors, like I said, adjunct professors or you know professors that were on maternity leave or first time teaching a semester, I got really discouraged at that point, but I think I could have been better. Because even though I got a C+, which as I said earlier and I was happy, I think I could have done better, and this is why. Coming to college, transitioning from a high school, even if you're going to a community college, or a university, there's a difference between taking a test and learning in high school and of course taking a test and learning in college, so I guess when I came to college, whether it was CC Community College or Distinctive University, I had to learn how to learn...had to teach myself how to learn properly that cramming the night before was not the solution.

After a year of struggling at Distinctive University, Daniel tried to “learn how to learn.” This proved difficult for him while still juggling full-time work. Even though Daniel had been working from the age of 16, it was now imperative that he work because his father was injured at work and was unable to provide for the family. At the time of his father's disability, Daniel was the only son living at home. His brothers had since moved and were supporting families of their

own. Juggling the multiple responsibilities as head of the household, full-time student, and boyfriend with the pressures of higher education was complex.

I had to take on the household, which was just the three of us. At the time my other four brothers had got married and I don't know, started their lives, so I had to grow up quickly. I realized what the insurance bill was, the light bill got real expensive, and I learned how to turn off lights...what is this doing on, turn off the TV! I had to grow up quickly and I had to take on the household because as you know sometimes when you become disabled it takes awhile for social security/disability to kick in 'cause my dad by that time was at least 59, 60 something like that.

When I asked Daniel how he felt about his brothers not being to assist his parents during this time, Daniel told me he understood why they could not help, but he still felt upset sometimes.

My brothers would help out when they could, but as you know them having their own families as a responsibility and mortgages and you know it was hard for them, too, um...I guess there came a point where I guess I got upset, now that I think back about it, think back and look, I think I got upset, but there was nothing I could do, I never took action on it, I may have felt upset, I never treated them differently.

Having to shoulder such responsibility at a young age hindered Daniel from experiencing college as a “typical” college student. Even though he became discouraged many times in his academic career, he valued and respected his responsibility as the current head of the household.

I have a beautiful fiancée, she's my high school sweetheart, and of course she was my high school sweetheart and then going to college I wanted to hang out with her on the weekends. I also had a couple of buddies who'd take care of me, and sometimes on a Friday we'd go and have a couple of drinks. Ah, yes, I did get hammered a few times (laughs) um...just part of the growing up process, but I had to keep that to a limit, because I had a responsibility. I couldn't call my parents from jail, I couldn't get pulled over, I couldn't you know crash my car, things like that. Talk about money being tight, money was tight. I was 20, 21, making \$12-\$13 an hour as a supervisor at a bank; you'd think they would pay more, overseeing the department, assisting in many projects. It built up a lot of pressure. I did have a little bit of fun, but not as much fun as a college student should have and by that I mean going to the football games, hanging out having a tailgate party, or doing what a college student does. I didn't have a social life.

Being a commuter student was another disadvantage that hindered Daniel's academic success. Not spending much time on campus limited the knowledge of services available to

Daniel as a student that could have aided him in reaching his academic goals. Academic advising was a foreign concept to Daniel during his first few years at Distinctive University. It is only in retrospect that Daniel feels he should have been the one to initiate contact with an advisor.

Being the first to go to college, having many questions but no answers, or nobody to go to, that didn't help either. I thought I was doomed for failure. I thought I was going to get ranked to the point where I was going to fail. I was going to fail college and I was going to let my parents down. I felt hopeless, like I said, I knew I had a dream to complete, but I felt I didn't have the resources available to me.

I mean it's one of those things where like okay I see an advising office but I should have took initiative to go talk to somebody.

Throughout our interviews Daniel spoke about God and leaning on faith to get him through his toughest times. Daniel's faith played a role in his determination to continue to not give up his plans for his future or stop caring for his parents even through bouts of depression and anger.

I gained a lot of weight; I gained about 100-120 pounds the first couple of years from stress, not sleeping, monster drinks, still my favorite. Eating fast food 'cause you're always on the go didn't help either, and of course, you can't get exercise in 'cause there's no time. I was depressed because I would see the bills and I guess at a certain point I was like this is not fair, and I should be able to go to school, come home, study, work on the weekends, but I didn't have that opportunity. I guess on a religious view, honoring my father and mother, I'm a believer, I love the Lord, the Lord, Jesus Christ. On a religious point that's when I grab onto the word and I knew I couldn't give up, 'because my father would never give up on me. He didn't stop working halfway through the day and say okay I'm going to go home and throw back 'because I'm tired. So I guess to answer your question, my parents were my role models and seeing as they didn't give up on me, seeing as they didn't complain, I didn't complain either. They never cried or complained to me, they may have had the conversations in the background, but I don't think they deserved to have a son who would give up on them, so I continued my dream, even though I was borderline passing, I still gave it all I got.

During his time at Distinctive University as an undergraduate, Daniel took courses as a part-time student only. He worked full-time at a bank and considered leaving school for a career

in banking. Daniel had been promoted to a leadership position at the bank and seemed to be on his way up the career ladder.

I had switched over to sales and marketing at the bank and it was an awesome job. I think I actually developed good people skills and responsibility but there came a point where my schedule at the bank and my schedule at school were conflicting so I had to make a decision. I think I actually sat out a semester and really thought long and hard of what I wanted to do. Should I stay in and work at the bank and move up, because I was a very well liked employee because I made miracles (laughs) or continue to make the best of my education you know go in there and work hard.

It was his parents who helped him make the decision to stay in school. He also received some input from a co-worker as well.

Go to school. That was it point blank, go to school - you've come this far, we know we've seen you take classes; we've seen you stay up late at night studying. We've seen you work hard, might as well finish. It was actually a conversation that I had with a co-worker at the bank who his whole entire life was in banking. His advice was go to school because banks are constantly buying each other out and this is a guy who spent his whole career working for many banks, and he says, I've been at banks that got bought out - my future here, even though I've been with the company like 20 something years, it's not secure. And I thought about it...I say, well what's the difference between me and him? There isn't. We're just a number.

Not only did Daniel decide to stay in school, he left the bank and began a full-time sales job which allowed him more flexibility to finish school. Daniel began working at Black and Decker making \$32,000 a year.

In the spring of 2009, while working a 40-hour a week sales job, he enrolled in nine hours of engineering technology coursework. While he did well in two of the courses, he failed the third. Daniel acknowledged that at that time his sales job was very demanding but for the most part, he blamed the professor who taught the course on his failure.

There was a professor there that not too many people are fond of and just to say this, I think people have a gift in life, just like there's a beginning and an end, sometimes there's the end is when you're past your prime it's time to give it up, you know it's time to hang up the coat and say you know what, I did a good job, I helped so many students. I guarantee you, and I would put anything on the line, if you were to take 10, 15, 30 people from his class one day and sit them down and ask them how his teaching techniques are,

is he fair with his grading, is he a half decent or a good professor, I guarantee you about 80 or 90% of them will say no.

Daniel's performance that semester put his cumulative GPA below a 2.0 and he found himself on academic probation. Without the aid of an advisor and "where stubbornness kicks in" Daniel decided to take two summer courses to boost his GPA. Unfortunately the academic rigor of the courses combined with a shorter, condensed semester resulted in another semester GPA below 2.0, which earned Daniel his first academic suspension. After appealing to the instructor to change one grade from a C- to a C to no avail, Daniel was devastated.

I felt like I wanted to die. I felt horrible, miserable, sometimes we think we're doing the right thing but we end up not doing the right thing. We say, well this is right, I should be doing it I should be working towards my education, but we fall and we wonder what did I do wrong, and I should have really thought about it long and hard, what I should have done correctly, seeking advice. So I talked to my professor and said is there anything I can do, I emailed him, he didn't answer back. I emailed him again, I forgot what his response was, I said you know what, I'm not going to take no for an answer. I came to the office and I talked to him, I said I please, please, please help me, is there anything I can do, an assignment, research, anything. I wasn't asking for a free grade...I was asking for help, I need to go from a C- to a C, 'cause the other class was already a C and he said no, no, no, no, NO! He gave me, you know, I guess you can say a good response, if I do for you I do for everybody else, and I understand that, but not everybody's in the same boat.

Daniel had acknowledged previously that he never had thought to see an academic advisor to seek help. He admitted it was his fault, but he "still had questions but didn't know who to ask." Daniel was unsure of the academic support Distinctive University had: "I didn't know the full services that an advisor provided so it was my fault." It was not until Daniel faced academic suspension that he finally realized he needed to seek the advice of an academic advisor. His advisor Bailey told him to again plead his case for a grade change or even an incomplete grade to have an opportunity to remain in school. The professor denied Daniel's request.

I was very upset and very angry I think at everybody, myself and my professors. I later found out that the same professor that told me no, helped out a good friend of mine, bumped her grade up; that was a slap in the face. I was very angry because I was like

I'm trying to do something with my life, I'm trying really trying, and nobody seems to be helping me.

After a few weeks of despair, Daniel found solace and encouragement in his mother.

Despite previously being unable to talk to his parents about his academic difficulties because he felt some concepts were “over their heads,” it was his mother who helped him regroup and begin thinking about his next steps.

The first couple of weeks I felt everything went down the drain, you know, I felt that everything that you work for it's gone and it's like there's no coming back. That's when I think my mom really helped me out through encouragement - saying like you fell down, get back up. Both of my parents were doing it you know but my mom, I think as a son you know I was a momma's boy. I felt devastated I felt as if the world was against me and I was, I'm sorry for the word, but I was pissed. I was very upset. So after a couple of weeks I got up, dusted the dust off, and I started taking online classes at a technical school.

Daniel earned two computer certifications during his first semester away from Distinctive University. After sitting out one semester, Daniel visited his academic advisor again to start the readmission from suspension process. He was excited about the prospect of coming back even though he still felt embarrassed about his suspension.

So the fall ends, I'm seeing my friends you know, hey, how's it going, everybody's calling and asking me if I'm going to come back and I turned my paperwork in. I think it made me stronger now that I think about it, so I turned my paperwork in, and Bailey looks at it and says alright, we're going to turn this in, we're going to see what happens and you know we'll go from there. So I get the letter in the mail, and it says that my petition had been denied.

Daniel's petition for readmission from suspension had been denied and he was advised to take physics and math at a community college and reapply the following semester. While Daniel believed the decision was a mistake, he enrolled in a math course at a local community college the next semester.

I took a math class, but I didn't take it seriously. I just knew that was a mistake. I knew that that paper, that petition I got was a mistake. I knew it was a mistake, but how do you prove it? You weren't there, like, I don't know, I was frustrated.

Ultimately Daniel sat out an entire year before his petition to be readmitted to Distinctive University was approved by the College of Technological Advancement. Daniel's first few years at Distinctive University proved to be academically, physically, and emotionally challenging for him. As a community college transfer student Daniel felt his grades were impacted by a completely different classroom experience at Distinctive University. The delivery of testing and availability of professors were blamed for his academic difficulties. Daniel was also juggling full-time work in an attempt to care for his parents after his father became disabled at work. Managing a household, a full-time job, and higher education was difficult and Daniel's grades suffered as he battled depression as well. All of this culminated in Daniel being placed on academic suspension after four years of taking courses at Distinctive University.

Returning from Academic Suspension

Once Daniel was readmitted from suspension at Distinctive University, he was concerned about having to retake some courses with professors with whom he previously had difficulties. Fortunately for Daniel, he took a chemistry course and learned not just chemistry, but pride.

I took Dr. Bingham's (pseudonym) class because he's a great guy. Even though it was chemistry, he showed me to be proud of your school, to be proud to be a Distinctive University Cougar. Even though it was chemistry, when I walked out of his classroom, I felt so happy to be here, yes, that's how much he impacted me. Being proud of where you're coming from, he goes, whenever you graduate and go out into the world, you're going to meet hawks, you're going to meet 'horns, and be proud to be a Cougar. Then he started talking about the president how she was making changes and how she came in here and how she was making great changes and to this day I know people have criticized her for her salary and all that, but you know what? If she's doing all that, I think she deserves it. So yeah, it made me proud to be a Distinctive University Cougar, and in order for me to tell people that I went to DU, that I was a cougar, I had to graduate first. It just brought up like my self-esteem about the school, I think that bitter taste I had at first kind of went away with that one class.

With an increase in pride came a decrease in fear.

Whenever you hit rock bottom, you learn that fear is just something we build in our heads, I didn't have fear no more, 'cause when you hit rock bottom, you've probably done it before. When you hit bottom, you can't go more down, only way you can go is up. I was on suspension, and even though I was kind of bitter at that time, I think it did me well. It got rid of the fear, it got rid of the fear to where, you know what, don't let nobody, not a professor, not a course, not a grade, not how you're going to pay for it, nothing get in the way of your destination to graduate. I felt that even stronger.

In addition to the impact of an excellent professor, Daniel also felt that a budding relationship with his advisor, Bailey, (pseudonym) made him stronger. He admitted that seeing an advisor earlier could have altered his academic path.

I definitely think [with seeing an advisor] my outcome would have been different. I would have gotten in here and graduated sooner, without the poor grades.

When I came back Bailey, I guess in a way he welcomed me with open arms. He was glad to see me back. He was glad and said you've come back, let's get you in here, get you taken care of, and get you out of here. Great guy, you know, even in my prayers to this day I still include him, Dr. Bingham and him, because I really do have them near and dear to my heart.

While Daniel was performing well in Dr. Bingham's course, he still encountered problems in a circuit course with whom he termed as a "difficult professor." Even though he received a D in that course, he was happy he passed it. Daniel did have concerns, once again, with not only the quality of instruction from this particular professor, but also his ethics.

I hired a private tutor at thirty some bucks an hour. I didn't mind, of course I made the money for that. I walked into the first day of class and I sat, you know after everybody had left, I sat down with that professor and I talked to him. I had just come back from suspension and wanted to make sure I get a good grade so I can get that probation off my back. And he said, yeah sure you know we'll see what we can do together and I felt a little bit better, but when his exams started coming in again my grades weren't where they needed to be. I kind of felt like I'm not falling back into the same hole, like I need to get out of this class 'cause he teaches two classes, that being one of them, but I was blessed that I got out of his class, I got a passing grade.

I knew he was going to be unfair. I knew the way he was, it was a lost hope. I've hired a tutor, I've took my time studying, I've talked to my boss, like we got a schedule to where I would go in a little bit earlier, get out earlier, and study. I learned about forming groups and studying. I honestly think I did my best that semester. Then when I showed my mom one of the tests, 'cause I kept my tests, I don't know if I was supposed to have them or

not, but I kept my tests, I go look mom, here he is grading me and he's giving me seven points, four points, three points off, and one of the sub questions he took off 14 points! My parents, having a very little education, even they thought that wasn't fair.

Daniel was disturbed to find out this same instructor taught the upper level circuit course he was required to take the following semester. Daniel took nine hours in the spring of 2011 and did not feel good about his schedule. At the end of the semester, he earned two B+ grades and an F in the upper level circuit course.

I decided to email him...and I said professor, I need your help, can you just give me a D-? I reminded him that I was on probation and so on and he didn't email me back. I said I don't want to waste my time, my time and the gas to go and try and talk to him.

Another reason Daniel decided not to pursue a grade change was his personal life was still impacting his academics. Even though he had finally found a better balance between work and school, Daniel's fiancée was involved in a car accident towards the end of the semester in which she suffered major injuries.

When I got the grade it was like a Wednesday and my girlfriend, ah, my fiancée, I love her to death, my high school sweetheart, she's on her way home to pick me up because I was kind of bummed out about the whole situation. Well she gets in car accident. A lady passes a red light and just hits her on her side, the driver's side. She gets a broken pelvis, two broken parts. I kind of felt a real low because I'm still struggling 'cause how am I going to pass this guy's class and then I got an F, which means I'm not going to graduate in the fall, 'cause my hope was to graduate in the fall, and you know I'm in the hospital, I'm thinking about death and I'm thinking of my girlfriend and I'm thinking like why is this all happening. It's like 11 o'clock at night and I just start crying, you know, why is this happening, like why, why is my girlfriend here, why didn't I pass the guy's class? I'm trying my best in life you know and why is this coming at once. That's when I started you know like crying and you know it's just I think we're on a journey somewhere and we get halfway through or we get close to the end and we're getting punished and beaten and kicked and everything, there comes a point where everything just says you know what, enough is enough, I'm tired, you know? My dream is still there but like why am I? Why is this happening? And then that's when I realized that God has a plan for everything, he turns our mistakes or our problems to miracles, to testimonies.

It was through his faith that Daniel, once again, perseveres. His fiancée broke her pelvis, but with time she was able to recover. Daniel's failing grade earned him a continued probation

academic standing. He sought advice from his advisor Bailey once again and was advised to take a course that would easily secure a bump in his GPA. In the summer, Daniel enrolled in a weight lifting course and earned an A, which took him off of academic probation, and also served to provide him with a boost of confidence that he desperately needed. Even though he was advised to alter his work schedule, Daniel was not able to decrease his work load because of the medical bills he and his fiancée accrued after the accident.

I wanted to [work less] but there was a problem, my girlfriend's accident. Even though she had insurance, we had put together a good savings, a real good savings, and that went down the drain with doctor visits, her not working for almost three months, just taking care of her. You know of course she can't move so you need diapers, just a lot of things. We never asked for a hand out or help from nobody, not that we have pride, it's just we understand that everybody has their bills, but it got really tight there so that savings that I had to go to school went down the drain, I say like right close to the end of the summer.

Daniel's worries about paying for college seemed to intensify when he was laid off from his job a few months later, but he soon realized it was a blessing in disguise.

It's August, everything seems to start to go back on track. I get a phone call, at work. Because I'm in sales and I'm always traveling to different stores there's a conference call at work, a nationwide conference call, and it was telling us that to be careful that our job might be going to a third party and they were going to make a decision on when this would happen, but don't worry, we're going to see if we can find something for you. Okay I knew what was happening, I knew they were letting us go. I kind of had that in the back of my mind, but that pushed me to work harder at school. Time came in November at Thanksgiving that we get a phone call and they let us know that they're going to lay us and 1,200 other people nationwide off and thank you for your time, thank you for everything, but it was a perfect time because I was trying to finish up my senior project design.

Daniel's senior project team won first place in a university research symposium for designing a smart fridge for people with disabilities. Daniel felt this was truly his time to shine and finished the fall 2011 semester with two B's and a D in calculus, which secured another semester in good academic standing.

Daniel still held on to the fear of academic failure upon his return to Distinctive University after a year on academic suspension. An encounter with a motivating professor instilled a pride in Daniel that had a positive impact on his academic outlook. Despite some personal set-backs, Daniel persevered and was progressing towards earning his bachelor's degree.

Reflections

In the spring of 2012, Daniel enrolled in the final four courses he needed to earn a degree in computer engineering technology. On May 11, 2012, Daniel walked across the commencement stage in front of his entire extended family. He was excited to share this experience with his family, who had supported him the entire time, including his young nieces and nephews.

My oldest brother is 43 so there is a big gap there. Their kids have grown up seeing me prosper in my education with high school graduation and my college graduation. On my graduation day all of my family, which I think is a total of 29, my immediate family came to the pavilion to cheer me on. They saw first-hand. First they were excited about skipping school, but they saw what it is to accomplish a dream and I think that motivated them. I'm with them every chance that I get to talk about education, 'cause nobody wants to be bombarded with you know you have to go to school, you have to get your grades up, but being active with them and saying look if you don't get an education, you're not going to live a prosperous life. You're not going to be able to afford the nice car, or the nice mansion or the house, you're going to struggle...but if you dedicate a couple years, four, five years however long it takes, and struggle just a little bit. I know it sounds like a lot but if you struggle just a little bit the rest of your life you will be prosperous, you will prosper...besides good health and being right with God, having a career, not necessarily about the money, but having a career [is being prosperous].

Daniel believed that his experiences can help motivate not only his nieces, but will also have an impact on his own children. Even though his fiancée is not currently in school, he realizes the value of his child not being a first generation college student.

I think that's something that my fiancée and I have talked about, you know me being at work and the day comes and my kids being at home with mom, emphasizing how important it is to get an education because your dad went to school and got his education

so it's important that you follow in his footsteps. Not necessarily the same career path but get an education.

When reflecting on how Daniel would impart knowledge and impact his children's academic career, he focused on providing them with certain tools early on so they would not have the same fears he did in pursuing higher education. His strongest piece of advice to his children would be to not be afraid.

I guess that would be my point, don't be afraid, don't be afraid of failure, and work hard, 'cause if I did it, you can do it. As far as paying for school and all that stuff, that's something that can be worked out but your focus is working on your education and getting good grades. If there's ever a problem, if there's ever a question that you don't have an answer to, you can get help.

This would be the same advice Daniel would give when dealing with a difficult professor. In retrospect Daniel realized some of the blame he put on professors for his failure was misplaced and he would teach his children a better way to deal with difficulties in the classroom.

I guess [fault was] both ours, both of our faults, professors and mine. I'm doing some thinking and I could have taken extra steps to make sure I didn't fall in the holes that I did fall in. At the same time I think the professor could have gone the extra mile to make sure the student understood. There has to be an answer. I guess that would be like the starting of my conversation with my son, there has to be an answer to your problem. You can go and speak to somebody and you know stand there and get somebody's attention and let them know what's going on, maybe not necessarily your instructor but higher up. I think the fear of a student is trying to get the professor in trouble and then getting him or her in trouble, and then now the professor kind of has it out for you, but at least you went down fighting if that was the case. But definitely seek help, that'll be my main point in getting across to my son or daughter, there has to be somebody who can help you, don't go down without a fight, continue seeking help, hire a tutor, do something, get extra books that you can get online or in the library to help you with that course. In my case, the professor didn't make sense, the book made even less sense, and even the professor said this book just isn't doing the job. So why did we use the same book twice? I had to go and find a different book and that helped, so there's always answers to your problems out there, there's always help out there, somebody has been through that problem already.

Daniel did not regret much that he went through over the past years in pursuing his baccalaureate degree even though he acknowledges being “pissed” in the past and feeling like the world was against him.

I think I've grown a lot this summer. I started working when I was 16 years old and being laid off during Thanksgiving, I had the last nine months, ten months to really sit down and think about my life, about the mistakes that I made. At the same time the goals that I've accomplished, and this is going to sound crazy but if I had to do it all over again I would. Of course making right decisions this time, but I would. And the reason why is because it has made me a stronger person. I feel that I can go and tackle any challenge that comes my way. I know I'm going to be facing that when I enter corporate America, or whatever job I do get, the problems don't stop here, they never stop. And I honestly think that this journey, this six year journey has made me a better person, not bitter, better.

The only thing Daniel would change about this journey was to do more research on college as a high school student, starting in his senior year.

I think it would have to be my senior year because when you first start off high school you think about college but it's in the background. I think maybe a little more information about universities, their programs, how do pay for it, taking the initial approach of how all that works, how to when to fill out your FASFA, when is the deadline, how do payment plans work. Now that's the finances, but how about the school? What school do I want to go to, what are my three top choices? Now at the same time, what is a degree, how long does it take, what is a full-time student, what is a part-time student, can I take classes at a community college and transfer them to a state university and so on...getting more information about what college is.

While community college was the best choice for him initially, primarily because of finances, Daniel believed if finances are not a concern, he will send his children straight to a university versus starting at a community college.

If I'm successful, or when I'm successful, I would send them straight to university so they won't get sidetracked at a community college. When you go to a community college, even though you're taking your basics, you're not necessarily taking the classes that you would take here. I know they offer like one or two, maybe even three introductory courses to your major, like circuits one, circuits two, and everything, but I felt like I'm in the wrong place...like an extension of high school. I was feeling like I wasn't making progress, even though I was taking history and English, it's just, I just felt okay I'm supposed to be over there.

Reflecting spiritually on his academic career, Daniel wished that he had held fast to one particular belief through his difficulties, especially when it came to taking on the responsibilities as head of his household. Daniel felt truly grasping the temporary position he was in at that moment would have helped him get through the desperation he was feeling.

I did mention growing up my dad getting injured at work, being disabled, I had to take over at the house. That did come to an end but one thing that I've learned is, the Bible speaks of all light afflictions are but for a moment, that all problems do come to an end. That would have been the first lesson that I wish I would have accepted by saying hey, I know I'm working 40 hours, I know I'm taking care of the house, but one day you know that will come to an end. My dad did get taken care of later on, learning to accept that not everything will last forever, but not everything bad lasts forever.

Throughout his college career Daniel worked multiple jobs - from bagging groceries to managing staff at a bank. He also won sales awards at a major national corporation. It is interesting that his ability to be successful in corporate America did not give him confidence in his ability to be successful in higher education. When asked why he never exhibited the same kind of fear in his corporate positions that he did at Distinctive University, Daniel suggested that it was a fear of the unknown. Daniel believed he did not have an option to be fearful in his employment because it kept his family alive. On the other hand, he did not view education as a "life or death" necessity.

...unknown territory and, let me explain. I think in corporate America it's more sink or swim, because that pays the bills. You have to learn it or you're on the street. I think with your education it's just you read the book you take the test, and that's it, there's not much else you can do. Yeah, with work, it's sink or swim, eat or you don't eat.

At the time of our last interview Daniel had yet to secure employment in the engineering field. When asked about the possible role his grades might play in his job search, Daniel downplayed their importance but acknowledged that a small percentage of employers may express concern.

I think since I've started actually applying for jobs that I qualify for I would say maybe about eight percent of those jobs actually require transcripts or require a 3.0 or above. The rest of the 92% just want you to have a degree, they want a degree. A couple of weeks ago I told you I had an interview with a small engineering company. They asked for my transcript and I sent it off to them and he did see my awards on my resume. He had the whole package, my resume, my transcript, so during the interview he did ask me, I noticed there was some trouble during your academic career and he said well what happened, what was going on. I explained to him everything that I'm telling you, I had a family to take care of, I had to work full time, I had to at the same time go to school and learn. It was a bit tough and it got tough at one point, and he understood.

The sum of all of Daniel's fears, angst, struggles, trials, and triumphs had culminated in a bachelor's degree from Distinctive University. On the morning of his graduation, Daniel wanted to make sure his parents understood what their unwavering support meant to him.

You know how I came here, there was fear; I failed, I got back up and I came back, got accepted, even though I was denied and I still don't know why. I came back, had a little bump in the road, got back on the horse, you know had won first place at the 2011 Symposium event. I had my highs and lows, and that built character. Now the day of my graduation I went to my parents' room and closed the door and I talked to my dad and my mom. I told them thank you because I looked at everything, I looked at how my grandpa cut the grass here, how he worked here at Distinctive University, you know on the yard, how he cut the grass here, so that one day his grandkids could come here. At the same time I thanked my dad for working hard because coming to a country not knowing the language and for both of them because they were married when they came here, not knowing the language, not having a penny in their pocket but just a hope and dream of giving their kids a better life and of course better education. I thanked them for that, I thanked my dad for working hard and I thanked my mom for waking me up to go to school, for having breakfast ready, for having my lunch packed, going and dropping me off, picking me up, and for my dad working hard and being a good dad, being a faithful dad, being a good example. At that time it didn't matter about education, it mattered about family values and I thanked them for everything thing that they did. Even though my grandpa's not here, he's in Heaven. You know, my parents cried and they said you're welcome, you know, we'll do anything for you and I was real happy. There is this description in the Bible that says I have fought a good fight, I remember that, I have won the war, the race is over; I felt that my journey had ended there.

Graduation day was the pinnacle experience for Daniel. He recalled poignant moments of the day, particularly having the opportunity see his academic advisor Bailey right before he crossed the stage.

When I left their room, me and my girlfriend came back here to the university and I couldn't believe when we were sitting down and Dr. Rice was speaking. I couldn't believe it was over, I couldn't believe that my journey had come to an end and I was successful, that I beat the odds, that by the grace of God I am here by my hard work and dedication. I didn't have enough money to pay for school and I had to scramble just enough to get by. All of that was worth it and when the ceremony was over, when it was my turn to cross the stage, Bailey was handing the names to the announcer and he looked and he smiled and I smiled back at him and I was like wow! As I walked across that stage I recited Isaiah 55 where it says 'for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways' and I smiled and I looked across the stage and I saw my parents, and my family, and they all jumped up and it felt great. I shook Dr. Rice's hand, and I shook everybody else's hand and went and sat down and I said wow, it's over.

Later that day at his graduation celebration Daniel took the time and expressed his gratitude to his entire family. He toasted his family because it was his sincere belief that without their contribution, without their prayers, he would not have earned his degree.

That day we went to eat at a restaurant and I gave a speech thanking everybody. I only invited my immediate family; I told them the reason I had only invited my immediate family was because they played a big role in my success and I thanked them. I gave a toast saying that I heard their prayers, I took their words of encouragement, I knew their thoughts were with me at all times, and I thanked them for that. There was tears at the table also, and then I turned around and looked at my nephews and nieces and we were still holding the toast, and I told them that if I did it with little to no money and with little to no knowledge of what college was or is, you can do it, you can go further and I told them, you can become the doctors, the lawyers, the engineers, the teachers, the accountants, whatever it is you want to do, follow the desires of your heart, never give up.

Daniel indicated during his final interview that he had been praying about final words to students who might encounter similar situations as well.

That [graduation] was definitely one of the greatest moments of my life, and I was happy. So what's my point? My point is to any student out there who ever hears this or reads this don't ever, ever, ever give up, and don't ever let anything bring you down, especially fear. Fear is something that we build in our heads and our mind...I think we build a problem in our heads and the more we think about it the bigger and bigger the fear gets when in reality it's not that bad. Don't ever give up, especially on your education because these four years that you dedicate to your education, or however long you dedicate, you will enjoy it the rest of your life. Four years versus 40 or 50 years, however long you live, it was worth it at the end, it was. Especially that day, May 11, 2012. It was a great day.

Daniel arrived at Distinctive University as a community college student struggling from fears associated with generational curses and failures, lack of academic preparation, and the responsibilities of a non-traditional student balancing full-time work with an academic load. He left Distinctive University not only the first one in his family to earn a baccalaureate degree, but stronger and more determined than ever to be a role model for the next generation.

Analysis

Daniel's story contained multiple themes. The themes presented in this analysis are: Cultural Fears and Expectations, Misplaced Blame and Anger, Spiritual Strength, and Building a Legacy.

Cultural Fears and Expectations

From the first interview Daniel expressed a strong desire to make his family proud of him. Both Daniels's parents had grown up poor, his father on a farm and his mother in an orphanage. From a very early age, Daniel's parents had instilled in him and his brothers that education was the key to a better life: "Their dream was to sacrifice their lives, I guess in a way, by working blue collar jobs, to one day to give their sons, their family a better life and to pursue their education." Daniel's parents wanted their children not to have to work blue-collar jobs like the grueling construction job his father had held. Instead, they saw their sons in suits and ties.

Attending college was a responsibility placed on Daniel by his grandfather, who was an immigrant from Mexico. As Daniel told me of his grandfather who had been a groundskeeper at Distinctive University, he painted a clear picture of the expectation placed upon him by growing up in a poor family.

My grandfather was...he was a groundskeeper... So as I was walking through here at first I would imagine my grandpa working here and how his grandson now comes here and is trying to make a better life for himself.

Even though the expectation to pursue higher education was clear in his household, Daniel was the only one in the family to attend college. The pressure for him to “do better” was intense and as he struggled to maintain his grades, he reminded himself of his family’s wishes. Daniel had indicated that he “owed it” to his parents to make something of himself. He knew they wanted more and for him “not be the construction worker or be the lawn care or the groundskeeper, or just to work any job just to make ends meet.”

Attending college was important to Daniel, but it was his parents who were the primary motivator for Daniel to persevere through even the most trying times of his academic journey. Daniel commented to me that he knew he wanted to go to college, but it was more telling when he continued by saying “I knew I had to go too but I had no idea exactly what college was about.” This statement hinted that the pressure from his parents to attend college was strong even though there was so little information about higher education available to him. Further, when Daniel was faced with being suspended from college, he was worried about his parents’ reaction: “I was going to fail college and I was going to let my parents down.”

Daniel also placed a high emphasis on the expectation that he was responsible for taking care of his parents when his father was injured and could no longer work. Although his older brothers did not feel the same pressure to care for their parents, Daniel took this responsibility seriously and endeavored to provide for the household and meet their expectations of earning a degree. Daniel believed his parents did not “deserve to have a son who would give up on them” but he was overwhelmed.

I had to take on the household, which was just the three of us... I was depressed because I would see the bills and I guess at a certain point I was like this is not fair, and I should be able to go to school, come home, study, work on the weekends...

Despite the expectation of higher education and a better life, there were also examples of how fears imbedded in the immigrant Hispanic culture inhibited meeting those expectations.

Daniel spoke often about the fears of previous generations which kept his family from progressing, even surrounding a simple act such as learning to drive.

They wanted a better life for my father and for their children, my uncles and so on, but I think in the Hispanic community...my grandpa didn't want my father to drive, he didn't want him to learn how to drive 'cause he was afraid that my dad was going to get into a car accident and you know many things would happen.

This fear also kept Daniel's parents from learning to speak English. He spoke about his parents' resistance to learning English as a fear of the unknown. This fear was the same fear that hindered his grandparents.

It's the fear of the unknown and it's the fear of embarrassment. If I go up to somebody and start speaking to them in English, and they only know Spanish, they're afraid they're not going to know what to say, and they're going to feel humiliated and they're going to shut down.

Fear followed Daniel as he pursued his baccalaureate degree at Distinctive University. He experienced anxiety at attending such a large institution because it was a new experience for him, but also because he internalized a fear of asking for help. Daniel attributed this fear to the same fear that crippled his grandfather, and his parents. The language barrier plays a large role in that fear.

For some reason, in the Hispanic community fear is our worst enemy. I can just give an example, if you speak to somebody who doesn't speak English and they're Hispanic, they will be scared and terrified of you. If you speak Spanish, it develops a comfort, this comfort where they can open up and talk more.

Fortunately for Daniel, a professor played a significant role in alleviating this fear which allowed him to push forward. Even though his chemistry professor, Dr. Bingham, spoke of school pride, Daniel took it further and felt Dr. Bingham's advice to be "proud of where you're coming from" also meant to be proud of your background despite any perceived limitations. Daniel recognized how crippling the fear could be when he gave advice to peers in similar academic situations:

...don't ever let anything bring you down, especially fear. Fear is something that we build in our heads and our mind...I think we build a problem in our heads and the more we think about it the bigger and bigger the fear gets when in reality it's not that bad.

The expectations of earning a degree as well as taking care of his parents in their financial need were difficult for Daniel to manage. He clearly valued his role as a provider for his parents, and moved through life in an attempt to live up to their expectations and make them proud. Fighting a culture of fear, Daniel persevered towards meeting the expectations of generations.

Misplaced Blame and Anger

According to research, first generation college student are less prepared than their counterparts for success in higher education. According to Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004), first generation students are more likely to be at a "distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (e.g., costs and application process), level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school" (p. 250). Daniel was a typical example of a first generation student lacking the necessary information and support to succeed in college. His disadvantages may have fueled his desire to earn a baccalaureate degree, but during the process we also saw Daniel blame his academic difficulties on professors instead of owning his own failures. On more than a few occasions Daniel placed the blame for his academic performance squarely on the shoulders

of professors and teaching assistants. Daniel had valid concerns about the availability of adjunct instructors: “our instructor was one of those...I call them substitute instructors, he doesn’t teach here full time,” but blamed additional low grades on teaching styles.

[I did] horrible, you want to know why? My C++ instructor was a first time instructor here at the university, Dr. Bill Riley. His first and only semester teaching and it happened to be that semester...I don’t think teaching may have been his best profession...

Daniel did acknowledge, when pressed by me, that he “could have done better” but he had to teach himself a different learning style to accommodate the academic differences between community college teaching and teaching at Distinctive University. But, when Daniel encountered additional academic difficulties, he blamed a professor whom he thought had run his course teaching: “...when you’re past your prime it’s time to give it up, you know it’s time to hang up the coat and say you know what, I did a good job...”

Not seeking academic support or communicating with his professors regarding the challenges he faced proved detrimental to Daniel’s GPA. When he was placed on academic suspension, he was angry at himself, but also others: “I was very upset and very angry I think at everybody, myself and my professors.” When Daniel returned from academic suspension, he was concerned about taking some of his major courses from a professor he thought was immoral: “I knew he was going to be unfair. I knew the way he was, it was a lost hope.” Daniel may have encountered challenging instructors at Distinctive University, but placing blame on others for his misfortunes did not serve him well. Seeking and following advice from his academic advisor Bailey and playing an active role in his own academic success did serve Daniel well. In retrospect, Daniel realized he was responsible for his success as well as his failures, but refused to shoulder 100 percent of the blame.

I guess [fault was] both ours, both of our faults, professors and mine. I'm doing some thinking and I could have taken extra steps to make sure I didn't fall in the holes that I did fall in. At the same time I think the professor could have gone the extra mile to make sure the student understood.

Daniel spent many years at Distinctive University blaming others for his academic misfortunes. As a first generation college student it was evident that Daniel suffered from a lack of information regarding higher education that impeded his success, but Daniel found more fault in professors than in himself.

Spiritual Strength

Even as Daniel's life took inconsistent turns academically, financially, and personally, there was consistency in his religious faith. Daniel first hinted at his spiritual foundation when he spoke about his interest in computers, which he saw as an avenue for future success: "My goal was to be successful at something and I was blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ, with computer engineering technology." The pressure for Daniel to achieve a higher education was evident, and he had indicated that although he knew he wanted to go to college, he had little idea of what a major was and how to achieve his parents' goal of him being successful. Despite not being able to afford a computer in high school, Daniel believed that the natural acumen he had in the computer field was a blessing from God and that opened a pathway towards reaching his dreams.

As the responsibilities of financially supporting his parents increased, Daniel had to place his faith in God to divert mounting depression. Because of an injury his father suffered at work, Daniel had to support his parents financially. While Daniel was working 40 hours a week and struggling in school, he did get depressed and began to question the fairness of the situation he was in.

I guess at a certain point I was like this is not fair, and I should be able to go to school, come home, study, work on the weekends, but I didn't have that opportunity.

Instead, honoring his mother and father was far more important to Daniel than the typical college life he may have been missing. He turned to the Bible to explain why he felt it was his responsibility to take care of his parents.

I guess on a religious view, honoring my father and mother, I'm a believer, I love the Lord, the Lord, Jesus Christ. On a religious point that's when I grab onto the word and I knew I couldn't give up, because my father would never give up on me.

Daniel once again turned to the Bible to help him understand that his pain was but for the moment: "one thing that I've learned is, the Bible speaks of all light afflictions are but for a moment; that all problems do come to an end."

Prayer was an important aspect of Daniel's life. There were moments when he mentioned praying for others and appreciating the prayers from others. Daniel acknowledged there were people in his life whom he would be forever grateful to for their positive impact. Both his advisor Bailey, and Dr. Bingham, who taught him how to be proud of where he came from, have a place in his heart: "...even in my prayers to this day I still include him, Dr. Bingham and him, because I really do have them near and dear to my heart." Daniel also acknowledged the prayers from his family that lifted him up. Daniel believed without their prayers, he would never have earned a baccalaureate degree. Daniel invited his immediate family to a dinner after graduation to celebrate: "I gave a toast saying that I heard their prayers, I took their words of encouragement, I knew their thoughts were with me at all times..."

When Daniel walked across the stage to receive his baccalaureate degree, it was God he thanked.

As I walked across that stage I recited Isaiah 55 where it says 'for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways' and I smiled and I looked across the stage and I saw my parents, and my family, and they all jumped up and it felt great.

It was evident that Daniel valued his relationship with Jesus Christ and leaned on his faith to push through challenges he faced in life. Praising God even in times of depression allowed Daniel to persevere and earn the degree he had fought so hard for.

Building a Legacy

A final theme that emerged from Daniel's story was one of building a legacy for his own children, nieces, and nephews. Daniel placed a high value on family and culture as evidenced by his commitment to his parents and grandparents. The legacy he wanted to pass on was clear as he thanked his parents for their commitment to him and for encouraging him to strive for a better life. He acknowledged them for coming to America with nothing, and for being a constant in his life as a child. The values his parents and grandparents passed on to him were invaluable.

I told them thank you because I looked at everything, I looked at how my grandpa cut the grass here, how he worked here at Distinctive University, you know on the yard, how he cut the grass here, so that one day his grandkids could come here... for my dad working hard and being a good dad, being a faithful dad, being a good example. At that time it didn't matter about education, it mattered about family values and I thanked them for everything thing that they did.

It was clear that Daniel had plans of passing down these same familial values. When he spoke of his nieces and nephews who attended his graduation, he wanted them to know all things were possible. He told them that even with little money and knowledge of higher education they could go further: "I told them, you can become the doctors, the lawyers, the engineers, the teachers, the accountants, whatever it is you want to do, follow the desires of your heart, never give up."

Daniel stated he also wanted to make sure that his children did not continue the legacy of fear and not be afraid to try new things and ask questions along the way.

...don't be afraid, don't be afraid of failure, and work hard, 'cause if I did it, you can do it...If there's ever a problem, if there's ever a question that you don't have an answer to, you can get help.

He wanted to make sure his children, unlike him, understood there is always an answer to a problem and someone who can help: "...that'll be my main point in getting across to my son or daughter, there has to be somebody who can help you, don't go down without a fight."

Finally, having earned a baccalaureate degree gives his future children another legacy; they will be second generation college students.

I think that's something that my fiancée and I have talked about...emphasizing how important it is to get an education because your dad went to school and got his education so it's important that you follow in his footsteps.

Daniel was proud that one day his children would have the advantage of having a parent who had a college degree. One of his major regrets in life was that he did not know how to research opportunities for higher education. He regretted not knowing basic information from "what is a degree" to "how long does it take?" Now armed with this information himself, as well as knowing what questions to ask, Daniel felt his own children would be successful.

Despite growing up poor with little knowledge of higher education, Daniel persevered to build a legacy for his own family. By living up to and passing along the familial values his parents and grandparents cherished, Daniel felt he was creating a stronger foundation for his own children to stand upon.

Chapter Summary

Daniel left our final interview thanking me for allowing him an opportunity to revisit some of the challenges he faced on his academic journey. Daniel told me a story of a young man who persisted through unfamiliar territory and overcame fears and other obstacles so that he

could continue to be a good example for generations to come. While I believe many first-generation students encounter and overcome similar barriers, I believe that Daniel can be an example of strength in the face of adversity.

CHAPTER 6: LIBERTY

Liberty is a 29-year old African American woman majoring in hospitality at Distinctive University. Liberty was the second student who responded to my request for participants for the study. Her participation was encouraged by one of the study's gatekeepers, a Director of Undergraduate Programs in the Hotel College at Distinctive University. He had been pivotal in her success since she had been readmitted from suspension a few semesters back and he thought she would be an ideal participant for the study. Liberty and I played phone tag over the course of a few weeks before we finally met in a classroom on campus. Since I had spoken to Liberty over the phone a few times I knew she had a bubbly and forthcoming personality. When she arrived in the classroom, she was not far from what I had anticipated. She had a large bag over her shoulder and was juggling several folders and books in her arms. She appeared to be running from place to place and later I found out she had gotten lost trying to find the building.

I was unsure of her race initially. She looked to be of mixed race, perhaps African American and white because of her lighter complexion and freckles. Her light brown hair was straight and in a messy ponytail with several strands attempting to escape, which gave her a harried look. I barely introduced my grand tour question before Liberty jumped in with her story. She had come to talk. This chapter tells Liberty's story as she moves from childhood to adulthood. Following her narrative, I present an analysis of themes which emerged from her life story using holistic-content analysis.

Liberty's Story

Liberty's path to higher education culminated in a Bachelor's degree in Hospitality in the fall of 2012. As an almost 30-year-old African American woman, Liberty recalled her experiences attempting to attain a degree with lots of humor and also some regret. When asked about some of her first memories of her aspirations to go to college, Liberty right away indicated that not going to college was never a thought.

I didn't even know that you could not go to college. I always thought that everyone went to high school and then college was part of that afterwards. For me, when I was a child I never knew that people didn't go, like it just never occurred to me. I guess when I knew that you didn't have to go was probably when I was in high school, but even then it was expected so it never occurred to me not to go.

Early Childhood

Liberty's early childhood was spent in Alaska with her family of five. She is the middle child of three, flanked by brothers. Liberty's father was in the Army and for the first five years of her life she lived on an Army base. While Liberty's father earned a Master's degree in criminal justice, her mother did not have a degree and worked as a teaching assistant.

While Liberty always understood she would go to college, throughout her youth she never thought about what it would take to get to college. She admits that even at a young age her rebellious spirit affected her performance in elementary and middle school. In elementary school, getting in trouble was usually followed by a phone call to her mother who worked at the same elementary school she attended. Liberty recalled a specific event in which her teachers believed they had found the source of their frustration – a possible learning disability.

When I was in elementary, I went to school and they called my mom and dad and they were like we need to have a parent teacher conference. They called my parents in and were like you know we are really upset that guys have pretty much been neglecting your child, you did not let us know she was deaf or hard of hearing, and you know this is going

to be a problem because we didn't know so we have haven't prepared. I guess they didn't have a special class, but my mom was like she's just ignoring you. That's kind of me, just kind of doing my own thing.

Liberty had no hearing loss or learning disability, yet there were obviously some behavioral challenges Liberty's parents and teachers had to contend with from very early on. Liberty says she has always had "that streak" that would cause her to rebel.

So I've always kind of had that streak so I went to a [new] elementary school there and even then I still got in kind of a little bit of trouble because like I said I wanted to do my own thing. They would give me classwork and I would just tell my teacher, instead of just doing it like a good kid, I'd be like I don't know how to do this. My teacher...she almost was like crying 'cause this was at the point they were taking the tests and she thought I knew the material, she goes up to my mom [and says] I thought she had it down and we're taking the test and she's saying she doesn't know anything! My mom literally set down a timer and was like you need to get this done. I was done with the work before the timer went off...

When Liberty was five years old, her father retired from the Army and took a job as a probation officer. A few years later, he moved the family to Harrison, a suburb of a large urban city, where he was originally from. Liberty recalls her time in Alaska with fondness and recalls a closeness in her family that seemed to dissipate once the family moved. As a child she was very close to her brothers and described the older one as "a dreamer," and the younger one as obedient. Liberty considered herself "the bad one," and explained how different they were both growing up and now.

My older brother is about four years older than me, so we were never really at the same school together at the same time. Then my younger brother, he's four years younger than me, so we never really overlapped in school, but they are completely different, they're very obedient, they're very sensitive. My older brother, he's actually my half-brother, but I never even recognized that, not even as a child, but you know if my parents told him to do something he's going to do it. I think he struggled a little bit in school as well, but I think it's just because he is a daydreamer. He's really into fantasy novels and stuff like that, he's kind of a nerd, and so I think that was more him as to where I'm just trying to be defiant. And then my younger brother, I ruled his life, both of them actually. I don't

know how I did that but for a long time I did. My younger brother, he actually didn't end up going to college, but he's a really hard worker, he has pretty much always has a job, but when I was younger he was pretty much my right hand.

Liberty's older brother, who is her half-brother, decided not to move with the family and instead chose to live with his maternal grandmother in Detroit. For Liberty this seemed to indicate the beginning of the unraveling of her family.

We moved here [to Harrison] in '93. When we did move here my older brother didn't move with us, my older brother decided to move to Detroit with my grandmother to continue wrestling. He was really big into wrestling in high school and stuff so he decided to move there and I never really asked him why, like was that always the reason. I'm not sure if there was something going on there that he decided to do that, I don't really know but I thought that was kind of weird; why wouldn't you move with your family?

Liberty recalled her early childhood with a myriad of emotions. When she spoke about the ornery streak she exhibited early on, she seemed almost prideful. Recalling stories of frustrated elementary school teachers, Liberty often laughed at the memories. Before starting middle school, Liberty's family moved from a relatively close community in Alaska to a suburb of a large city in the southern region of the United States. Reflecting on her family's move to Harrison, Liberty still expressed uncertainty over the reason why her brother did not move with the family. This decision apparently had an impact on Liberty's family dynamics as her feeling that the decision was "weird" is still germane today.

Middle and High School

Liberty started middle school in Harrison and from the onset was not happy with the move. Even though the family moved to a diverse community, Liberty had a difficult time adjusting to middle school. She felt many of the children in school picked on her for no apparent reason and she had very few friends in middle school.

Being on a base and being in that kind of town [in Alaska], it's very multicultural because of so many families that are up there for the military, so like going from there to here I was just like okay...and just people were just so different. A lot of people, a lot of the kids, were very unaccepting of me so that probably has a lot to do with it. Like I hated middle school, I didn't have that many friends, I didn't like it, a lot of the friends that I did have were friends that lived in my neighborhood, like the kid across the street or the girl like a few blocks away, that was more of my friends, not really the kids that were in school, so that probably has a lot to do with why I did skip class and why I didn't want to you know be in be in there with other students that probably has a lot to do with it.

Much of Liberty's discontent also had to do with the racial insensitivity she encountered in her new community. While she felt people in Alaska were very friendly and appreciative of diversity, in Harrison, Liberty felt her peers were judgmental and unaccepting of what may appear to be "different." Liberty had already thought of herself as being different, but her peers now saw her as different as well. Being very fair, Liberty believed she did not fit in with Blacks or Whites equally. This idea, coupled with her own confrontational personality, often caused confrontations with her peers.

I had never, ever in my life heard anyone say a racial slur, like ever, and I'm not okay with it. I have really strong feelings about that because in Alaska I'd never even heard one, it's a non-issue. But then down here some people are just so rude and they would just like say stuff and I'd be like are you serious? Like did they just say that? Or, and a lot of problems I had was because I was so fair kids would be like oh, well she's white, oh well she's you know, whatever, oh well she doesn't talk like this, oh well. I'd just be like wow. So it was very in-between. And then like and it wasn't like, the neighborhood I grew up in is a very working class neighborhood but everyone's like oh, well you live over there you must be rich, and I'm just like, no...I'm not, everyone in this neighborhood goes to work every morning. And I think like one time some girl misheard me and I was saying that relaxers are not good for your hair, but she turned it around and was like oh well she's too good for that. I'm just like what are you talking about? You guys are all crazy, and why do you even care because I wasn't even talking to you?

In general, Liberty was unhappy with the move to Harrison and not truly finding a place amongst her peers, Liberty began to skip school as early as middle school. While recollecting

her experiences in middle school she once again referred to herself as “bad” and laughed in retrospect.

I've never been an awesome student. I'm just like okay well there's school and you have to go so I go so even in high school like I skipped a lot...I was a really bad student. I skipped school so much, which you wouldn't expect that from someone whose dad is a probation officer. He would come in my classes and sit. Like in middle school, he came to my math class and sat through the entire class with me. One day my dad was like you're not going to class? And I was like, yeah, I'm going to class, sure...and I went to class late one day and he started coming out of my class and I was like is he seriously here? It was so embarrassing and he sat there in class with me the whole time and I was like I can't believe this. I was so embarrassed, and he was like if I hear, if your teachers call me one more time, I'll be in every single class.

Liberty's discontent also came from the dysfunction she was seeing in her family after the move as well. Liberty's memories of her family in Alaska were ones where the family engaged in many activities together, including family dinners which were bonding moments. Moving to Harrison changed some of those dynamics. Even family dinners changed as there were more distractions in the larger city the family moved to. To Liberty, what was once a close family unit was unraveling.

In Alaska it was a family unit. We lived all the way out and where we lived, you know up there, I mean it's kind of like your entertainment is being with your family. Up there we didn't even have McDonalds, so it's just like being here it was like whoa, there's like fast food everywhere and I think that it distracted us from being that tight knit family. A lot of times when any of my brothers or my mom or my dad talk about like the good times, it's usually when we were in Alaska, it's not really so much here. I think probably my parents had a lot of financial problems once we moved here, and so I think that stressed them out a lot, and since I was older I started picking up on it more. Although I didn't know exactly what it was, you could tell they were unhappy.

Even though Liberty's father had attempted to minimize her cutting class by sitting in class with her, it was obvious to Liberty that in other ways her father was becoming less and less engaged with the family.

I think that he [my father] definitely had a lot of stress on him and he definitely was not as controlling like you need to go to school, you need to do this, this, and this, like before. It was very much like I knew what was expected of me...but I think there definitely was less of that once we moved here. Because even in Alaska he was like the coach of my softball team like for a couple of years, and then he was the coach of my brother's basketball team, like we were always on sports and when we moved here I was still in sports but he was definitely less into them.

High school did not bring about many changes for Liberty, either at home or school. Her circle of friends was still small and she was not only skipping class, but was also dismissed from class for a myriad of reasons, including challenging her teachers. During this time in high school Liberty did exhibit very arrogant and confrontational behavior. Her attitude towards school appeared to be that she was doing her teachers a favor by showing up.

I probably had like enough write-up slips to like paper one of my walls in my bedroom. [Write-ups are] like when you got written up in for whatever reason; for like if I skipped class or if I got sent out of class for whatever reason; definitely for skipping, maybe for being late, like being really late to class. One of the teachers, me and her just did not get along. She was this Indian lady and she was just so rude and I'd be just like listen, I'm not going to take your shit, and you could tell some teachers, like the way they would talk to some students, it's like, it wasn't appropriate. Sometimes the other student wouldn't realize that the way this person's talking to me isn't appropriate and I'd just be like don't talk to me like that; like I can leave if you feel that you're going to talk to me like that, that's not okay.

One instance in particular was like, I went to school and it was my birthday and I was totally going to skip and I was like I'll go to school anyway, I'll grace them with my presence, I'll go to school. I went to school, first period, the teacher, she was in a wheelchair, I don't know why, I don't remember why, and it was she had like hurt herself and was in a wheelchair, and I went in to class and I was sitting down and maybe she asked me something like you know where's your homework or where's your book or something like that. I was just like I don't have it or whatever it was I didn't have it and she was just like well I know where you get that attitude from and I was like ...say what? Because you don't even know my parents; because it's not like she would even know and I was just like I'm leaving. So I just got up to walk out and I picked my book up and I think I scared her when I picked it up. I snatched it and I put in my backpack or whatever to walk out and she was trying to give me the write up slip and I was like take it down there yourself, and I just left school and went straight home. I told my parents

exactly what happened, I was like, that's not okay. My dad ended up coming up there the next day and was like don't you ever talk to my daughter like that again. I probably could have handled the situation better, but I was definitely like no...no...that's not okay. There were probably some other times in there where like I definitely should not have said what I said, but at the same time I was a teenager, I was crazy. I realize how crazy I was now.

Even though Liberty's behavior had been consistently disruptive in school, Liberty was never punished for that particular situation because her father believed the teacher's behavior was inappropriate. When discussing the incident, Liberty laughed because she realized how wrong she was, even if her parents did not. There were other times when her parents tried to discipline Liberty for her behavior, but the punishment often failed to affect her. When discussing her parents' attempts at discipline, Liberty, throughout our interviews, thought their minimal efforts were useless.

They tried to ground me...I'd sneak out of my room so much the bush in front of my window died. I would sneak out and I'd go across the street and I'd play basketball...in the driveway, because I'm tough! It's not even like I'd be doing anything; I wouldn't be going anywhere, I'd be like Mike let's play basketball, and we'd play basketball.

Even though Liberty had always been a self-proclaimed bad student with marginal grades, her immediate and extended family still believed she had the potential to go to college. Liberty mentioned very early on in our first interview that she had always known she would go to college only because it was an expectation set by her parents. Unfortunately, Liberty imagined college to be an extension of high school because she thought everyone went to college as indicated by her statement, "it never occurred to me not to go." During her senior year, her family staged an intervention of sorts to get her on track in order to attend college. At this time Liberty's thoughts weren't on not going to college, rather she had not thought about it at all.

My cousin, who's a little bit older than me, she'd graduated, and when she graduated they were just like Liberty needs to get it together. So it was like my Uncle John...my

Aunt Brenda, my grandfather, and I think my dad, and they were just like you know you really need to get it together. We know that you know you haven't been doing well in school, but we also know that you're not doing well because you don't want to do well; it's not that you can't.

This intervention did not go quite as planned because Liberty continued to be the marginal student she had always been. Without studying, she received C's in most of her courses with the exception of math. According to Liberty, even thinking about the prospect of taking a math course "hurt," therefore she took most of her math courses in summer school.

I failed math every single year of high school. I went to summer school every year. When I got to my senior year, I didn't even take math. I was like, I'm not taking it, I was like I'm just going to take it in summer school I'm not going to waste my time.

While she passed math, it was not until her senior year in high school that Liberty started to pay minimal attention to her grades. For the first time in her academic career she became involved in extracurricular activities and according to her, it seemed to make a slight difference in her academic performance.

My senior year I really got into other clubs and although my grades were a little bit better, well they were better because I had to keep my grades up to stay in some of the activities that I was in. But that was pretty much the only year that I kind of got my grades up and started getting socially active in school as far as different clubs and activities.

Liberty's home life was continuing to become more unstable for her. Her parent's relationship was in obvious trouble and she began to resent her mother for her passiveness and her father, who was still trying to be the disciplinarian, for his assertiveness.

I have a lot of issues with my mom on that part just because it's like, I think I'm so assertive and I'm so confrontational; my mom is not like that at all. She's very passive; in a lot of ways she's very passive aggressive and that's one way I'm very much like my dad. My dad's very confrontational, he has a temper issue, as do I a little bit, and that's definitely worked to his disadvantage a lot of times. My mom, you know, she didn't finish

school...I think she relied on my dad to provide for her for so long that that she's really handicapped herself.

Even though Liberty referred to her mother as passive aggressive, alternatively, she indicated her mother seemed not to express any emotion during this time and “mentally checked out.” Her father’s physical absence coupled with her mother’s emotional absence continued to affect her academic performance.

As Liberty’s high school career was coming to an end, she felt consumed by everything else except thoughts of attending college in the fall. Still thinking that college would ultimately be the path she would take, Liberty took the SATs. She was not totally invested in the idea of college even though she still thought it would be no big deal for her to get into a four-year college.

I assumed I could just get in, it's like whatever, I could do this. I mean like even with taking the SATs I was out the night before 'til like one in the morning and then I was like whatever, I'll just go take the SATs. [I performed] not great, but not bad, I was in the middle, again, C...as in the middle of the road, and so it was always just like, I'm obviously smart enough to get it but I just am like... I really didn't apply myself and I think that's probably because I didn't know what I wanted to do and I didn't know what I wanted to be or what degree I wanted. I think that might have a lot to do with it, I think I was like well I have to go to school so, I'm gonna go to school.

Many of Liberty’s memories about middle and high school centered on her difficulties at home and school. There were few incidents Liberty discussed during this time that truly brought a smile to her face. At times it appeared as though Liberty blamed the dissipation of her close family on the family’s move to Harrison. It was in Harrison that Liberty first felt her father’s physical presence shift away from the home. Liberty believed that while her mother knew her marriage was in trouble, she refused to acknowledge it. Liberty embraced the concept of being the black sheep of the family and put forth little effort to positively impact her academic

experience during this time. She seemed content with her marginal grades and the uncertainty of her own future. This attitude continued as Liberty reached the end of her high school career.

Young Adulthood

High school graduation came without much fanfare for Liberty. At this time Liberty made a conscious decision to take a year off between high school and college because she was unsure of her future path. Additionally, according to Liberty, she knew she had to get some “things” out of her system and had no plans on committing to school. During this time, Liberty worked full-time at various restaurants and spent a lot of time hanging out with friends. She did not have a curfew and with her father’s decreasing presence at home, Liberty managed to “party, party, party” most of the year.

It was also during this year that Liberty’s home life changed drastically. Her feelings of resentment intensified towards both of her parents when she became aware of her father’s infidelity. When she was 18, Liberty found out by chance that her father was cheating on her mother; she told her older brother a year later, who in turn told their mother.

I went to Olive Garden and I was eating at Olive Garden with my then boyfriend, and the waiter came up and was like yeah, you need to tell your dad to keep his girlfriend in check and he knew who I was because of my last name on my credit card that I paid with. He [the waiter] came right up to my table and was like oh, is your dad Mr. Abernathy (a pseudonym)? How many Abernathy’s do you know? It’s either my dad or my grandfather and I was like, yeah, he is. I was like what the hell, and that’s how I found out my dad was cheating on my mom. I was maybe 17 at the time and I didn’t say anything to anyone for a year, but I just like mentally took account, like oh, where’s dad, oh he’s at work or oh yeah, okay whatever.

I think she [my mom] knew deep down but just didn’t admit it and I think a lot of that had to do with, they just had issues. They had a lot of financial problems and my dad with the way his family is, his family dynamics are a little messed up. I mean I didn’t talk to him the whole time he was cheating on my mom; I didn’t talk to him for a year after that, not one word.

Any respect Liberty had for her father been lost and she used this as an excuse to party even more.

When they separated, that was like party time for me because I was like no one can tell me what to do. When I found out that he had done this giant wrong, I was like don't talk to me about being anything, don't talk to me about being truthful, don't talk to me about being honest. Like don't even go there with me and he didn't, he was just like I'm just going to leave her alone because she's crazy.

My mom had an in-home day care so she was always at home, and it was just like...I think mentally she had kind of checked out, but in retrospect for me, I was just like awesome, my dad's not here I can do what, I can go where I want, I can do whatever I want, and there are no consequences.

The resentment Liberty felt towards her mother stemmed from a disappointment in her mother's reaction to her father's infidelity. She could not understand why her mother appeared so fragile during the separation, especially when both of her parents encouraged her independence growing up. Liberty believed if her mom could handle her growing up, then she was indeed a strong woman, but it frustrated her that her mother was so dependent on her father.

I felt bad for her, just because I think that in the time that she was raised and then being with my dad, she didn't really have the self-esteem to like, be like you know what, get your shit and get out of my house and don't ever come back. In that way I feel bad for her because that's how my dad raised me. He actually said that to me when I was in elementary; he was like don't ever allow a man to do anything for you, do it for yourself. Because he was a juvenile probation officer and he saw all these moms, these single moms, come in and be struggling or have these guys that beat them or abused them. So he always raised me to like be on my own and then I think my mom, she's not really like that, so I always kind of felt sad for her but at the same time I get angry with her because I'm like you have the potential to do this, just do it, stop giving me reasons not to do it, just do it, at least try...just try.

Over the course of the next year, Liberty lived at home with her mother and younger brother as her already fragile relationship with her father continued to diminish. Liberty was pained by her father's infidelity, but she found it difficult to tell her mother and was in a sense

relieved when her older brother told. It was a relief to her after holding on to the secret for a year. Liberty continued to work various jobs while spending her days off at amusement parks and her evenings and late nights with friends playing pool, partying, and occasionally drinking. Liberty also began thinking about the next stage in her life, which was attending college. While she was still unsure of what she wanted to do in life, she felt this step was the next natural progression and thought she was ready.

Young Adulthood - Community College and Marriage

Realizing that she still did not have a clear understanding of her educational goals, Liberty decided to take classes at the local community college, which was ultimately a good decision for her because of the ease of transition from a small high school to a small college experience.

I liked the school; the way that they had everything set up was always really easy um. It is really small, the classes are really small, the instructors I thought were pretty good. All their processes are really easy because I'd went to HC Community College a couple times with like friends to register for school and there's always these crazy long lines and like only two people behind the desk and I was just like it just seems so discombobulated here like what is going on? So I really liked WCCC for that and they were always really diligent about this will transfer, this won't transfer, you know, and letting you know what will transfer and if it will transfer what that credit will fulfill. They were always really good because like I ended up having all of my credits transfer, I didn't have any issues because they were always just so helpful and they would be like well here it's English credit but over there it'll be a communication credit, so you're satisfied in this, this, this, and this but you're going to need this because when it transfers it'll be something else...yeah so that process was really easy.

Even though Liberty enjoyed her experience at WC Community College, she admitted she did not utilize the services available to help her make the best choices about her academic path.

I just went up there and they just had the booklet, because I mean back you know way back then they had those little paper booklets of the classes and I just went through I just

picked my own classes and then I met with a counselor and they basically approved the classes that I picked and that was it. I was just going down the list of what I needed to take, I was like entry level algebra, okay, uh, English, okay, history, okay, I was just going down the list...whatever was the core classes basically I was like well these are the ones that I have to take so I'll just go down the list and check them all off and then I'll decide what I'm going to do I guess when I get there.

During this time Liberty's life was still in her mind, unstable, and this contributed to average grades throughout community college. Navigating the differences between high school and college, minimal effort, as well as a disinterest in some core subjects also played roles in lackluster grades.

I was kind of I was kind of figuring out what it was all about kind of because I was like it was a lot different just because like they didn't remind you when you had tests or anything like that, I'd come in and be like ooh, there's something due? And I had no idea and I was like they are not going to tell me what's going on, like you need to figure it out for yourself. They're not going to baby you basically and so that was me kind of like figuring it all out and just trying to get it all together. It was good but yeah, even then my grades were still kind of spotty.

I think a lot of it was just a disinterest in maybe the subject because in the subjects that I did like I got really good grades in. I mean you know history is not appealing to me at all, or like government, I'm just like oh, my, God no thank you. But I mean I still passed the class but then I would take a literature class that I loved and I of course got good grades in that. The ones that I excelled in were literature, economics, and ...the rock class...geology...that was a lot of fun. I definitely started knowing more about what my interests were when I would go, like 'cause I never thought I'd have an interest in economics and then I'd go to class and be like that's so cool. I definitely saw a lot more of what I liked, what I didn't like and saw how school was appealing to a lot of people as far as bettering yourself, not so much like I have to go because I have to go, but I want to go because this is interesting to me and I want to know more about it.

Liberty's attitude and maturity may have increased slightly when it came to her outlook on school, but her parent's separation and ultimate divorce still affected her negatively.

I was still like in a really weird place with my parents and I think it probably did contribute [to grades] but I think that a lot of it was internal. I was figuring stuff out about myself but at the same time I was still like staying out late and partying on

weekends and like doing whatever I kind of wanted and not really focusing on what was going on. Even with school, sometimes my grades still weren't great, you know I could have done a lot better but since my parents were still like basically splitting up I was just like whatever I'm just going to do what I need to do, which is school and work, and not worry about anything else.

Liberty's parents eventually divorced when she was 18 years old. There were times during the interviews when Liberty speculated about the real reasons for her parents marital problems. Liberty mentioned that her mother being the breadwinner after the family's move to Harrison may have been a factor, but certainly her father's infidelity was predominant. She ultimately she blamed her father because she believed he was supposed to set the standard for the family. Liberty refused to speak to her father for well over a year, but eventually decided she did want a relationship with him. Her decision to reach out to her father was fueled by the fact that she did not want to have any regrets if something ever happened to her father. While discussing her decision to rekindle her relationship with her father, Liberty recalled her memories of times when she thought he truly was a good father.

When my parents separated it was a hard for me because my dad...being in the Army, it was like you do right and not wrong. I was just like, all of that's a lie, all of it is wrong. I literally didn't talk to my dad for like a year or two, like not anything at all. Then finally one day I was just like you know I don't want to be that person that my dad dies and I'm like oh I wish I would have done this. It was just like a switch and I was like you know what, I'm over it. And it was hard because my mom was so hurt by it, but the way that I looked at it and the way I explained it to her was like in that aspect of him being a husband, yes, he was a bad husband, he shouldn't have done what he did, but that was between you all, it has nothing to do with me so ya'll figure that out, but for me, he was a really good father, he's a really good role model, so that's pretty much what I gotta do.

Like many students working towards advanced degrees, Liberty also had the stress of paying for school. Even though Liberty's relationship with her father was mending, he refused to assist her in paying for her education if she could not earn adequate grades. The added stress of financing her education made her appreciate the value of an education, but it did affect her persistence.

I remember I didn't get good grades because my dad was like well I'm not going to pay for you to get bad grades and I was like alright, fine. As soon as that happened and I started paying for school myself, my grades got better and after that all of my college money was coming out of my pocket because my dad was like I'm not going to pay for bad grades. I mean, I can't blame him for that, so after that I had to pay for school myself it definitely made me appreciate a lot more and I actually put in a lot more effort. My grades did get better but I would go for a semester and then I would take a semester off.

During the time Liberty spent at community college she also made a very important decision for someone so young. When she was 23-years-old, she married the one person she considered to be a support system for her during what she considered to be a turbulent time.

The one person I haven't talked about at all is I have an ex-husband and he's like probably one of the only support systems I did have. The entirety of the time for me to go through school he would be like Liberty, you need to get off your ass. I say he's my ex-husband, we were married for a really short time, but I knew him all throughout. I might have been still going to junior college when we met [but] I wasn't in school, I was just working. I didn't have a car, I had just moved out of my mom's house, the first time I had ever moved out of my mom's.

Liberty acknowledged the important role her ex-husband played in her life at the time. During an uncertain time in her life, her ex-husband was the only person in her life who was consistently giving tough love. While her parents may have tried, her ex-husband not only had high expectations of her, but also pushed her to think about how she was going to reach those expectations. Even as an independent adult, it appeared that Liberty needed more support than she was ready to admit.

[He] made me see if he can do this like there's no reason I can't, but then you know we had a terrible breakup, it was just terrible and for like a few months it was just a really rocky relationship where we just weren't getting along. I think that made me be like I don't want to listen to you whether what you're saying is right or wrong and at that point I was so much younger that I didn't see the full picture. I couldn't appreciate what he was doing for me then but like at graduation I'll probably like make a speech and be like, Jeff you're the best friend I ever had because he still is my best friend and I am his. He's probably the one person that was constant and I wouldn't say that my parents gave up, but they didn't they definitely didn't push as hard as I would have wanted them to. Not

that that's their responsibility, but he was definitely someone that pushed me a little bit more and was like stop making excuses, whereas other people they may have supported me, but he was definitely the kind of person that was like why are you making excuses instead of just getting it done? I would always be like well I'm working and he was like, I'm working too and I'd be like well blah, blah, blah. And that's where the money came in because I was like I don't have money, he'd be like okay I'm going to help you with your tuition this month, I'll make that installment and you know I was on a payment plan, he was like I'll make that payment on that installment, you need to be going to school. I didn't have a laptop, he bought me a laptop.

When we discussed her ex-husband, she obviously still had a great deal of care and concern for him. The marriage was short lived and Liberty accepted the fact they made better friends than spouses. Liberty's face lit up when she discussed the current relationship between the two.

We weren't married that long and it was sad but it was just like you know what this isn't working. I'm going to kill you and we obviously made better friends so after maybe like six months of not talking, because I was like I don't want to talk to you right now I'll still be your friend but I don't want to talk to you right now, we rekindled our friendship. We still have it to this day and it's really nice because you know he's in Pakistan right now meeting with his future wife and I'm like I can't wait to meet her. It's definitely a better support system for the both of us because like I said he doesn't have anyone else here and I think that if we would have tried to stay in that situation it would have been negative for him. I would never want to go through something like that again but I think that it definitely turned out for the best because we're still reaping the benefits of having a supportive relationship where we can actually just talk to one another and not have to worry about oh, this person's going to judge me so it's nice.

The time Liberty spent at WC Community College was filled with critical events that shaped her outlook on relationships, finances, and education. For the first time she saw her parents as humans having flaws. When confronted with her father's infidelity, she attempted to punish him by not speaking to him for over a year. She believed his actions negated everything he had ever attempted to teach her about values. It took a little maturity on Liberty's part to realize it was more important to have a relationship with her father than to live with any regrets. Liberty's disdain for what she saw as her mother's passive behavior was also prevalent. She felt pity for her mother but wanted her to be more assertive when dealing with her father. Liberty

also married during this time, which was premature and ended fairly soon. In retrospect, Liberty realized she was not ready for such a relationship, but can now cherish what her ex-husband did provide for her during that time – a little stability and support.

Liberty's lackluster performance at WC Community College was an extension of many of the attitudes Liberty had while in high school. She put forth minimal effort in subjects she wasn't very interested in and did not utilize any support services the college had to offer, including academic advising. Starting college while dealing with her parents' separation and ultimate divorce, working full-time to manage her tuition payments, and uncertainty about future goals, all affected her academic performance. Yet, Liberty began making plans to transfer to a four-year university and earn a baccalaureate degree.

Young Adulthood – Distinctive University

After her divorce and completing just over 40 transferrable credits, Liberty decided it was time for her to not only think about transferring to a four-year college, but also about what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. Liberty had researched a few schools after deciding she had an interest in the hospitality field.

I was ready to move. I had all these hours and I was like you know, I really want to move. I really wanted to go to Florida International University in Miami. They had a really good hospitality program there and I had went to Miami with some friends on vacation and I was like I love it here, this weather is great, let's do this, and I was like all set. I want to move that's where I want to go, that's the program I want to get in to. Well I looked at the school fees and I was like oh no! It ended up being that you either had to pay international fees or resident; there was no out of state fees. It was either international or not, and I was like oh, no, because my plan was to scale back on work, work part time, take out a loan to go to school and really start getting my stuff together. Then I started looking at the housing for apartments and on campus and I was like this is ridiculous compared to what it was here. I was like okay well I'm definitely not going to pay for that so I was like okay, I'm going to go to Distinctive University. Distinctive U was my second choice, like I either wanted to go to Florida or I was like I'm going to go to Distinctive U.

Liberty's desire to prepare for a career in hospitality was sparked by her first party she planned, which propelled her to look for work in the hotel industry.

I had a Halloween party and I loved setting it up, like I had a full bar, I had my brother bar tend. We did all the walls in the garage, like it was just great and I was like I should do this, this is so much fun. I was working customer service at a cell phone internet company and I was like okay, well I want to be in hospitality so I need to quit here. So I quit there and I started working at a hotel, and I loved working at the hotel. I was like hospitality is definitely for me, I need to just you know make the change.

Liberty recognized there were certain aspects of the hospitality industry that conflicted with what she considers a sometimes introverted personality, but she felt her experiences at the hotel challenged her and helped her hone in on some skills she already had in her arsenal.

I was just front desk, checking people in and it was just a lot of fun and it was like I don't know because usually when I'm at school like I probably don't talk to anyone in class, which is really weird, 'cause I talk all the time (laughter) and so it's really weird to me like at school I'm just like I'm quiet, I just get my work done, I don't really know that many people, but then like once I know someone I'm just like blah, blah, blah. So it's like I really have to like warm up with someone before I start talking to them, which is weird, 'cause like I talk so much. Especially with hospitality like it's so important to network and get to know people, breaking the ice with someone is like the hardest thing for me to do, I'm just like umm hi...and I have no idea why, it's just, it's so weird.

I planned a party and I'm really good at organizing other stuff that I want to organize. Like if you like saw my room it's just chaos, but then I open my binder and everything's labeled and color coded, I have my note cards and my highlighters and everything's like perfect. Then you're like but look at her car, there's crap everywhere. I always think that's so weird I'm so organized in some places and in others, just not at all. I don't know, but that's how I made that choice and then I was like alright, that's what I'm going to do and I registered in school and started working at a hotel.

Although Liberty made the decision to attend Distinctive University in part because of an excellent hospitality program, her grades from community college prevented her from being accepted into the major. In the fall of 2008, Liberty was admitted as an undeclared student to Distinctive University with the intent on earning a GPA high enough to be accepted into the Hotel College. After her first semester she earned A's and B's but was unable to declare her

major. She continued to take courses in the Hotel College and did well her first two semesters at Distinctive University because the courses were interesting and engaging.

I took that first semester I got all A's and B's, got my GPA up, and I think there was, they lost my paperwork, somewhere, somewhere my paperwork got whatever and I didn't transfer that time, but you know I kept my grades up enough to eventually transfer in to the actual declared Hotel major. Those were classes that interested me and they applied to me because one was etiquette, and then I had wine appreciation with Professor Sampson, and then at that time I was like really into wine and I was like oh yeah. I only liked like one wine, so that was really cool to me, this is awesome like it's so much fun. It's hard, but it's so much fun. Then I took etiquette and I was like that is so cool because they teach you all these other etiquette strategies that they use in other countries and how important it is to know their etiquette before you travel abroad or even if you have a business dinner with people that are from somewhere else, knowing their etiquette; I mean they can think the peace sign is the middle finger, so that was really cool to me. Having the classes that applied to me, made me apply myself and get a lot better grades.

Unfortunately with the demand of paying her own tuition and fees, work eventually became more of a priority than school. After her first year, Liberty took a semester off to save more money to pay for school. She had always prided herself on paying for school out-of-pocket and was really adamant about not taking out loans. The difference between tuition at a community college and a four-year university can be extreme and caused a certain amount of additional stress for Liberty.

I was still paying out of pocket and I was like no, I'm really not going to take out any loans, I was like really adamant about that...but then it was like it ended up taking me so long to get out because trying to work full time I was only taking part time classes and that wasn't working, like, it just it wasn't working, but I wasn't, I don't know, I guess I wasn't savvy enough to be like hey, you need to get a loan so you can get the hell out of here. I was really naïve and I was like well you know if I got all the way through junior college without having to take out loans I'm going to try. I'm going to try and stick with that and not take it out but it just really ended up taking quite a toll because I was always stressed out about having enough money. It wasn't even like the tuition; it was like well okay well tuition's paid, well books, and I was like how much are these books?

Eventually Liberty's father began to assist her financially by helping her pay for books. Liberty believed her father was proud of the grades she was receiving and therefore he offered

his assistance to help pay for her books. While she was grateful for his help and his pride in her, she was still stressed by working full-time and going to school at the same time.

But by this time my dad had been like okay I'll pay for some of your stuff and he was actually helping me pay for my books, which was nice. Even he was like one book is how much? And I'd be like yeah, it's crazy, and he was like wow, but I think he was really proud and he was really happy that I had gotten through and been like fine, I don't need your money. I did it myself, so I think he was really like this girl's crazy, but good job. I think he was really happy about that and I didn't even ask him, he was just like you know let me pay for your books. I think I was probably like the tuition's this much and my parking pass is this much. It was good but there was the stress of working full time and only going to school part time.

When Liberty returned to Distinctive University after taking off a semester, she began to encounter her first real academic difficulties. While Liberty acknowledges the stress of finances took part in her difficulties, it was also an unhealthy relationship that shifted her focus away from school as well.

I was doing good in some classes but the classes I was doing bad in were the ones that really mattered and it just kept dragging me down. Then a lot of it had to do with basically the relationship that I was in because I mean he didn't go to college, he didn't plan on ever going to college, and I was. And it's not his fault but I was so focused on him and what he was doing and supporting him that I wasn't focusing on what I needed to focus on.

Fortunately for Liberty, her community college GPA allowed her to transfer to a large, public university in Harrison, Distinctive University. Although the university offered the major she was interested in, hospitality, she did not have the requisite GPA to be automatically accepted into the program. With plans to earn a solid GPA and transfer, Liberty started at Distinctive University as an undeclared major. Finally taking courses which held her complete attention, Liberty did well in her first two semesters taking courses in the hospitality program. The demands of paying her own tuition and fees forced Liberty to take on full-time employment, which ultimately affected her ability to continuously enroll in school. She took a semester off from school to pay her tuition, but the stress of finances ultimately trumped her academic

progress. In addition, Liberty found herself in a very unhealthy relationship which would contribute to her first academic difficulties at Distinctive University.

Adulthood – Relationships and Academic Suspension

Liberty's first job in the hospitality field was at a well-known hotel. When we discussed her position at the hotel, it was the first time Liberty expressed pride in something she had accomplished. She worked as a front desk manager and made it her goal to provide excellent customer service to hotel guests. Even when she had to resolve a reservation conflict, she prided herself on being responsible for customer satisfaction, "I like being the problem solver. I enjoy getting over that conflict with someone and having them walk away happy."

After working at the hotel for almost a year, Liberty began dating her manager. In retrospect, Liberty believed the relationship had its good points, but the fact that her boyfriend could not relate to her struggles pursuing a baccalaureate degree created tension in the relationship. In addition, she had to transfer from the hotel she enjoyed working at because of a no fraternization policy. At the time Liberty thought this was a good choice, but as she continued to discuss her relationship and subsequent employment, her voice was laced with regret.

When I started working at the hotel, he was actually my manager. I was there for almost a year and then I ended up quitting because you're not supposed to have a no fraternization rule so I was like okay, well I'll quit my job, so I quit...um and I went to work at another hotel, ended up hating it over there um...and that was also really unhappy 'cause I had left, I left this property that I loved I loved working at the hotel that I was at and so I ended up leaving there. It was a really good relationship when it was good but then when it was not great, it was terrible, because you can clearly see like it reflected in my grades. Like I said I was focusing so much on him and what he needed to do that I wasn't doing my school work or I really needed to be supported in a way that if I'm like I'm going to skip class today, he would be like yeah, skip class and let's go and I needed to be supported in a way that would be like no, you really need to go to class. So

that really just took my focus off of school; you know the relationship itself was okay, but how I let it affect me was bad.

After only a few months into the relationship, Liberty moved in with her boyfriend and supported his full-time work. She began to take on the role of a wife – cooking, cleaning, and supporting his goals, while her priorities fell by the wayside. In addition to taking care of his needs, Liberty found herself enabling a drinking problem as well.

He didn't have a degree so he really had a really good work ethic, you know, he was really focused on work because he didn't have a degree so he was like I really need to work my ass off because if I get fired what am I going to have? I'm not going to have anything and so I was always like really supportive of that and I'd be like yeah, let me take your dry cleaning, let me pick it up, let me make your lunch, let me do this, let me do that, but then he also had a really bad drinking problem. I would come home and he would be passed out and I'm like why are you passed out in the middle of the day, what the hell?

After a few months we did move in together and so I was just like you know what is going on here? He should have really gotten, I really should have had him get help from someone. I should have forced him to go get help, but instead it was more me helping him. I'm trying to support him, trying to go to school, and trying to work, so obviously I put him first.

Putting her boyfriend first partly contributed to her first academic suspension. Liberty was with her boyfriend for two and a half years, and did not realize how their differences were affecting her grades until it was too late. The differences in their outlook on education continued to widen as her boyfriend could not comprehend the devastation Liberty felt seeing her grades decline. She felt her boyfriend also couldn't understand why she was so upset about her grades when her behavior often showed otherwise: "...it was hard for him to understand; why is she so upset about this when she skipped class yesterday?" Managing her relationship, school, and full-time employment was becoming overwhelming.

My grades fell, I ended up getting out of school, and for him it wasn't even like a really big deal. He couldn't understand how big a deal it was because he had never...I think he ended up dropping out of high school and getting his GED so I don't even think he could, he couldn't even comprehend like what was really going on. He knew that it affected me,

but I just don't think that he could comprehend you know because I mean unless you go to college, like you can't understand that commitment that you have to like school and you know I'd already gone through all of junior college and paid my own way. I just think that he couldn't really fully understand where I was coming from, so, you know that was kind of a rift.

And like I said it's reflected in my grades, [they] would go up, and then they'd go down, they were never...I don't think they were ever 100% like stable; not only because of that, but also at the same time like the work thing. I'm still like trying to work full time, not going to school full time, I didn't go to school full time until like a year ago.

During the semester Liberty's grades dropped low enough to earn her a first academic suspension she was juggling a toxic relationship and working at the hotel. While she was devastated about her academic dismissal, she took the required semester of academic dismissal to continue to work. After the semester ended, Liberty started the process of being readmitted from academic suspension to Distinctive University. The process to return was not daunting, but Liberty still was not admissible to the Hotel College and applied to return as an undeclared major once again. During the readmission from suspension process, Liberty had to see an academic advisor whom she insisted was helpful in the process. When she was readmitted she had to enroll in a course to assist her with getting back on track academically. "When I was readmitted I went through the undeclared college and the class is actually really good...they really made you prioritize on what's really important..."

In the spring Liberty enrolled full-time while working full-time, and finished the semester with a term GPA slightly above 2.0, just enough to keep her on continued probation. Before she began the summer session, Liberty had broken up with her boyfriend, quit her job at the new hotel, and took a job at a country club.

Work was still always first. At that time I'd quit my job and I went to another hotel, ended up hating it. I was there maybe six months and I left, I was like I can't do this anymore, so I left. I started working at a country club and I hated the country club even more, but at this point I was like I am not starting over at another job...I'm not doing it, so I just like suffered through it. I hated that job so much. I probably went home every

other night and cried because I hated it so much. I couldn't get any hours and I kept changing my school schedule around. I'd be like okay well I'll take all my classes in the morning so that way I can work at night, well when I did that they still only gave me part-time hours. I was like on the verge of tears because I'm not making enough money to pay my tuition and I can't go to school if I don't have the money, so it that was that was a real that's where I think it came to almost a breaking point at the country club where I was just like you know I'm putting in all this work, I'm here all the time, I moved my schedule around for you guys, if you guys tell me to take classes in the morning I take them in the morning. If you tell me to take them at night, I take them at night, and you're still screwing me on hours...what is going on, and so I think a little bit after that is when I was just like...I'm done here, I'm going to look for another job.

Even though working at the country club was not ideal for Liberty, she continued her employment there throughout the summer while she enrolled in three courses. When I asked her about why she chose to take nine hours while being on probation and who she spoke to, she quickly glossed over the fact that she did not seek academic advice from anyone.

I didn't talk to anyone; I was just like I need to take these classes because I had been out so long. I was like I need to get my junk together and I took practicum, which is basically like a work study class, where you have to show that you're working in a hospitality industry, and then I took a nutrition class, I was like, that'll be fun, and statistics. The nutrition is what got me. I had more homework in that nutrition class than I did in my two other classes put together, and it was an elective so I assumed it wouldn't be so intensive, that class had so much frickin' work I had like four projects in the summer semester! I really honestly never really thought that it would end up being so much work, but it got to a point where I was doing some of my homework while I was at work...and my manager was like seriously? I have to break down all these recipes, and I have to calculate the fat percentage, and I was like this is an elective. I really just I didn't think that an elective would be so hard, and I was I was pissed I was so mad and that that class is what brought me down.

Liberty failed her nutrition class, which resulted in a second academic suspension. At Distinctive University, students on second suspension must sit out for a full academic year. Although being suspended a second time was difficult for Liberty, she took the time off to explore new career choices. She had already held jobs in the hotel and restaurant industries, but she desired to expand her experiences. During this time she also experienced her first

termination from a job. These experiences were life changing for Liberty and helped her once again clarify her future goals.

I ended up getting a manager position somewhere, got fired after two months, first job I've ever been fired from...ever, but I hated it there so I was just like alright, bye. That year that I was out I took the management position and got fired. When I got fired the first thing I did was I got unemployment and then I went on an internship. I went on a three month internship, and then I also took a free internship with the rodeo and I interned for the entirety of the cook off. That was hard, that was fun though, it was hard but it was really fun, I thoroughly enjoyed myself and because I was on unemployment I just like took internships. I went with other internships; I went to a bunch of golf tournaments as a venue manager, I went to this place, I went to that place. By the end of it we had went to another state and I did a music festival and I interned there. Oh my gosh, that was an experience I will never repeat again, but it was great. I did all that and it really just invigorated me like as far as like I really like what I do...I just need to get my shit together. That is when I was like screw this, I'm taking out a loan, I'm going full time, and so when I came back from my internship at the end of the summer I got a part time job the day I got off the plane. I literally got off the plane, drove home, changed clothes, and went to an interview and got a part time job.

Being fired for the first time had a major impact on Liberty. The termination made her think about her own footprint in the hospitality industry and perhaps how she would have managed differently.

The whole thing of going in somewhere as a manager and then being fired, I was just like what the hell? It was just like crazy to me, I was like seriously, you're going to fire me, like seriously? Taking the management class that I had taken at Distinctive University I'm just like the way that restaurant was ran was terrible, because there was like no training, there was no communication, and it was just how they ran stuff. I should have went further with reporting them but I didn't and I should I really think that I should have just because of you know how they treated their staff and yelled at them and cussed at them and I was just like you know I really felt like I probably should have went a step further, but that definitely pushed me to be like no, I'm going to school I'm getting my degree and I'm getting out of here. That definitely clarified a lot of things for me - being out and I think maybe even just being off that year and you know after being fired I didn't have to work so I think that gave me a lot of time to be like okay, what really are you going to do? What are you going to do and it definitely made me think a lot more of like okay, well, I want to be in hospitality but what do I want to do in hospitality? I definitely crossed restaurants off my list very hard. Well what kind of event planner do you want to be? Do you want to be a wedding planner? Do you want to be a meeting

planner? Do you want to be a corporate planner? Do you want to go into sports? It definitely made me narrow that down.

Liberty was also able to learn a valuable lesson about preparing for a satisfying career.

Another thing is it definitely made me do was you know do my research before I accepted a job. I didn't understand how incredibly important that was but I should have went out and like gotten reviews not only on the restaurant, but the manager, the owner, what's their turnover rate, how many servers have they been through, like I should have done more research but I mean lesson learned. I definitely don't look at it as a negative experience. I'm kind of just like glad it happened that it happened early because I definitely learned a lot from that experience. I'll never let someone push me into a position that I don't even want, 'cause that's basically what happened. I took a position that I didn't want and I got fired but it's like well what'd you expect when you didn't even want that job to begin with and it's like oh, I didn't think about that before.

After a year of interning for various organizations and finding a part-time waitressing position at an upscale restaurant in Harrison, it was time for Liberty to once again begin preparing for readmission back to Distinctive University. When I asked Liberty if there was any trepidation about being readmitted she disclosed she was a little worried, but she was determined to return and earn a degree in hospitality. While she did speak with an advisor in the Hotel College who assisted her, Liberty was still unable to reapply to Distinctive University as hospitality major so she submitted her readmission to suspension paperwork to the Liberal Studies College.

It wasn't [a difficult process] and I think that was just because it was transparent to me at that point. I was like no, this is obviously not working for me in the past, going part time and not taking out loans, that's not working. So I think that's why it was easy because I was just like no, you need to get this together, you need to get out of school. I think it was more like if I have to go to one more graduation that's not my own I'm going to kill someone.

I was a little bit worried about it just because this is the second time and it's a big deal, but I think at that point I was just determined. I don't care who I have to talk to, and how many times I have to talk to them, I don't care if I have to write a paper. I don't care if I have to talk to the president of the school I'm coming back to school. Also in that time I had done all these internships and I was like nope, I've quit my job because I do remember that part when they were like well what's going to be different this time? And I was like I quit my full time job, that's not a focus anymore. I remember that exactly

because that was a big part of why I didn't focus how I needed to before so I was definitely like no, I'm getting out of school, been here too long, getting out...

During her first few years at Distinctive University, Liberty experienced personal, professional, and academic failures. Entering into a relationship with the manager at the hotel she worked for proved not only unsatisfying, but also exposed her to substance abuse. While Liberty did not disclose much information about the extent of her boyfriend's alcohol abuse, it was clear she held some guilt for not trying harder to get him some type of help. Liberty also placed partial blame for her academic difficulties on her boyfriend, who could not or would not support her academic journey in a way she felt she needed. Professionally, Liberty navigated full-time and intern positions in the hotel and restaurant industries. Experiencing unsatisfying employment as a manager of a restaurant and other positions did help her clarify what her future career goals might look like.

Liberty also experienced the ultimate academic disappointment twice; she was academically suspended two times. She spent a year and half out of college on academic suspension. The process to return from suspension to Distinctive University can include submitting an application, writing a letter of explanation, an interview, as well as participating in study skills courses and workshops. For Liberty, going through this process twice was not daunting and she became determined to return and put all of her effort and energy into earning a baccalaureate degree in hospitality. By this time, even though she was still not eligible to declare a major in hospitality, she had amassed a certain amount of credits in this area and was not going to let her GPA stop her from earning the degree.

Adulthood and Maturity

Liberty was accepted into the Liberal Arts College with the goal of transferring to the Hotel College as soon as possible. Going back to Distinctive University without the pressures of working full-time allowed Liberty to seriously concentrate on being a full-time student for the first time.

I had never been able to be really involved in any school activities because I was always working. It was just that was awesome. Now I know why people don't work when they go to school; like this is awesome I can do internships, I can study when I want to study. If I want to sit at the library for four hours [I can]. I was like no wonder, this is awesome!

Liberty had finally been accepted into the Hotel College after bringing up her GPA. In the fall of 2012, Liberty was in her final semester at Distinctive University after pursuing a baccalaureate degree for over ten years. She reflected on the many events and people who played a significant role in her journey and acknowledged that most of the angst she had encountered was because of her own lack of goal setting.

I never pushed myself to really step up and be like and take a stand and really have a path and have a goal that I want to graduate by 2011 December class, like that really never occurred to me so I don't feel that I ever really gave myself a goal to achieve, it's like I'm going to school because I have to go to school. Was there an end in sight? Did I have a graduation date? There, I don't, there wasn't really one because I feel that had there been one I probably would have met with my advisors more to make sure that I was on that right path and that you know I want to graduate by this date on this day and how many classes do I need to take each semester to get there and once I knew my classes that I needed to take okay well can I afford this, how much am I going to work, how much am I going to need to take out a loan. I didn't really have that structure for myself.

Personal relationships in Liberty's life both supported and derailed her goals. After many disappointing relationships, Liberty was finally in a stable and supportive relationship.

I'm definitely in more of a place where I can remove myself from whatever it is and just be like well okay is this really what I want to be doing? I mean like with every other boyfriend none of us had the same end goals, none of us had the same wants in life. Like having kids and marriage and where do I mean how do you want to raise those kids. A

lot of those questions I'd never asked before. So when I got into this relationship with him I was like listen you know like I really don't have time to bullshit, like I need to get out of school, you know I have to work, like I really just don't have time for it so you know if you really want to have a relationship then that and that is part of it is like when we first started dating it was kind of just like dating and it was just like oh, you know, whatever...but then we broke up and got back together that second time that's when I was like listen, if you really want to have a serious relationship, then we can have a serious relationship, but if not like, I don't want to deal with this, you know, I'm not going to put in all this work and then you know so that definitely, I knew I had a better sense of what I wanted and who I wanted to be. I definitely was tired of everything else that had you know gone on and interrupted in my life and I was just like I need to get it together so I think it was just like ... having that clarity definitely helped put my relationship on a positive track because I was like listen, this is what I'm doing and this is what I'm about and you're either on that page or you're not. And if you're not, that's fine but you know I have my path and so I think that definitely helped, a lot.

Liberty and her new fiancée had very different academic experiences. While Liberty fought to support herself financially and encountered many academic difficulties, her fiancée was able to finish school with relative ease. When looking towards supporting their future children in their academic pursuits, she would hope to provide them with an experience similar to her fiancée's path.

My fiancé, he got his master's by the time he was 26 or something. He had all his college paid for, didn't come out with any debt, his parents paid for everything. He never had to work during college, only had summer jobs and he did summer internships. It was definitely two very different experiences and I would like to be able to provide that for my kids, you know, that would be really nice. I'd be like you better bring home some good grades, like that's your job basically, your job is to go to school. I would definitely like to at least be able to give them that option as opposed to doing what I did which was the roundabout way, but I mean if they choose the hard way, then they'll learn. I'll just be like it's not the wrong way but I mean it's a lot easier if you just do it this way. I'm telling you, a lot easier.

Liberty also advocated for the community college experience for her children.

I think the community college is a very good route just because it is a little bit easier. I think it's easier than going to a four year university, but I think it gives them a nice little introduction to what to expect and just knowing that they're not going to remind you to bring your stuff, they're not going to remind you to bring your pencil, they're not going to give you a pencil, they're not going to do all that stuff for you. I just think that it's a nice ice breaker to be like wow, it really is just me doing this. But that's also from a point of view that I've never been, like I never moved away. My fiancé, he moved away.

He went to Tennessee, so I mean I don't know if looking back I would definitely want to move away. I think it definitely gives you that sense of clarity that I was looking for much earlier, but I mean who's to say that that's right? I mean, some people go to college and they get out of college and they have no idea what they're doing because they're like the whole time I was in this sorority and you know identified with that and then when you're taken out of that you know it's shock. I mean I don't think that it's right or wrong. I think if anything I might say hey you might want to try this, even for the first year or they have the willpower to do it try it during their senior year of high school or during the summer so they can just kind of be like okay I know what's going on and if they want to make their decision I'll be more than happy to support that decision.

I think I would let them make the choice and I've never really asked him, asked my fiancé how his experience was so that probably would be something that we would probably talk about and then let them make the choice. I don't want them to go away and fail and I think that we might prepare them a little bit better to like even if it's just one semester, go for one semester, check it out, and then transfer, so then that way you know when you are having issues or whatever and you're seeing these other students and it definitely will help them maybe focus more on the school side of it as opposed to you know you move away and you're like my parents aren't here, awesome. I would like to say I would let them make the choice but I would definitely try and get them to go to a junior college first just to give them a little bit better sense of what's really going on.

Liberty's maturity and growth throughout her academic career was especially evident as she reflected on other relationships in her life, including those with her parents. It appeared as though her ten year journey had culminated in not only being on the cusp of receiving a baccalaureate degree but finally coming to be in a mutually satisfying place with the most important people in her life. Liberty laughed as she recalled what kind of child she had been growing up. She recognized her parents gave her a significant amount of freedom to find her own way and be her own person. By allowing her to express opinions freely, dress how she wanted, and own her own punishments, Liberty feels her parents raised her well. At the same time, when we discussed her own children she laughed at the mention of having a girl. "[I'm] definitely...terrified. I'm like praying to God I don't have a girl. Like oh my gosh, she's going to be a terror. Oh God, I'm so scared."

Her relationship with her mother appeared to be an example of role reversal as Liberty has encouraged her mom to return to school and expand her daycare business. She has also tried to be a positive influence on her younger brother.

I've tried to push my younger brother, he didn't go to college and I'm like Junior you need to go to college, you need to go to college you need to go to college and he didn't go that okay that's his path that's his path. Even my mom, she wants to close her business and I'm like you should go back to school mom, you should go back to school, get a loan, go back to school. She's like I'm too old but I'm like my grandmother got her master's when she was like sixty something. The median age on campus is 30 years old!

I push her [my mother] really hard because in the back of my head I'm probably thinking you know that's probably what I needed; you need someone to hold that mirror up to your face and be like seriously, what are you doing? And so she decided to open her day care and I was like fine, how many kids do you have? Well one...well, how are you going to plan on getting more kids? Well I don't know. Well mom you should have thought about that before you decided to take that step. I told her now you're open, you have no income; you need to make yourself a plan to do this.

Being close to graduation, Liberty also reflected on the university's role in her success as a student. Liberty did not remember participating in an orientation at the community college or as a transfer student to Distinctive University, but believes clear communication from the university would have been beneficial to her.

[An orientation] would have definitely helped a lot like exponentially. Now I'm on [the college] listserv where we get emails about every little thing, five times a day. Maybe if they had something like that, like a listserv like that for a transfer student. I think it should be mandatory to sign up on that so they can start getting those emails like this is when orientation is, this is the services that that we offer we're going to talk about these services. I think something like that but that is specifically for either transfer or first years, basically just first year students at Distinctive University regardless of where they're at I think something like that would have been helpful 'cause then I would have been more aware of it. I didn't have listserv until I was already in the major so I mean to have something like that prior definitely would have gotten my attention a little bit more. But then at the same time I didn't ask so...it is it's just my fault as much for being ignorant of what was available to me. But I think if even before you took classes if it just came up almost like you can't if you're a first year at Distinctive University you have to go and see someone; I mean then I would have been forced to go see someone.

As an undeclared student, Liberty felt the university did not necessarily fall short on helping her reach her goals. Although she rarely saw an advisor, she does believe the university could have done a better job at informing her of the tools that were available to her.

For me it was like well you've taken this one, this one, and they checked it off and it was more like this is where you're at. I didn't ask them about taking summer school, what do you recommend? I would get where I was at but I wouldn't go the step further and be like hey I'm thinking about taking summer school, what do you recommend? Like that really never came into play, it was always just where am I at, what classes do I need to take next, okay, this one, this one I can take any of these, okay, and then I'd go online. Some of it also had to do with the money thing. If I had money to take two classes, I'd only take two classes. If I had money to take three, I'd take three. That definitely affected my course load because my course load was as much as I could afford. But like I said, I didn't have a goal. I didn't have a goal of I want to graduate by this year so it's hard to say. I just would have liked to have been more aware of the tools and the resources that the campus had to offer.

Since returning from academic suspension, Liberty had not earned a grade below a C in any of her classes. Being in her major, getting to know her professors, and surrounding herself with academically focused peers helped keep her on task as well.

Another thing when you're in your college the teachers all know my name and my face and I'm just like oh shit; that definitely puts extra pressure on you. I mean they know you, like Professor Samuel knows me, and if he saw I was getting a D in a class, he'd be like bullshitting around, huh? And now I'm just like oh, I can't get a D in his class, like, he knows that I'm capable of getting an A. It's almost embarrassing in a way 'cause you're just like oh, I didn't you were the instructor, I guess I'll do my homework now. They know what you're capable of doing and you know what they expect of you and that's also another thing, it's just making sure that your students are aware of your expectations like you know this is what we're doing, this is how you're going to do it, and we expect you to be successful at it because there's no there's no reason for failure. I mean you can't really blame anyone else you know and but you also have to be committed to make the changes like I made the change to finally scrap work. Not everyone has the luxury to do that so, I was definitely more fortunate in that respect, but I mean I also see these other people like one of my friends. She would work and she had a two year old and she was going full time. I was like oh my gosh, how do you do this? And she was just like well, I don't have a choice. She has to do it because she needs to get out of school. When you have people like that next to you it's just like well, hell, I mean I gotta study 'cause you're making me look bad.

Graduating with a lower GPA caused some concern for Liberty as she began her career search. She actually had experienced the question regarding her GPA from a potential employer.

Someone did ask me that when I went on an internship a few summers ago and she was like well why's your GPA so low? I was like oh shit, I didn't think she was going to ask me that and I told her well you know I let some other personal matters distract me and at this point I'm just getting back on my path and refocusing on school as well as building my experience base. She was like alright, that's an honest answer and I think that's just what I tell them. For me it was just a different journey and I mean you can see by the transcripts you know there were dips and lows but you can definitely see I think at the same time it was always going up, although it did go down, it was still continuing on that path of getting done whether that took like 12 years now? It wasn't great but I mean at the same time I never stopped, so, I mean there's so much determination.

Conclusion

On the brink of earning a baccalaureate degree in hospitality from Distinctive University, Liberty believed she had important advice to impart on younger students and that is to lean on your peers and build a comfortable relationship with your academic advisor.

Talk to other students. A lot of times I'll talk to the younger students that are freshman. I was actually talking to one the other day and you know she was almost in tears because she had to write an appeal letter and she was just like this process is so unfair! I was like you know you're letting it overwhelm you right now; it's not unfair, it's just that they have to go by deadlines too. It's not like that advisor's out to get you or anything like that they have to have stuff by a certain date and that's it, but you don't just give up like just write the letter and be real about it you know? And tell them, be honest. I told them exactly what was going on and I got back in. I told her if I can do it. Also, I didn't talk to anyone about it at school but find that person you feel comfortable with, your advisor go talk to your advisor about it whether it's a school thing or not school thing. I mean it depends on the person, but if you don't want to talk to them then talk to other students...and definitely do the orientation thing.

Liberty's story began with her expressing an understanding very early on that she was going to college, but only because she thought everyone went to college. Liberty had no goals and no clear understanding of the process to get into college. Once she was in college, she failed to achieve high academic standards because she continued to progress blindly, without proper academic and personal support, or individual accountability. Only after Liberty was exposed to

disappointment after disappointment did she start to visualize herself with a baccalaureate degree and as a successful career woman in the hospitality industry. When she realized her potential and own inner strength Liberty was able to move past obstacles in her path and graduate from college.

Analysis

Liberty's story engaged me in many different ways. While interacting with her life narrative, several themes emerged that will be supported by critical events that happened in Liberty's life: Acting Out as a Response, Accepting Flaws, Dependency and Naiveté, and Self-Awareness and Maturity

Acting Out as a Response

Liberty seemed to take pride in being the black sheep of her family. Throughout Liberty's early life she seemed to use acting out as a response to uncertain situations. She attempted to describe her behavior as just the way she was instead of accepting she may have acted out as a defense. Liberty provided me several examples of what she referred to as a "streak" that often got her in trouble as a child. As early as elementary school, Liberty was making a conscious decision to rebel against authority. Her teachers believed Liberty may have had a hearing impairment, but in reality, she was ignoring them. She described her behavior as typical: "That's kind of just me, just kind of doing my own thing." Doing her own thing appeared to be Liberty's way of standing out in her family as the only girl. When she described her other brothers, she called them "very obedient" and "very sensitive." She also maintained that she "ruled" their lives for a long time as well. Liberty's self-proclamation that she was "the bad one" in the family seemed to benefit her because she felt no remorse when she did exhibit

bad behavior, but the more we talked about her behavior, the more it seemed her acting out was a response to feeling “different.”

When Liberty’s family moved to Harrison, she encountered peers who did not accept her differences well. In middle school, Liberty became a target because of her looks and found herself with few friends: “people were just so different. A lot of people, a lot of the kids, were very unaccepting of me so that probably has a lot to do with it.” Liberty was very fair in complexion and that seemed to confuse her black and white counterparts; she felt as though she did not fit in with either race: “A lot of problems I had was because I was so fair, kids would be like oh, well she’s white... she doesn’t talk like this...”

As a reaction to this perceived hostility, Liberty continued to act out and her disobedient behavior progressed to skipping school as early as middle school and continued through high school. She claimed she was a “really bad student” and was surprised by her behavior because her father was a probation officer. She told of one situation when her father reacted to her behavior.

One day my dad was like you’re not going to class? And I was like, yeah, I’m going to class, sure...and I went to class late one day and he started coming out of my class and I was like is he seriously here? It was so embarrassing and he sat there in class with me the whole time...

In high school, Liberty’s behavior could be described as arrogant and confrontational. She laughed as she recalled the sheer amount of disciplinary write-ups she received for skipping class or being late: “I probably had like enough write-up slips to like paper one of my walls in my bedroom.” Liberty told me about one situation where she and a teacher had a direct confrontation and she walked out of class. She believed the teacher was disrespectful, but looking back, realized her behavior was unacceptable.

There were probably some other times in there where like I definitely should not have said what I said, but at the same time I was a teenager, I was crazy. I realize how crazy I was now.

Perhaps what is most unsettling about Liberty's rebellious behavior was that her parents often seemed to overlook her antics, which allowed Liberty plenty of leeway to continue destructive behavior. When Liberty had the confrontation with her teacher, her father appeared at the school and chastised the teacher for her behavior, but never condemned Liberty's behavior: "My dad ended up coming up there the next day and was like don't you ever talk to my daughter like that again." In reaction to other incidents at school, her parents would try to ground her, but never enforced punishment.

They tried to ground me...I'd sneak out of my room so much the bush in front of my window died. I would sneak out and I'd go across the street and I'd play basketball...in the driveway, because I'm tough!

It was clear that Liberty was not tough; even as a young adult, she continued to act out as a response in situations that she felt she had no control over. After Liberty graduated from high school she found out that her father had been unfaithful to her mother. As her parents' marriage began to unravel, Liberty dealt with her feelings by staying out late and partying. The anger she felt towards her father played over time, but she used his absence as an excuse to "party, party, party" without thought to responsibilities.

When they separated, that was like party time for me because I was like no one can tell me what to do. When I found out that he had done this giant wrong, I was like don't talk to me about being anything, don't talk to me about being truthful, don't talk to me about being honest...I was just like awesome, my dad's not here I can do what, I can go where I want, I can do whatever I want, and there are no consequences.

Acting out as a behavioral response to challenges in her life was common for Liberty. From an early age she learned that disruptive behavior warranted attention and deflected pain

away. During the difficult times of adolescence, Liberty reverted to skipping class, being unruly and challenging authority. As a young adult, she managed her pain by partying.

Accepting Flaws

The demise of Liberty's parents' relationship was also a lesson in accepting the flaws of parents. Parents may often be seen as super-human or without error and Liberty began to see her parents through a different lens in response to how they handled their own marital problems.

In high school, Liberty began to see her father's absences became more obvious. She took note of that, but also took note of her mother's passive response to the situation. It disturbed her that her mother was not more assertive.

I have a lot of issues with my mom on that part just because it's like, I think I'm so assertive and I'm so confrontational; my mom is not like that at all. She's very passive; in a lot of ways she's very passive aggressive.

Liberty wanted her mother to respond to her father's infidelity like she would – in a more confrontational way, although she admitted confrontational does not always equal effective: “...that's one way I'm very much like my dad. My dad's very confrontational, he has a temper issue, as do I a little bit, and that's definitely worked to his disadvantage a lot of times.”

Liberty resented her mother's passive nature and blamed it on her lack of education: “My mom, you know, she didn't finish school...I think she relied on my dad to provide for her for so long that that she's really handicapped herself.” Liberty was frustrated that her mother was so dependent on her father and she would get angry with her mother for that dependence. Liberty wanted her mother to be the strong, independent woman she thought her parents raised her to be. She felt bad for her mother, but angry at the same time because she knew her mother had the potential to be strong. Even though Liberty felt resentment towards her mother for her

lack of response and her passive nature, Liberty's actions weren't so much different. When Liberty found out her father was engaged in another relationship, she did not immediately tell her mother or confront her father. She told her brother and was relieved when he was the one who revealed the affair to their mother, but she herself did nothing except distance herself from her father.

I was maybe 17 at the time and I didn't say anything to anyone for a year, but I just like mentally took account, like oh, where's dad, oh he's at work or oh yeah, okay whatever.... I didn't talk to him the whole time he was cheating on my mom; I didn't talk to him for a year after that, not one word.

While Liberty despised her mother's reaction to her father's infidelity, she despised his actions because they spoke against all he was supposed to believe in as a father raised a young girl. Liberty's father was the one who taught her to demand respect from a man and here he was disrespecting her mother.

...he [my father] was like don't ever allow a man to do anything for you, do it for yourself. Because he was a juvenile probation officer and he saw all these moms, these single moms, come in and be struggling or have these guys that beat them or abused them. So he always raised me to like be on my own...

It also disturbed Liberty that her father did not uphold the same standard of morality at home that was expected of him in the Army: "When my parents separated it was a hard for me because my dad...being in the Army, it was like you do right and not wrong. I was just like, all of that's a lie, all of it is wrong."

It took some time for Liberty to begin seeing her parents as humans who made mistakes. As for her father, after almost two years of not speaking to him, she acknowledged that while he may not have been the best spouse, he had been a good father.

...one day I was just like you know I don't want to be that person that my dad dies and I'm like oh I wish I would have done this. It was just like a switch and I was like you

know what, I'm over it...yes, he was a bad husband... but for me, he was a really good father, he's a really good role model...

Accepting the differences between her and her mother also took maturity on Liberty's part. She acknowledged her mother's passive nature came from being raised in a different time and needed support rather than disdain. She chose to be a positive influence on her mother and push her to be more independent instead of getting angry with her dependence.

Even my mom, she wants to close her business and I'm like you should go back to school mom, you should go back to school, get a loan, go back to school.... I push her [my mother] really hard because in the back of my head I'm probably thinking you know that's probably what I needed.

Liberty was able to move from being angry with her parents' actions during their separation and divorce and come to recognize and accept their flaws as one of the drawbacks of being human. Her own maturity was reflected in the process she went through to come to a place of accepting them despite their past mistakes.

Dependency and Naiveté

While Liberty described herself as “assertive” and “confrontational,”, many decisions she made in her life appeared to come from a place of dependency and naiveté. While she may not have recognized her need for authority, love, and structure, it became clear to me that those needs propelled her to make some uninformed decisions in her life. Liberty navigated her life with the naïve belief that she was independent and strong, but many critical events in her life showed the opposite.

As a young woman, Liberty was disturbed by her mother's own dependency on her father and claimed that she was nothing like her mother. Instead, she was the product of a father who raised her to “be on my own” and never depend on men for anything. Liberty prided herself,

from a very young age, on being an independent spirit who did her own “thing.” Instead, as Liberty moved into adulthood, what we see is a young woman who did become dependent on men to satisfy her needs for authority and love. Liberty may have been looking for another father figure when she married at the young age of 23. Her ex-husband Jeff did provide Liberty with the support she felt her parents could not give her at the time.

I have an ex-husband and he's like probably one of the only support systems I did have. The entirety of the time for me to go through school he would be like Liberty, you need to get off your ass.

Liberty admitted that at the time she did not appreciate it, but Jeff never gave up on her. He gave her the tough love that she refused to admit she needed.

He's probably the one person that was constant and I wouldn't say that my parents gave up, but they didn't they definitely didn't push as hard as I would have wanted them to.... he was definitely someone that pushed me a little bit more and was like stop making excuses...

Liberty may not have seen her relationship with Jeff as a form of dependency, but it was evident he fulfilled a need that was absent in her life at the time. Liberty had just begun strengthening her relationship with her father, but he had been unavailable to her emotionally for much longer. Marrying at a young age seemed to be a decision based on feeling that emotional emptiness her father left in her.

Liberty again found herself in an unhealthy relationship when she began dating her manager at her first job at the hotel. Liberty did not necessarily see her relationship with her boss as codependent. Codependency acknowledges a condition in one person of the relationship “is controlled or manipulated by another who is affected with a pathological condition” (codependency, n.d.). Liberty was dependent on her boss for love and understanding but she did

not receive the support she unconsciously needed at the time. Instead of supporting her academic goals, her boss, who did not have a degree, encouraged her to focus on him more.

Like I said I was focusing so much on him and what he needed to do that I wasn't doing my school work or I really needed to be supported in a way that if I'm like I'm going to skip class today, he would be like yeah, skip class and let's go and I needed to be supported in a way that would be like no, you really need to go to class.

Liberty soon found herself supporting his goals while cooking, cleaning, and picking up his laundry. In hindsight she realized his drinking problem contributed to not only the relationship's demise, but the demise of her academic success. She would come home to him passed out from drinking while she was trying to manage home, school, and work.

My grades fell, I ended up getting out of school, and for him it wasn't even like a really big deal. He couldn't understand how big a deal it was...

Liberty naively believed she should have been the one to help him with his addiction: "I really should have had him get help from someone. I should have forced him to go get help, but instead it was more me helping him." What she did not realize was that she was not in a position to get him help because of their codependent relationship.

As Liberty moved through adolescence, her naiveté was clear in her outlook on life. Her naiveté was displayed when she answered the first question I presented to her. Liberty always believed she would reach a certain goal, in this case higher education, but she never had a plan to achieve that goal. Liberty believed, naively, that success was guaranteed to her: "I didn't even know that you could not go to college. I always thought that everyone went to high school and then college was part of that afterwards." Because of this attitude, Liberty encountered many roadblocks on her higher education journey. In high school she never applied herself, but still believed she was going to college. As a senior she sat for the SATs with no thoughts of preparation.

I assumed I could just get in, it's like whatever, I could do this. I mean like even with taking the SATs I was out the night before 'til like one in the morning and then I was like whatever, I'll just go take the SATs.

When Liberty decided to attend community college she rarely utilized the support services available to her. At Distinctive University she made the decision not to take out loans to help support herself through college. Working full-time to pay her own tuition caused anxiety and stress which affected her academic performance and persistence. She was “adamant” about not taking out loans. After years of attending part-time she decided enough was enough: “I guess I wasn’t savvy enough to be like hey, you need to get a loan so you can get the hell out of here. I was really naïve...”

Liberty took almost ten years to realize that anything worth having was worth fighting for. Having dealt with hardships throughout her academic journey, Liberty began seeing the world through a more mature lens. Once she was readmitted into the Hotel College at Distinctive University she decided to concentrate on being a full-time student.

Naiveté and dependency were prominent themes that affected many of Liberty’s decisions about relationships and her future. I found that with maturity, Liberty was able to embrace the fact that she was not truly independent and she did need support from others, including her father. Her experiences with academic failure also forced her to push herself in ways she never had before because she had naively thought life would hand her everything she needed.

Self-Awareness and Maturity

Self-awareness and maturity came over time for Liberty. In three short interviews I met Liberty the spoiled and rebellious middle sister; Liberty the naïve high school student who wanted life laid out neatly for her; and Liberty the young adult fighting through unhealthy

relationships and academic challenges. In the last interview I met the Liberty who was ready to walk across the stage and receive her diploma in a few short months.

Towards the end of her academic career Liberty realized the reason she was having difficulty attaining a baccalaureate degree was because it was not a goal she had truly embraced as her own. The maturity of setting goals and standards for herself propelled her towards academic success: “I never pushed myself to really step... I don’t feel that I ever really gave myself a goal to achieve, it’s like I’m going to school because I have to go to school.”

Once Liberty embraced her goal and put a date stamp on it, she began to utilize the support system around her. Building relationships with college peers, faculty, and her advisor was important in reaching her goal as well. Being active in her college and classes meant the bar was set higher: “...the teachers all know my name and my face and I’m just like oh shit; that definitely puts extra pressure on you.

Liberty also became more aware of her needs in personal relationships as she matured. She indicated she was in a place where she could step back and evaluate a situation: “I’m definitely in more of a place where I can remove myself from whatever it is and just be like well okay is this really what I want to be doing?” In her current relationship with her fiancé, she made sure they shared their goals and values before the relationship progressed.

... with every other boyfriend none of us had the same end goals, none of us had the same wants in life... I knew I had a better sense of what I wanted and who I wanted to be...having that clarity definitely helped put my relationship on a positive track.

There were a few events in Liberty’s life that gave us a glimpse into her maturation process. Doing some self-analyzing helped her define what she truly wanted in life and clarified how to achieve it.

Chapter Summary

Liberty's story provided us with a glimpse into the complex and critical incidents students face during their pursuit for higher education. From experiencing the dissolution of her parents' marriage, experiencing her own divorce at a young age, to finally realizing her own life goals, Liberty's story shows persistence that is worthy of the degree she was on the brink of receiving.

CHAPTER 7: SHANE

Shane is a 23-year-old male student at Distinctive University. At the time of our interview, Shane had earned enough credits to be considered a junior. His academic advisor, Carla (a pseudonym) in the College of Technological Advancement suggested to me that Shane might be a good candidate for my study. Shane had initially come to Carla for advising because he was required to as a student returning from academic suspension. The relationship between the two of them had evolved into one of mentor and mentee. Carla had informed me that Shane owned a nightclub and that he was pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering technology after taking courses in a few different areas. Carla was proud that Shane had been doing well academically after returning from suspension.

Our first interview was conducted in my office simply because it was more convenient for Shane as he was between classes. When I met him I was immediately taken in by his smile and good looks. Shane was shorter in stature, with a lean build, olive skin, and dark eyes with extremely long eyelashes! I was not sure of his ethnicity, but later learned he was of Caribbean descent as both of his parents were born in Trinidad. Shane looked like an ordinary college student with a satchel slung across his chest, but he also had on designer jeans and wore a silver chain with a large cross dangling from it. Although Shane had a good nature and was easy to talk to, he also came off as very sure of himself. I hesitated to call him arrogant, but Shane certainly carried himself with a swagger that projected he had life all figured out. This chapter presents Shane's life story and is followed with a holistic-content analysis of emergent themes.

Shane's Story

Introduction

As a 23-year-old junior at Distinctive University, Shane responded to the request to participate in this study only after a follow-up request from his academic advisor, Carla. After years of pursuing a baccalaureate degree, Carla was the very first academic advisor Shane interacted with.

I've taken classes that I don't need; I've wasted a lot of time and money going to school for classes I don't need. The first advisor I've ever spoken with was Carla and she really helps me, like I [will] owe my degree to her...

When asked about his first aspirations to attend college, Shane readily admitted he never grew up thinking about college as an option for him. His father was a successful businessman who had never earned a degree and Shane believed he could be successful without a baccalaureate degree as well.

Actually I'm surprised I'm here because I really never planned on going to college throughout high school and everything. I just never really felt that college was that important to me. My dad, he went to college for a little bit, but he opened up his own business and he's always done well. He's in the IT field and he's always been an entrepreneur. He just did his own business in consulting and he's pretty successful at that. So in my eyes college was either to become a doctor or a lawyer, something like that, but just [to get] like a regular business degree or generic degree, I felt that it was more of a waste of time.

Life without Dad

While Shane's outlook on college was influenced by his father, Shane spent most of his childhood without the physical presence of his father. Shane grew up with his mother and his two younger twin brothers, although he has four siblings. In addition to his brothers, who are six years younger than he, Shane has an older sister and a younger sister. Both Shane's parents are

from Trinidad; his father came to America at seven years old, and his mother immigrated when she was 19.

Early in our exchanges Shane mentioned his father's influence on him regarding education and careers, but his feelings of indifference in regards to his father surfaced quickly. There was never a time Shane recalled his parents "being together." Instead, his childhood was filled with an absent father.

He [my father] was never really in my life. I mean, only the past four or five years he really became a father figure. I lived with my mom, grew up with my mom; you know it was just me and my mom the whole time, and my little brothers. My older sister lived with my dad and my younger sister lived with my dad.

Shane and his older sister have the same parents, while his younger brothers have a different father and his younger sister has a different mother. Understanding the family's decision to split custody appeared unconventional; Shane explained his childhood was "pretty screwed up." The decision to split him and his sister up came down to his father questioning his paternity.

I think it was more like they had a mutual agreement, 'cause when I was born my dad, he never claimed me as a son. So my mom told me, I don't remember anything, we just had like a blood test and realized I was his but he didn't want me so my mom [kept me] ...and he took my sister. She's [mom] pretty much of a pushover, like she doesn't really like to fight or you know that type of stuff I guess, so if he says he's taking my sister, she just let him.

After paternity was confirmed, Shane's father flitted in and out of his life and when he was present, he caused consternation. Shane's father was in the military at one time and Shane described him as "real strict." Often, Shane's father would take his mother to court in an attempt to gain custody out of spite.

My mom told me it was because my dad didn't want to pay child support so he tried to get custody of me, and he never paid child support. My dad would try to make it like my mom was a bad parent and so I'd be getting in trouble and that showed that she was a bad parent. The court got involved and was going to try and find out...I guess that's what his goal was - to get me to move over there...

Shane's secondary education was filled with behavioral issues because of the instability with his home life. When prompted to discuss what type of student he was, Shane recalled an indifference to high school.

I didn't like it or dislike it. I went; it was what you were supposed to do. I went to school, but I didn't try hard. I wasn't the student who came home and studied and you know...I never really studied actually.

Even though Shane never committed himself to his studies, he claimed his grades were always pretty good. For Shane high school was easy, but staying out of trouble was more difficult. He considered himself a "bad kid" through high school. He attributed his behavior to the back and forth quarreling between his parents. Shane's behavioral problems escalated during his sophomore year and he was expelled from school for fighting. He was sent to an alternative program for a semester.

Yeah, school was easy. I think high school is...you have to try to fail. My big thing was I'd get in trouble, but the work wasn't really an issue you know. It was if I went to school I got a B you know, if I would try I'd get an A, but I was going to pass everything.

Growing up I was...I guess a bad kid. I would get in trouble, stuff like that. I really changed my life around when I was like...I'm 23 right now; I would say after high school is when I started to feel the importance of being good and going to school. I would fight in school; I'd get kicked out of school. I mean I graduated from high school but for one semester I got in a fight and that school you get in a fight they kick you out. They had this thing like the guidance center that you go to - you gotta go to a special center to go to school...

The court system also recognized a problem with Shane's behavior. During one of his father's attempts to gain custody, Shane was ordered to go to counseling, but did not feel it helped at curbing his rebelliousness.

The court issued me to go to counseling because I guess I was acting up. I didn't take it serious. I would just go there and I didn't want to be there so they would ask me a question and I'd be real nonchalant. I guess the point that they were making me go for wasn't achieved.

As Shane moved through high school, higher education was discussed, but there was not a great emphasis on preparing for life after high school. While Shane's parents did want him to go to college, it seemed their actions spoke louder to Shane than their words did. Neither of Shane's parents attended college and he shaped his definition of success based on his perceptions of his parents' net worth. Shane's father spent some time in the military and earned various certifications in the field of network communications. Shane recalled his father being very successful, working at places like NASA and Cisco. When discussing his father's profession, Shane appeared proud of his father's success. On the other hand, he indicated his mother struggled because she had no special skills and he did not seem particularly proud of her profession.

He [my father] has worked for like NASA, for Cisco; he's a network engineer, I believe that's his title. He's taken certifications, but he never actually went to college. I think he's really good at what he does, honestly. I don't think it's really luck. I think he does spend a lot of time like researching his field and I mean he has taken classes to get special certifications and stuff like that, but I don't think it's luck, I think it's that he has spent the time and it paid off.

[My mom], she never went to college either. She never went to school in America, and it's really different and she struggled. I mean she doesn't have any special skills or field; she does like dental assisting and stuff like that. Right now she has her own business as well; she does billing and coding for different dental offices. She did a special class, not

really school. I think the dentist that she works for sent her to special classes to do that and she's been doing that her whole life.

By early high school, Shane had already felt college was not necessary primarily because of the success he saw in a father who had not attained a baccalaureate degree. Additionally, he felt his parents wanting him to go to college was more the right thing to say to their young son, but they never actually invested in assisting in Shane's transition from high school to college.

I felt that it would be more of a waste of time for me to spend four years in college when I can start doing something. I felt like why go learn to make money when I can just make money? I never had a conversation with him [my father], he's always pushed me to go to college and actually he made me see I should go to college, but I just learned from seeing his experiences and stuff like that you know. My parents pushed me, like they've always said go to college and they were big on college through high school. Throughout my whole high school, college was where they wanted me to go, but it was more they were just talking - like they feel like everyone says go to college. You know it's just the idea you go to school, then high school, college, and you get a good job. But I know a lot of people who got out of college that haven't found a job, four years, five years, and they can't find a job.

Shane navigated high school not honing in on anything that he might want to do for the rest of his life. For him it was not about finding something he was passionate about, rather it was about finding something that he could make lots of money doing. When I asked Shane about any subject he enjoyed in high school, he quickly answered there were none; finding a lucrative career was more important than education.

It was really just about money. Honestly, whatever was the most lucrative field is what I was geared towards. Everyone was like don't pick a profession geared toward money 'cause you're not going to like what you do, but I still don't believe that... if I'm making money I'm successful in life.

With making money a top priority, it was no surprise that Shane started his first job at the age of 15. By being dishonest about his age, Shane began working at a fast-food restaurant and continued to work in food service and retail throughout high school. Despite his troubles in high

school, Shane graduated from high school in three years. Shane's ability to graduate early was not due to having aspirations of continuing his education or even by applying himself; rather, he was trying to maintain a relationship with his high school girlfriend. Shane's girlfriend at the time, who he described as a "nerd," encouraged him to take dual credit courses while he was still in high school.

She's actually the one who made me start going to school and college. She was always studying so I was like okay, and so I did the dual credit thing 'cause she was doing that in high school. She was already in college when I was still in high school and she was taking classes at a community college so I just did that and that's how it started.

It was apparent that Shane held his high school girlfriend in high regard and even when he called her a nerd, it was with endearment. Being a bit of a bad boy in high school, Shane admitted the relationship started off troubled because she was so different from him and her parents did not approve of the relationship.

Her parents hated me at first. She was real religious, she goes to church, school, all that and I'm completely opposite. I actually went to church one time and my mom, she goes to church, knew her parents. We just started talking and she actually didn't even like me or want to have anything to do with me. I guess something changed once we were talking and then we just started dating.

From there his girlfriend encouraged him to do better in school and enroll in dual-credit courses. Shane enrolled in the courses and did well, but his motivation was to spend time with his girlfriend, not to prepare for college.

That's how I ended up graduating early because I would take dual credit just so I could go to school with her because the only time I would see her was either for studying or at school. Her parents wouldn't let me see her like dating or anything like that. They were pretty strict on her and so that's pretty much when we'd be dating – in school. So that's actually how I ended up in college.

During this time, Shane's relationship with his father continued to be strained. He ultimately made a decision to completely disassociate with his father at the end of his high school career when his father did not attend his graduation ceremony. Shane's older sister had already made the same decision when she turned 18 and it was easy for Shane to do the same: "I would always try my whole life to get his approval. When he didn't come to my high school graduation, then I cut him off completely and didn't have anything to do with him."

After Shane graduated from high school, his father was absent from he and his sisters' lives for the next two years. Although Shane appeared nonchalant about this time period without his father, it was clear to me that he was hurt even if he did not readily admit it during our initial interview. Even though Shane had convinced himself that he really did not need his father during his early years, it is evident that his father had influence over his behavior and his outlook on life. An absentee father coupled with years of court battles over custody encouraged unruly behavior at home and school. Shane navigated through middle and high school with no direction, yet he managed to make above average grades. Even though he was adamant that college was not for him, he began to take college level courses in high school at the urging of his academically motivated girlfriend.

Playing College

After graduating early from high school, Shane was unsure of which direction his life would take, but he was sure he would be successful and make plenty of money. Shane continued to take courses at the local community college, not because he thought it would assist him in any future plans, but because his girlfriend was taking classes. Taking classes at community college was still the only time Shane was able to spend with his girlfriend.

I went [to college] because she was going. She was taking classes in the summer. She was at Baptist University out of high school but she would take night classes and summer classes at the community college so the only time I would see her was at community college. I would take classes with her so all the basics like composition 1, composition 2, speech; those kinds of classes.

Despite not having a clear goal in mind concerning his academic path, Shane excelled in these courses, ultimately graduating with a 3.6 cumulative GPA. Shane's overall feeling about college at that time was that it was easy and not leading him towards a specific path. The only courses that challenged him were math and science and according to Shane math was always his "worst subject." He felt like those years in community college was a waste of his time trying to find something that moved him.

After high school I've taken classes that I don't need. I graduated in 2006 and we're in 2012 right now so I've been going to school for a while and I haven't graduated with a degree yet. I've done like biology classes that I don't need for my degree. I wanted to do x-ray tech, pharmacy, I've taken a pharmacy class. I've taken classes that I don't need, I've wasted a lot of time and money going to school for classes I don't need.

I asked Shane about his experiences with his academic advisor at community college and was dismayed to find out he never spoke to a professional advisor about his academic goals and progress during his years at community college. He recalled picking up a degree plan and using it as a guide.

They had like a sheet of paper with your associates of arts and so I was pretty much going off of that which is pretty much your basic classes you know math, science, speech, history, government, those type of classes.

But as Shane mentioned previously, in addition to the core academic courses that would transfer to a four-year institution seamlessly, he dabbled in other courses, taking a random class to see if he liked it.

I wanted to do nursing, somebody told me about nursing. I guess they pretty much told me, hey, this is pretty lucrative, you know, you should do this...so I'd take a class in that and then figure out I didn't like it and then do something else.

Shane spent four years at community college with no degree. I asked Shane why he had not earned an Associate's degree and he honestly stated he never thought about it and did not attempt to go through any process to prepare for earning such a degree: "No...well you have to apply for one right? And you have to meet with them to go through your classes and I've never done that." After amassing a number of credit hours in random subjects, it was only at the insistence of his sister and his girlfriend that Shane began to realize he could not remain at the community college any longer and needed to think about his next steps as far as his academic goals were concerned. In the fall of 2008, Shane applied and was admitted to Distinctive University. He would spend the next few years at Distinctive University in an attempt to earn a baccalaureate degree.

The Prodigal Father Returns

Even though Shane was floundering through school at this time, he was preparing for success in the business world. After working jobs in hospitality and retail, he maintained long-term employment at State Farm. His employer at State Farm would prove to have a lasting impression on Shane as he pursued his interests in both business and education. More importantly during this time was the reappearance of Shane's father.

During his first year at Distinctive University, Shane's father began to try and reclaim a relationship with Shane and his sister. His father began to call more often and send gifts, but neither he nor his sister wanted anything to do with their father. At Christmas, Shane's father sent expensive gifts to his children in an attempt to reconnect.

At 19 or 20, that's when everything flipped. Now he would send us gifts for Christmas, he would call us. He actually mailed us some gifts and then my sister mailed it back to him; it was something like a diamond bracelet that was engraved and he got my sister like a diamond necklace and earrings and stuff like that, he spent some money on it.

We never really had anything to do with him and then I ended up seeing him at some parties. He hosts a lot of parties so I've seen him. One time at a party he was there and then we just started talking. I called him and then we would talk here and there, you know go out to eat or so once in a while and after that we just kind of tried to mend the relationship. My stepmom at the time would tell me, he's all depressed and stuff.

It was during these talks that Shane and his father began to discuss a business relationship. Shane's father, being a successful entrepreneur himself, knew of Shane's own desire to be a successful business owner. Because of their mutual love of promoting parties, music, and entertainment, Shane's father helped him finance a night club and they went into business together. Shane took out a \$10,000 loan but his father financed the remainder. On his 21st birthday, his father handed the entire club over to Shane.

I've always wanted to open a night club or a lounge or a bar. My dad, he's actually a promoter, would bring bands from the Caribbean islands and he's been doing that for a while too. He's always known that I've wanted to open a club right and so in the back of my mind maybe I'm thinking that he saw this opportunity and got me involved and that's how he's getting back into my life because he knows that's what I want to do. That's my goal, you know? My ultimate goal is just to be a successful business owner. Open one business, two businesses. I get that from my old boss at State Farm. He had his whole family involved. They own multiple businesses, like random businesses. You would think it's all in the same field but he has a restaurant, he's a State Farm agent, he has what else? I don't even know all the businesses he owns, but he has quite a few. He has an AC business, yeah, just random right? And in my eyes, that's success. Being a business owner there's no cap on the amount of money you can make; as much as you put in is what you're going to get out of it.

Shane's father's attempts at reconciling with his son were successful. His mother, even when questioned about Shane's paternity, never attempted to discourage a relationship between Shane and his father. Both his mother and his older sister, who eventually opened up to her

father as well, were supportive of this new relationship. While Shane admitted that he and his father were becoming closer, he still kept him at a distance.

Me and my dad we actually have a pretty good relationship now, yeah, surprising. I don't really hold anything against him anymore. I think everything happens for a reason. My dad, like he's completely changed now; he's not that dad he was before. Now he's really trying to be involved in my life. I keep him at a distance, but we're still pretty close.

On various occasions during the interview, Shane mentioned he and his father had more of a business relationship than a father-son relationship. I wondered if he had ever truly forgiven his father for his transgressions and if they had ever discussed the past.

He tried; I was just like the past is the past, you know, it is what it is...it happened for a reason and here we are. You can't really change it, why keep talking about it? I don't need to hear apologies, I don't, you know everything you did, you did for a reason. You chose what you did and that's how I feel. If you did something, you knew what you were doing, everyone has a right mind, if they're doing something then they know what they're doing, they know the consequence and they know what's right and what's wrong. So you've changed, cool...we just move forward from here, right?

While they may not have discussed the past, it was clear the father and son relationship was more than just a business relationship. Shane indicated that late night conversations at the club had become common. One night his father asked him about his future with his current girlfriend.

My girlfriend, she's graduating and whenever I hooked up with her I'm like I'm not getting married. He was asking me about ah what's going to happen or whatever and so we talk about all that nonsense. I guess he's more like a friend too like you know I can talk to. Like he wasn't there growing up so now we're like business partners and friends so we can talk about pretty much anything I guess...

Shane's father was also attempting to do the little things to stay connected to his son. On the morning of one our interviews his father had sent him a message, which he appreciated.

He tries more; like he's the dad that you would think I had when I was like 13 or something. He texted me today about like good luck on my test; he's really trying to go above and beyond, sometimes like too much (laughter). I know he's just really trying to make up for lost time and whatever, I mean I'm not going to be like no, you've had your chance, leave me alone...

Shane's relationship with his father had been nonexistent for most of his youth, yet his father clearly had a strong impact on Shane. Even though Shane steadfastly argued he did not need a college education to be successful, after spending years at the community college, he transferred to Distinctive University. During his early time at Distinctive University, his father's reappearance in his life was paramount. Shane's father attempted reconciliation by sending gifts and ultimately fulfilling a lifelong dream of Shane's by financing a nightclub. While Shane mentioned he still tried to keep his father at a distance, they began to spend more time together and seemed to be developing a closer relationship. With his father's help, while attending Distinctive University, Shane had become a successful businessman.

Coming Together and Falling Apart: Distinctive University

In 2008, Shane was preparing to transfer to a four-year university. By this time his new girlfriend had earned a baccalaureate degree and was on her way to completing a Master's degree. Both she and Shane's sister decided it was time for Shane to step up and pursue a four-year degree. Shane admitted there was no real epiphany on his part to transfer anywhere, but he did agree with his sister who had chided him for wasting time and money at the community college.

I knew I would never get a degree. I spent all this time in school and money I feel like I have nothing to show for it so I should get a degree, right? And so I came here to get a degree. I came [to Distinctive University] because it's local, it's here. Everyone I know went to Distinctive University.

Shane had no problems being admitted into Distinctive University with his solid transfer GPA, but when he came to Distinctive University, he still struggled not knowing exactly what field he wanted to pursue. When I asked him about his choice of major, he responded initially he did not have a field of study.

I didn't choose anything. When I first came here, that's when I took a pharmacy class and I took a psychology class also. Actually my girlfriend now, she was here and she did psychology...so I took that class with her. Yeah, school was never really my plan in life.

Orientations on college campuses are designed to introduce students to their academic options as well as provide support for choosing courses. Shane attended orientation but did not take it seriously and he used his sister as a guide for getting through school early on.

I did go through the orientation and that sort of stuff. I remember talking to people and going through like degrees and stuff, but it was mandatory you had to do that so that's why I did it. I felt like I'm going to college I don't need to go to orientation.

Additionally, Shane was admitted to Distinctive University as an undeclared student and without the aid of a prescribed degree plan to follow, he signed up for courses because his girlfriend was taking the course or because his sister advised him to.

My sister's in college and she's been in college for a while too. She's taken time off as well but she's actually the one who would sign me up for classes because she's always been above me trying to make me do good. She's really helped me a lot; she's actually the one who looks over my grades. Me and my sister, we're really close and she's helped me with everything actually, signing up for classes, doing that rate your professor trying to find a good professor, all that stuff.

Already a successful businessman, I inquired about his choice not to pursue a business degree. His employer at State Farm had a major impact on his feelings about higher education as well as did his father. When Shane transferred to Distinctive University, he shied away from pursuing a business degree because his own experiences had taught him a business degree did

not necessarily make a successful business man. In addition to his father being a model of this theory, his boss at State Farm was also an example to Shane of success that came without a specific degree, or any degree for that matter.

I feel I can do without the business degree. I don't need a business degree to be a business owner. Like I can't be an engineer without a degree, but I already own my own business and I plan on doing more businesses. I learned that from experience, talking to people, research, that type of stuff. The degree won't help me make more money. I'm my own boss so I don't need to show a degree you know. I'm not opening my own accounting firm or real estate or something where that may look good on your wall. Actually my old boss he attended Distinctive University and his degree is in his office. He hated school, he sucked at school, and he's very well off right now and his degree's in general studies. He's always been like go to college, and everyone else too; there's no one who told me don't go to college, everyone's like go to college go to college, but when I look at your life, I look at people around, college did not help you become where you're at right now. Maybe you learned a thing or two there, but your work, what you've did in your life is what helps you become successful.

Shane was confident that he did not need to get a degree in an area he was already successful in. Rather, he believed in going to school to get a degree in something he could not do without having a degree. He chose to pursue engineering technology as a career and owning multiple businesses would be something “just for fun and a side thing.” Even with his difficulties in math and science courses Shane was interested in engineering: “I’m surprised I’m doing what I’m doing now because it’s a lot of math and math is my worst subject; I hate math, it is very difficult.” Shane chose to pursue a degree in engineering technology because he thought it would be the most lucrative.

I wanted to do engineering or medical and honestly I still feel that those are the only two professions that pay off for the work. I never really wanted to be a doctor but in my mind it was either engineering or medical and so I didn't like medical, I wasn't good at that, so I did engineering technology.

I have a couple of friends in engineering. They all travel, they all make money and a lot of them are my age and I'm behind. Like do I want to make a difference and that is my goal to be an engineer? No, but do I enjoy it? Yes.

Shane's first semester at Distinctive University was a test of managing a 12-hour course load, working at State Farm, and managing a successful nightclub. When I asked him if he remembered a one-on-one advising session, he did not.

I don't think I did, I think I just signed up on-line. Ah, I don't even remember ever [seeing an advisor]; I remember we had to do an interview as a group but I didn't have a one-on-one like how I am having now with [my advisor].

Mid-semester he dropped two courses and finished the semester with a 2.6 GPA. Shane felt, in hindsight, that running his business and working hindered his success at Distinctive University, but felt his first semester was "easy courses that didn't take much out of me." Second semester proved to be more difficult for Shane. In the spring of 2009, Shane enrolled in four courses which included pre-calculus and history, both of which would count towards a Bachelor of Science degree. He also enrolled in a leadership course, as well as a pharmacy course as he was still considering a major in the medical field. Unfortunately for Shane a full-time course load coupled with full-time work did not result in a successful semester. In addition, Shane's dislike of math was reflected in his grade. That semester Shane earned a cumulative GPA of 1.998, which put him on his first academic probation.

It was the math because I'm not that good. I took pre-calculus and I got a D in it. The pharmacy class I probably got a C in that...I don't remember what it was. That semester was bad.

It was obvious to me that Shane's performance during his first two semesters at Distinctive University not only surprised him, but disappointed him. College had previously been easy for him, and he was still not convinced he needed an education to be successful. With

his previous attitude about college, I asked him if he cared about his academic status at the end of the year.

I cared, but it was like when they told me I was on probation I wasn't, I guess, as alert. I wasn't really like okay I've gotta get my grades up like I am now. It didn't click I guess.

The following fall, Shane enrolled in another 12 hours. Even though he had not declared a major in the College of Technological Advancement, he had acquired a degree plan for the mechanical engineering technology program and decided to take a few courses. He still had not spoken to an advisor regarding an academic plan or possible repercussions for being on probation. Shane received two D's that semester, one in calculus I and the other in a calculus-based engineering technology course, earning his first academic suspension: "I didn't know that I could get on suspension right off the bat like that so if I'd probably knew that then I probably would have maybe tried a little harder; maybe made sure to get good grades."

Unfamiliar with the academic standing process at Distinctive University, Shane did not know he was suspended initially: "I didn't even know I was on suspension until I tried to sign up for classes and I had a hold and I went to see someone and found I was suspended." Being suspended was an eye-opener for Shane; he realized he did want to be in college and began to see it as an investment in his future. He decided he wanted to continue to invest.

Being suspended it was kind of an awakening too 'cause I had friends who were still going to school and they were all doing their school thing and studying and stuff and then I'm not because I'm suspended, right? So everyone's studying and I don't have anything to study for.

Contrary to Shane's initial feelings about earning a college degree, in our latter interviews he expressed a clear shift in his opinions about his academic future. He recalled having a conversation with his father about earning his degree.

I put in so much time. I was just talking to my dad last night when I was at the club and we were talking about it and I'm like regardless I'm going to get a degree. I feel like I wasted so much time. If I didn't [waste time] I could have been doing something already versus being here at school and it'd just kill me if I didn't get a degree now. If you invest in something you still want to see a return you know? I want to have something, whether I need the degree or not, I still put in so much time and effort and money to get the degree so if I quit now it would be a waste.

Shane was required by Distinctive University to sit out for one semester. Recognizing his deficit in math and science, Shane decided to enroll at a community college during his academic suspension and registered for physics and calculus II. He failed calculus and earned a D in physics. The following semester he reenrolled in both courses and withdrew from calculus while earning another D in physics. Shane remained at the community college for another year before preparing to return to Distinctive University, but still struggled in math and science courses.

Having missed the deadline to return from academic suspension previously, Shane took it upon himself, for the first time ever, to meet with an academic advisor to ensure his return to Distinctive University.

Carla, she actually sent me all the paperwork, everything I needed to do, because at that point I did meet with her. She was actually the first one; after that I just only dealt with her, I mean, anytime I needed anything I would just email her and she would respond. She would make sure that I met all the deadlines. She would send me the paperwork to my email, things I had to do, so she was really on top of me about making sure that I got my stuff together.

Shane was not allowed to reapply to the university as an undeclared major due to the number of hours he had attained. He submitted the readmission from suspension paperwork to the College of Technological Advancement, where he had previously taken courses towards the mechanical engineering technology program. When I asked Shane about the ease of the

readmission from suspension process at Distinctive University, he laughed and replied that the process was far from easy.

Coming back? No, it was actually pretty difficult. I was trying to get into here [College of Technological Advancement] so I had to meet you guy's criteria, plus I had to do all the paperwork. I mean, I think it's difficult for a reason, right? If you want to come back you have to show that I'm not wasting your time so I guess it's designed to be difficult.

Even though Shane was determined to return, there was a point in the process that he felt the odds were stacked against him. In addition to the readmission from suspension paperwork, Shane also encountered university policies and deadlines he was unaware of, including a new policy requiring all students to be vaccinated for bacterial meningitis.

Every day I was trying to make sure I was on top of everything, I would tell my dad too like hey if it's not one thing, it's another because I was like dealing with all this. Everything felt like it was getting in the way of me signing up because at one point I didn't have a meningitis shot; I didn't know anything about that, but that had a deadline and if I didn't turn that in I wouldn't get in. I went to take it and everywhere was out of the shot and it was just it felt like everything that could happen to prevent me from coming to Distinctive University happened.

The fact that he also struggled in math and science was a concern particularly because he was attempting to pursue a program that required higher level math and science. When asked if he had a heightened concern about being readmitted because of his difficulties with calculus and physics, Shane said no, but at the same time it was clear in his answer that he did indeed have doubts about being readmitted from suspension.

No, I knew I was going to come back and get my degree. I told my dad, actually, if I didn't get in this semester I wasn't coming back because I was just like I tried so hard and everything's getting in the way it's probably not meant to be, let me just do what I'm good at doing, I guess...

For Shane, doing what he was good at would have been to continue to work at State Farm or run the club. Fortunately, Shane was readmitted from suspension into the College of Technological Advancement in the spring of 2012.

Shane transferred to Distinctive University after spending years at the community college taking courses at random. While his GPA posed no problems in a seamless transfer to Distinctive University, he experienced, for the first time, several academic difficulties. Shane enrolled full-time while working a full-time job and managing a night club. With the nonchalant attitude about the importance of earning a baccalaureate degree and the little effort he put into his academics, Shane's grades put him on academic probation and he was ultimately placed on academic suspension. Even though Shane had been adamant that a college degree was not necessary for a successful future, being placed on academic suspension marked a shift in that belief. Shane began to rethink his investment in his academic future and decided he was not going to waste any more time and money to not earn a degree.

Reflections of his Former Self

When Shane returned to Distinctive University, he found himself reevaluating the effort he put into attaining a baccalaureate degree. The first semester Shane was only allowed to take six hours of coursework and he was determined not to fail. For the first time ever, he actually worked at being a student. I was interested in what changed at that point and Shane replied that he changed.

Me, my effort... the effort I put into school and the effort I put into the work and the homework and everything changed. I mean I would go to school sometimes, but I'd miss school or you know sometimes I wasn't putting 100% you know. Now, I don't miss any class; I turn in every assignment.

Remember I said I never picked up a book? I didn't even buy the books before. Now I make sure I buy the book before class. I'm a college student now, I guess you can say, before it was just a joke.

Shane began to comprehend that what was required of him at the community college would not be enough for him to be successful at Distinctive University. He recognized that community college work was different.

Community college is like high school. I mean you talk to the teacher nice enough and they'll pass you pretty much. You just show up for the class, the teacher feels like you're putting in effort, you know they help you out, I guess. Here you have to prove that you know the material, which is good I mean it's supposed to be like that, right? I mean it's college, if it wasn't, then everyone would have a degree.

Shane also began to take advantage of the academic resources he for so long had shunned. Shane began to regularly communicate with his major advisor, which is something he had not previously done.

If Carla didn't really push me...I feel like she put a lot of time into helping me like sending me emails or sending me links to what I need to do and making sure she checks with me throughout the semester like to make sure that everything's on point. If I ever have a question, like when I was in fluids and I didn't have the pre-requisite, I just shot her an email and she made sure that everything gets done because she knows I've been on probation and suspension and I've been back and forth.

Students returning from academic suspension in the College of Technological Advancement are also required to attend tutoring sessions and Shane found this requirement invaluable.

I had to [get tutoring] and it actually helped. It's actually good you guys made me go; I didn't even know that place was there. I think I only had to go like three times but I was in there pretty much two or three times a week because it helped.

As an administrator, I was disappointed that Shane had no idea tutoring services were available to him as a student at Distinctive University. I inquired as to whether Shane thought the university had done him a disservice because he was unaware of the services which could have supported him. He acknowledged his role in his own failure: "I didn't put in enough effort so it's my fault as well." Even though he did not put in enough effort, he did explain that the lack

of responsiveness from professors and instructors was discouraging. In regards to setting up a meeting to discuss his mid-term progress with a professor, Shane expressed his dissatisfaction.

I tried to speak to my professor and I emailed my TA but he doesn't really speak that good English. He's really not helpful towards me and my professor also he really doesn't have time because I tried to get in contact with him about my mid-term progress report that I had to turn in and up to now I haven't turned the progress report in. He said he lost it so I emailed him one, I took it to him, I talked to him in class about it and he just didn't respond. I just stopped emailing him about it.

Another professor, I don't even remember his name and I don't think he teaches here anymore, but he helped me out a little bit in that course. Other than that really a lot of my professors are kind of stand-offish. I mean maybe I don't put in an effort to meet them, but to me they always seem busy, I mean they probably are, they just always seem busy.

Acknowledging his role in his successes and failures was most effective in prompting Shane to change his academic behavior. In addition to taking advantage of tutoring and other learning support services, he found himself spending more time on campus and being productive. Before his suspension, as a commuter student on the days he would actually attend class, he would arrive on campus and hang out at his friends' dorm rooms instead of the library.

Sometimes I had space between my classes. I was like I'm going to try to study in those spaces, but my friends lived on campus and I ended up going to the dorm and eating and watching TV or falling asleep or something.

Having supportive family and peers also motivated Shane to intensify his effort to do well in his studies. During his time at Distinctive University Shane broke up with his first girlfriend who had such an impact on Shane attending college, even if it was for the wrong reasons initially.

It sucked...we broke up. Well her mom never liked me. They are religious, they're all in school and I'm not into school and it was just like socially we weren't meant to be. Everything kept happening and I promote parties and work at a club and all that stuff and so she wasn't that supportive with everything and that wasn't helping that relationship. We're two totally different people I guess trying to make it work and so that didn't work.

Shane met his current girlfriend, who was by then finishing a master's degree in psychology, promoting parties for the Caribbean community. She had always supported his educational goals, but Shane also appreciated her support of his career aspirations and current business interests as well.

Now my girlfriend now, she is by far more supportive than anything about the club, like she knows, like if I'm at work or around bartending or I'm running the club or whatever I'm doing at the club, if I'm there 'til four in the morning, it's not a problem. She's not like where are you or why are you going to be out this late, she knows. Sometimes she'll even come bring me food. If she's not doing anything and I'm short staffed or need a waitress or something, she'll come and waitress and stuff; yeah, she's really supportive. She hates the club, she just she doesn't like it, she doesn't like the late hours, she doesn't feel that it's worth my time, but she still helps.

With the life changes Shane experienced after his academic suspension, he returned to Distinctive University and “really put in the time” and spent “24/7 in the library.” At the end of his first semester after returning from suspension, Shane received an A and a B in mechanical engineering courses. His cumulative GPA had not been significantly impacted by the six hours, but he was able to continue on academic probation the following semester.

When Shane and I met, he was still on academic probation taking six hours, which included thermodynamics and calculus II, Shane's fourth attempt at the course. The previous summer he had enrolled in calculus II at the community college and failed it once again. The realization that he could not progress further on the degree plan was not lost on Shane: “I didn't pass it [calculus] so this semester I had to rearrange my schedule and so I'm taking calculus II and I'm gonna pass it.” Knowing that his cumulative GPA was below a 2.0 was also motivation for Shane to do well considering he needed a 2.0 in his major to graduate and he had plans to graduate next year.

I'm not far from a 2.0, I'm at 1.8 or something; it's close, but it's not at 2.0. I'm going to take summer classes and stuff like that but by bare minimum the longest I'm going to take will be May of 2014, but should be before then, hopefully.

Shane also found himself reflecting further on his relationship with his father and the lessons learned from him. For him, the ability to move forward and not be stifled by regrets was important. Not looking back and not placing blame allowed Shane to keep progressing even through difficult times. Whether speaking about his relationship with his father or his lack of effort early on in his academic career, even if he would have done some things differently, Shane refused to have regrets about his past.

Maybe I refuse to have regrets. I've heard my dad say before growing up that people in general try to put blame on other people or something else instead of putting it on themselves, and I don't want to be like that, you know, I feel that like everyone goes through hardships in their life, right? And so...ah, it's just life, you have to accept it and deal with it and I guess I guess that's where it comes from, I don't want to regret anything, I don't want to put blame on my dad or put blame on my mom, or put blame on the situation that growing up for what's happened now or what I'm going through now.

Being placed on academic suspension was just the motivator Shane needed to realize his own potential and desire to attain a degree. After being readmitted from suspension to the College of Technological Advancement, Shane reinvented himself as a real college student, whereas before college was “just a joke.” For the first time in his academic career he sought the assistance of an academic advisor. He also availed himself to other academic resources at Distinctive University and found tutoring and study groups effective in achieving above average grades. Refused to be mired down by his past, Shane was looking forward to a 2014 graduate date.

Conclusion

During our last interview Shane was preparing for upcoming final exams. Different from his earlier college career, Shane had actually spent a significant amount of time studying, which

he clearly felt proud about. For the first time, Shane also joined a study group which he acknowledged, just as tutoring had, helped tremendously.

I've been here since 9 this morning...yeah, in the library and then I got to study again at 9 o'clock tonight with the thermodynamics group. [Knowing] all the extra help there is to study does help me a lot.

Participating in this study caused Shane to do some self-reflection so when I asked him what he would have done differently in regards to his academic career he told me he had been thinking about how long he had been in school. Even though he felt his dual credit experience was beneficial, he would have gone directly to a four-year university instead of continuing at the community college after high school graduation.

I tell my little brothers, they're about to start college now, too, to pick what you want to do now and go to a four year college because you guys have it designed to finish in four years. Like on the degree plan you have first semester you're going to take this, this second semester you're going to take this, and it's designed once you pass everything you finish in four years. When I was taking classes here it came down to the point where I couldn't take any more classes because I didn't meet certain pre-requisites and stuff like that and then some classes only offered in the fall or only offered in the spring. You guys have it designed where you will meet every requirement once you follow the plan. If I had come here as a freshman I would have been done already.

I also asked Shane how he would speak to his own children about a college education, particularly because he started his own journey with serious reservations about the value of a college education. Shane responded that just having a degree would speak volumes to his children: "Like I told you before, my parents always told me to go to college, but they never went to college, right? So I would have experienced it and they can learn from my experience, I can show them what I've done in the past." Attaining a college degree now had several implications for Shane, including the ability to be a model for his children in the future.

Being a successful businessman Shane mentioned earlier in the interview that he had put too much time and effort into school to not earn a degree. Contrary to his earlier statement,

when I asked Shane if there was ever an investment he was willing to walk away from, he quickly said he would walk away from a losing investment, and drew a parallel between his business and his education.

I mean, you gotta know when to pull out, right? You've got to know when...like if I was in the club and every month I'm not making my bills and I'm just putting money into it at a certain point you just have to cut your losses and move forward. I'm at that point now if I were to get kicked out of here I would not attend another university, I would try to cut my losses and do something else.

It was clear to me that even though Shane strongly desired to earn a degree, he did not have as much confidence in his math and science abilities as he did in his entrepreneurial skills. The reality that his deficiencies in math and science might prevent him from progressing made him second guess attaining his goals.

I can't guarantee that I'm going to get a degree. I mean I can put in all the time, all the effort in but if I'm not capable or I'm doing something wrong, I'm not seeing what I'm doing wrong, then I'm just going to be going in a circle, right? I'm just going to keep dumping money, I'm going to keep spending time studying and I'm going to just keep failing. I mean it's just going to be a never ending battle. I mean I really want this; my heart, my passion, my time, everything I put in to get a degree, but what if something is not right? If I can't fix that problem then I'm just going in a circle and wasting time, right?

At that point in time, Shane was putting all of his energy into passing calculus II.

Calculus was the one course that Shane's success hinged upon. Every upper level course in the mechanical engineering technology degree program required calculus II as a prerequisite.

Carla was like you get every tutor, you go to every session, you find every possible support. You give up whatever you need to do to make sure you pass calculus II because if I failed it that's it. You just put everything else aside. There are resources out there and if you have to go through every single resource and continue to go through it do it. I mean even if you have a TA and you don't understand what they're saying, whatever, you keep going, you're going to get something out of it; you're not losing. So I see that and understand that. I know I've got to put the time in and I'm here every day trying. I'm really just trying to pass calculus II and get calculus behind me so I can just move forward. Calculus II has been the wall to my degree.

At the end of our final interview Shane was leaving to continue studying for his calculus II final exam. I thanked Shane for his participation and he in turn thanked me: “I’m glad I did this, it helped me too. Talking about a couple of things actually makes me see what’s really going on so it helped, it was cool.”

Shane’s journey through higher education was influenced by many along the way. Even though his parents encouraged higher education, they never provided a blueprint for his academic persistence and success. An influential girlfriend encouraged college level courses, but Shane’s intent was pursuing a relationship instead of a degree. Not seeing the true value of a college education, Shane wandered through college amassing credits that would take him nowhere. It was only when Shane decided for himself that education was worthwhile did he change his attitude and behavior, and began to see the positive results that had eluded him during his early time at Distinctive University. Shane still had a number of credits to earn towards attaining his baccalaureate degree at the conclusion of our interviews. Despite his early resistance to concede to the value of higher education he was clearly in a place where the desire to earn the degree he had been working so hard to receive was strong. Though he feared failing, he was committed to seeing the ultimate return on his investment, a baccalaureate degree.

Analysis

Several themes emerged and became clearer after writing my global impression of Shane. The themes explored in this analysis are: Projected Bravado, Wandering towards Success, and Accepting Shortcomings.

Projected Bravado

Shane's story was filled with examples of a young man who presented a strong pretense but revealed inadequacies as time went on. Many of Shane's experiences typified a young adult who had life all figured out, only to be reminded that he indeed did not have all of the answers to life's questions. Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines bravado as "blustering swaggering conduct" and "a pretense of bravery" (bravado, n.d.). Further, swagger refers to arrogance and "overbearing self-confidence" (swagger, n.d.). As Shane's story progressed, there were several examples where Shane put on the face of bravery and walked with swagger but further analysis revealed that this attitude was only a projected image, not always a true representation of how Shane felt.

Shane's attitude toward school initially was that he did not need a degree to be successful. He started our first interview together expressing his own disbelief that he was at Distinctive University.

Actually I'm surprised I'm here because I really never planned on going to college throughout high school and everything. I just never really felt that college was that important to me. My dad, he went to college for a little bit, but he opened up his own business and he's always done well.

Shane had witnessed his father's success without a degree and believed he could be successful without a degree as well.

Shane prided himself on being a successful businessman. Prior to our first interview Carla, an academic advisor in the College of Technological Advancement had informed me that Shane owned a nightclub. Within the first minutes of our interview Shane told me he opened up a nightclub as well. It was not until later in the interview that I learned that Shane's father actually helped him finance the club and on his 21st birthday gave him sole ownership. While

Shane acknowledged his father gave him the club, he still made it clear that he also borrowed \$10,000 to invest in the club as well. Initially he may have minimized his father's role in the success of his nightclub, but later referred to their relationship as a "business relationship" which gives his father some credit for the club's success. In general there was the feeling that Shane was proud of *his* accomplishment instead of *their* accomplishment.

When talking about his success as a business owner, Shane's bravado was extreme. Shane believed the fact that he owned his own nightclub superseded any knowledge that he could gain by earning a business degree. He understood he could not pursue a field like engineering without a degree, but he was confident that he did not need a business degree to be a business owner: "I feel I can do without the business degree. The degree won't help me make more money. I'm my own boss so I don't need to show a degree you know."

For years, Shane downplayed the importance of a degree and even discounted the degree his former boss earned: "He hated school, he sucked at school, and he's very well off right now and his degree's in general studies." While Shane may not have needed a business degree to run a nightclub, he clearly began to realize he needed some degree to reach the success he desired. The bravado he projected abruptly changed when he began to have difficulties attaining what he previously thought was unnecessary. After Shane was placed on academic suspension, earning a degree became vital stating "... it'd just kill me if I didn't get a degree now..." Shane acknowledged the shift in his attitude about the importance of education. He saw the time and effort he put into his education as an investment in his future.

If you invest in something you still want to see a return you know? I want to have something, whether I need the degree or not, I still put in so much time and effort and money to get the degree so if I quit now it would be a waste.

Shane went from “playing college” to becoming an active participant in his education. His bravado and arrogance gave way to long nights and early mornings in the library, as well as finally seeking support by seeing his advisor and getting tutoring: “I had to [get tutoring] and it actually helped. It’s actually good you guys made me go; I didn’t even know that place was there.”

Additionally it appeared his definition of his own success had changed. When he compared himself to friends who had already earned a degree, his bravado faltered: “I have a couple of friends in engineering. They all travel, they all make money and a lot of them are my age and I’m behind.” This thought process was a deviation from his initial declaration that he himself was already successful.

It was also puzzling that while Shane did not necessarily respect a higher education degree, in his personal life he gravitated towards those who did value education. Shane projected an arrogant attitude about the insignificance of higher education that he seemed to minimize his high school girlfriend’s academic achievements by stating: “She’s a nerd I guess you can say...” He articulated he only took college level courses to spend time with her, but the fact that he was interested in someone who clearly had high academic aspirations was telling. He could have easily chosen to spend most of his time with someone who was less interested in their academics and had more time to spend with him. Shane’s current girlfriend is also highly educated as she is pursuing a Master’s degree in psychology. Shane spoke highly of her and her support of his nightclub career:

Now my girlfriend now, she is by far more supportive than anything about the club... If she’s not doing anything and I’m short staffed or need a waitress or something, she’ll come and waitress and stuff; yeah, she’s really supportive. She hates the club, she just

she doesn't like it, she doesn't like the late hours; she doesn't feel that it's worth my time, but she still helps.

Shane could have chosen a relationship with a woman who did feel the club was worth his time and agreed with his sentiment on education, but again, he chose to be in a relationship with someone who placed a high value on education. Surrounding himself with people who valued education appeared to be at odds with Shane's initial views of education being unnecessary.

It was clear in Shane's story that the image he wanted to project was one of a successful business owner who already had life figured out. As Shane's story progressed, we saw that there were many examples where the bravado he projected was actually a front. Over the course of three weeks I saw a major shift from the bravado Shane projected to the vulnerable person he really was. Shane told us he was a successful business owner yet we find out that his success was shared with his father who gifted him a nightclub. He was also a staunch believer that higher education was not valuable; that belief changed as the degree he sought became almost unattainable. Shane began to recognize the importance of education and his bravado faltered as he fought harder to reach his goal of earning a degree.

Wandering towards Success

Shane's early academic career can be described as a student aimlessly wandering toward a vague goal. Shane's goal was to be successful and he thought he had a clear understanding of what success meant. He had expressed that both his father and his previous employer were both successful because they owned businesses and made money. While Shane acknowledged his father's success many times during the interview, Shane negated the success of his mother. Even

though his mother owned a business, Shane did not see her as successful and referenced her profession as “stuff.”

She never went to school in America, and it's really different and she struggled. I mean she doesn't have any special skills or field; she does like dental assisting and stuff like that. Right now she has her own business as well; she does billing and coding for different dental offices.

Shane pointed out his mother was not successful because she never went to school. This is particularly ironic because Shane praised the idea that his father was successful despite not having any higher education. His contradiction once again left me to wonder whether Shane truly believed his own monologue about the insignificance of earning a college degree and what constitutes success.

From a very early age, Shane thought success was defined as making a lot of money. At the age of 15 Shane started on this quest of becoming successful, but had no clear idea of the pathway to get his there. After high school he began to wander aimlessly through college, searching for the success he had defined for himself. When Shane began taking college level courses, it was never about finding a career that incited passion in him; his only passion was money.

It was really just about money, honestly, whatever was the most lucrative field is what I was geared towards. Everyone was like don't pick a profession geared toward money 'cause you're not going to like what you do, but I still don't believe that... if I'm making money I'm successful in life.

With this attitude, Shane began taking courses in a myriad of disciplines. In community college Shane took his basic courses but he also took a nursing class because he was told nursing was a lucrative field. By the time he transferred to community college, Shane's aimless wandering through the course catalog had netted him little success but he had amassed quite a few credits. At Distinctive University he continued to chase success by taking courses in

psychology, philosophy, and pharmacy before finally settling on engineering. Even though he eventually decided to pursue engineering technology, he chose the major because it would lead to success, which he defined as making money: “I have a couple of friends in engineering. They all travel, they all make money...” It did not matter to Shane that his strengths did not lie in math and science; he was intent on majoring in something that would pay dividends: “I’m surprised I’m doing what I’m doing now because it’s a lot of math and math is my worst subject...”

During our last interview Shane was at an impasse. He decided he wanted to continue to pursue his education and he began to see the importance of it. At the same time it appeared Shane was fearful that not earning the degree would render him unsuccessful, which was something he seemed to fear: “I mean I really want this; my heart, my passion, my time, everything I put in to get a degree, but what if something is not right?” This fear Shane exhibited was not evident earlier in our interactions, but as long as Shane had been chasing success this seemed to be the first time he questioned what would happen if he did not capture it.

Shane’s definition of success, to make a lot of money, prompted him to become an entrepreneur, but it also impacted his journey through higher education. Not necessarily believing he needed a degree to be successful, he set his sights on pursuing degrees that would guarantee him the most lucrative careers. Wandering aimlessly for years through college only earned Shane a number of useless credits. He pursued courses in the medical field, such as nursing and pharmacy, and believed they would secure his success. When he was not successful in those areas, he pursued engineering technology, despite acknowledging difficulties in math, because he was sure engineering was another well-paying field. Towards the end of our

exchanges, Shane began to exhibit some concern that successfully earning a college degree might indeed be elusive.

Accepting Shortcomings

Shane's relationship with his father had been non-existent for most of his life. As a high school graduate Shane made the decision to remove his father from his life. A childhood of nasty custody battles, questions about paternity, and a distant relationship with his father caused Shane much turmoil. When he and his sister made the decision to stop speaking to their father, Shane in essence decided he could not accept his father's shortcomings.

Early in our first interview Shane attempted to minimize his father's role in his life as an adult because his father had caused him so much turmoil as a child. He mentioned he still kept him "at a distance" and that their relationship was more of a business relationship than a father-son relationship. Shane's attempt to define his new relationship with his father appeared to be his way of mitigating any future hurt. Even though he wanted to put distance between he and his father, there were instances in our interviews that provided clarity on the relationship he desired to have with his father and hinted to the fact that he had indeed accepted his shortcomings. It was clear Shane still felt hurt about his father's actions as a child, but he had come to a point where mulling over the past was not an option. When I asked him if his father ever tried to discuss those years, Shane indicated his father had, but he was not willing to discuss it.

He tried; I was just like the past is the past, you know, it is what it is...it happened for a reason and here we are. You can't really change it, why keep talking about it? I don't need to hear apologies, I don't, you know everything you did, you did for a reason... So you've changed, cool...we just move forward from here, right?

Having a relationship of any kind with his father meant that Shane not only had to accept his father's shortcomings, but also had to learn to forgive. While Shane insisted their current relationship was really about business, he contradicted himself quite a few times by acknowledging his forgiveness.

Me and my dad we actually have a pretty good relationship now, yeah, surprising. I don't really hold anything against him anymore. I think everything happens for a reason. My dad, like he's completely changed now; he's not that dad he was before.

There were also times throughout the interview where Shane made casual references to spending time with his father. When we were discussing his desire to complete his degree he indicated he and his father had a talk just the other night about his future. I asked Shane if he valued these conversations with his father and he said he did.

I guess he's more like a friend too like you know I can talk to. Like he wasn't there growing up so now we're like business partners and friends so we can talk about pretty much anything I guess...

It was also important for Shane to accept his own shortcomings academically to progress in his degree. College had previously been fairly easy for Shane until he attended Distinctive University. While Shane clearly exhibited some arrogance surrounding his entrepreneurial skills, it was evident that he had some difficulty grasping certain academic concepts, particularly math. Shane could have completely blamed "stand-offish" professors or TAs who didn't speak clear English for his inability to pass Calculus, but in the end, he accepted responsibility for his own shortcomings as a student: "I didn't put in enough effort so it's my fault as well." Recognizing his shortcomings prompted Shane to make changes which ultimately led to seeing some academic success. While he had never even picked up a book before, Shane was now diligent in his studies: "Now I make sure I buy the book before class. I'm a college student now, I guess you can say, before it was just a joke."

For Shane, whether he realized it or not, accepting the shortcomings of his father allowed him to move beyond the hurt that was inflicted upon him as a child. Forgiving his father's past transgressions opened the door for a closer father-son relationship. Despite trying to convince himself that their relationship was only a business relationship, it was clear both Shane and his father wanted to lessen the distance between them, and they were actively building a new foundation for a more mature relationship. Shane also realized the need to accept responsibility for his own academic shortcomings. Finally putting in the appropriate effort to be successful in college allowed Shane to continue to progress towards earning his baccalaureate degree.

Chapter Summary

Shane's story was an interesting contradiction of perception and reality. Throughout his life Shane perceived success as looking one way, only to find out later in life that success could be defined many ways. Shane wanted the world to see him as a competent and successful young man, but the reality was that he was still striving to be that.

CHAPTER 8: MANNY

Manny responded to a follow-up email I sent to prospective participants two weeks after sending my initial request. Manny was a Leadership and Supervision major in the College of Technological Advancement. I had not had the opportunity to meet Manny before, but I was excited about the prospect of meeting him because his academic record revealed a student who had experienced many academic highs and lows.

When Manny arrived for our first interview I immediately noticed his passive disposition. His voice was low and his speech slow. He slumped in the chair and fiddled with a pen in his hand. He also had on a wrinkled maroon t-shirt and jeans which coupled with droopy eyes, it appeared he had been up late cramming for impending final exams. My immediate perception was that it would be difficult getting any information from Manny because he appeared uninterested. That proved to be far from the truth when I asked Manny my grand tour question and he revealed to me that he never saw himself going to college, but that his sisters had known which college they wanted to attend since they were in the second grade.

Manny's Story

Manny was a senior in the College of Technological Advancement when we began our interviews. With a very laid-back temperament, Manny responded to my question about his first aspirations of attending college by saying he never saw himself going to college.

I didn't always know actually when I wanted to go to college. I have two siblings who were like really gung-ho, like since they were maybe in second grade or so, knew they

wanted to go to A&T, but I didn't really have an affiliation with A&T. With me, it was a little different. I didn't really see myself going to school in the beginning after I graduated high school but my mindset is different from what it was back then than what it is now. I started going to college because of my parents. Because they wanted to see me with a degree in my hand and as time went on that's when my mindset kind of switched over and I thought okay, maybe I could make something out of this.

Ultimately Manny did make “something out of this.” Our first interview was just two weeks shy of graduation. Manny would be earning a baccalaureate degree in Leadership and Supervision. His impending graduation seemed bittersweet, likely because the journey to this goal was long and complicated and still held some unknowns.

Right now I'm still questioning once I graduate in 18 days, where this degree is going to take me. So what I am basically still questioning myself is about this degree I am going for? What kind of future will I have; where will it take me? What opportunities are there in the world?

Manny in the Middle

Manny grew up in a mid-sized urban city in the United States with his parents and two sisters. When Manny introduced me to his family by way of our interviews, he described his two sisters by their accomplishments.

My older sibling is about four years older than me. She graduated from A&T back in 2004, which was the same year I graduated high school. And then my younger sister, she's just a year younger than me, but she graduated from A&T around 2009, 2010, somewhere around then.

Manny was obviously proud of his sisters' accomplishments, yet it was not lost on me his slight dismay that his sisters had attained something that had taken him so long to achieve. Being a middle child myself, our conversation quickly steered to what some refer to as the middle child syndrome. As early as fourth grade, Manny felt the constant comparisons to his siblings.

Well with my older sister setting the standard for my family, for many, many years I was compared by some of her old teachers to her and they'd make little comments like hey, why are you getting this type of grade, you have a sister that went through this stuff and I was like oh, well, okay... They would usually say oh I had your sister, she was a good student. There were these preconceived notions that I would be a genius of some sort or maybe the well rounded child, but I wasn't really that well-rounded child. It just kind of well, went to her and my little sister. I was just the middle kid.

Manny felt he was the middle child who didn't quite succeed at anything while his sisters mastered most things they pursued. Throughout his secondary education, Manny was an average student.

I wasn't the best student let's just say. Umm my sisters came back with grades, they'd come in with like you know A's and B's or all A's. Me on the other hand, I was the every once in a while an A, B student, C's, D's but never an F. But it was mostly D's and C's or B's and C's.

There were no subjects in high school Manny felt comfortable in. He struggled quite a bit in both math and English. All throughout high school his math grades were marginal at best. Geometry was the only subject he felt he excelled in.

My best subject was sophomore or junior year geometry; I got a high B, almost an A. I was like, aw man I am so good at math, awesome! Because I was horrible at algebra and making a good grade in geometry kind of gave me a chance. I was like cool, mathematics, awesome! After [geometry], I went to algebra II and that turned out to be a high C, low B, but overall I still got that whole C thing going. And then taking pre-calculus in my senior year, yeah that one was a doozy. A no go. That was like a C or a D. Math is not necessarily my favorite. I still find it interesting today. It's something I always had difficulty with all throughout my years. So you know basic counting, adding and subtracting, back then I mean heck $4 + 4$ which should equal 8, I thought it was maybe like 6 or 7. I was always counting wrong.

English had also proven to be difficult for Manny, especially being a first generation American where Spanish was the primary language at home.

English it was an up and down situation. There were always errors – run on sentences, punctuation, all your basic English errors. And even though I was assisted with help, maybe like from teachers and peers, I always ended up making the same mistakes on all my papers.

Manny felt his parents could not help him in any of his subjects because of their lack of education and inability to speak English. Manny's mother was from Mexico and his father from Costa Rica. They both immigrated to the United States as young adults.

With my parents, well my mom couldn't really help me on mathematics or English because she barely speaks English and that is the same today. Yeah, they both are not really good at English. My dad speaks English but he can't read or write it to this day. With my mother, I talk to her in English and she will be talk to me in Spanish. She comprehends, she just can't speak it. I try to comprehend her Spanish and try to translate it and find English words for it.

Even growing up in a Spanish speaking home did not guarantee good grades in Spanish. Unlike his sisters, Manny never quite excelled in the language. He made yet another comparison to his sisters' abilities versus his own.

Yes they took it in high school and some in college, but they were able to comprehend the subject quicker than I was. So they are able to communicate with our cousins and our relatives and me, I'm still like that struggling dude, that middle child struggling dude who made D's in Spanish; surprising for a person who grew up in a Spanish speaking background.

Manny did believe growing up with English as a second language did inhibit his academic growth and that was compounded by the two different dialects his parents spoke.

Not to mention Costa Rican Spanish and Mexican Spanish are two different dialects; you have ghetto Mexican Spanish compared to Costa Rican Spanish which is ghetto compared to actual Spanish from Spain. Yeah...so you got your levels of Spanish – top notch is Spain, Costa Rica is toned down and words are changed up and Mexico is like hey, what's up, that kind of stuff.

Manny's parents encouraged all of their children to achieve higher education. Their own upbringing and lack of education made it imperative that their children have better. Manny's parents both came to the United States illegally and later in life became citizens. His mother only earned a sixth grade education and his father did not earn a high school education either.

I think in the 50's and 60's in Mexico I guess students only had up to a sixth grade education level I think. That was normal back then and then they were just released to the world. And then my dad, my dad told me stories of when he was a younger child. He was a wild child and so I think he only got up to maybe junior high level in his home country of Costa Rica.

Manny's mother was a housewife and his father used to own his own business. Despite being a business owner, Manny's father always wanted more for his children.

My dad...he does...he was once a business man. He mostly did dump truck work right, just like delivering dirt to someone's house. He did really well in the early to mid-90's. Early 2000, his business was going downhill because other guys around town were doing the same thing he was doing except at a cheaper price. It was him and like two other drivers who delivered the materials to people's houses to build driveways or a miniature cul de sac in people's driveways. Cement, asphalt, gravel, top soil, all that stuff. My mother, she's always been a housewife. Yeah, always, ever since she had us. It was mostly like my dad would tell me don't be like me, that's what he would say; pick a future where you're not working outside in the cold, the rain, the heat, getting sunburn, working your muscles off, you know, maybe injuring yourself, joint pain or anything like that.

Manny's father thought a degree would guarantee him a better life: "A degree to him meant me doing this...office work; sitting behind a desk. I don't know, maybe one day sitting behind a desk on the 15th floor with a view, maybe of the ocean."

While Manny's parents were dreaming of him as an executive on the 15th floor, in high school Manny dreamed of being a race car driver. A friend of his fathers had given him racing tapes which Manny would watch with enthusiasm. Not only did he want to race the cars, but he wanted to build them.

It was more like influence from one of my father's old friends. He's not around anymore. He just gave me an old VHS tape of drag racing accidents or something like that. It was like the best wipe-outs of all times! I didn't know any better it was just like entertainment. When they would crash I was like whoa is that supposed to happen? When you're little you don't know any better! It made me want to race, but the notion, even though I wanted to race for a very long time, in the back of my head I always thought okay it takes money to build an engine or to build a very good race car and that was something my parents didn't have and so I held that behind me for a very long time.

And so after high school you know I was thinking about going to college. This is for my parents. Maybe I'll make some money and then build a race car or something later on.

Putting his dreams of being a race car driver on the back burner, Manny began to think about what he could do as a career. Because he was very artistic, Manny began to look into a career in art.

I didn't really have a very clear idea of where I was going to go. My first gung-ho moment was like I want to go to SH University and be an art student! I really thought there was going to be a lot of money in art.

Manny was also interested in video game design and thought SH University would be the best place to pursue the field. By this time, Manny was a senior in high school and was applying to colleges. While Manny's sisters applied and were accepted into their first choices, which was a very prestigious university, Manny was met with multiple disappointments.

I wasn't accepted [to SH University]. I applied to A & T, Turner Christian University, no I didn't apply to Distinctive University because I didn't know about DU. I am not sure if there was a lot of advertising, but I did not know about DU on that side of town. Yeah so I was not accepted to SH University because they needed my SAT and ACT scores. My ACT scores, I think the passing minimum was like a score of 25 and I ended up getting a 22 or 23...one of those numbers. I was fairly close. I was like oh my gosh! And I took it twice, maybe three times and still never hit that score. With my SATs...oh Lord!

Manny's SAT scores were too low to be considered for admission to the colleges he applied to: "I ended up making an 850 total. Yes that is very embarrassing." Low test scores coupled with mediocre grades increased Manny's anxiety about his future in higher education. He graduated from high school in 2004 in the bottom half of his class: "Okay so I mean not the worst, but not the best..."

Although Manny was quite clear he would not be following his older sister's path to A & T, he thought at least one of the schools he applied to would welcome him.

SH University, well they just, well you know, we received your test scores, sorry we can't have you. I was like great, ok. And also back then, and I think I am now, but back then I was very passive so reading the letter I was like, I'm not accepted well alright, we'll just wait for the next letter. And then A & T comes in, well we can't accept you and I was like when did I sign up? And then I think it was like TCU? Yeah TCU comes in and it was like nope, same thing. So I didn't know what my options were...except slightly because I think my little sister mentioned at the time hey, why don't you go to the community college.

A guidance counselor in high school also thought a trade school or community college would be a better fit for Manny and after graduating from high school in May of 2004, he enrolled in North Community College the following fall.

The only son of immigrants, there was the expectation that Manny and his siblings would attend college. Sandwiched between two overachieving sisters, Manny looked at his own achievements as being mediocre. An average student throughout school, Manny did not excel in any particular subject and found his choices for higher education limited. After being rejected from four colleges, Manny decided to start his journey to higher education at a community college.

The Four-Year AA Plan

North Community College opened its doors in 2003 and Manny was among the first students to take classes at this particular campus. Manny believed the college was still going through growing pains and because of this his math placement scores erroneously placed him in college algebra. With his previous difficulties in math, Manny knew this had to be a mistake.

So being in operation for just a year they're still getting all the kinks and bends in their system out and stuff. And somehow, don't know how, I was told it was a computer glitch later on, so I was able to test into college algebra. Even though I knew I had some difficulties, like a dummy I am at times, I totally believed the system and I said man, I am smarter than I initially thought so hey why not, let's take that college algebra! But I still had to take the remedial English class – writing and English class. So I was like darn!

Manny enrolled in 12 hours including remedial English, remedial writing, college algebra and an introduction to computer programming class. He earned high C's in his English courses and did well in his computer course, but not so well in math.

My one computer class and actually I made an A in that class, which was pretty awesome! But with my college algebra I ended up dropping that late in the semester and that sucked. Telling my parents, that really sucked.

College brought about new challenges for Manny academically, but it also brought about new and exciting opportunities as well. Manny was very eager to tell me that college was where he got his first real girlfriend as well. In high school Manny's lower self-esteem affected his relationships with the opposite sex.

In high school I wasn't really popular with the girls. I had friends who were girls. Most of them I have been friends with since kindergarten...yeah I wasn't really popular, not like the football players who are like hey babe. I never really cared about dating at the time. I would be like oh she's hot! But from a distance because I'm, like well, I'm not good enough so oh well, that's cool. Basically I would like lower myself you could say; lower myself towards other people - more or less like downgrading myself.

Throughout our interview Manny had a very self-depreciating attitude as he compared himself to others, especially his sisters, but he seemed to light up when speaking about his first real relationship. Manny met his girlfriend in his college algebra class. When I asked how the relationship began, he told me his humor reeled her in.

Well, I was the funny guy in class. I was the funny guy, who turned out to be the slightly cute guy as well, and what was the bad thing was I didn't pay attention as much as I wanted to in college algebra to get through it.

While his new relationship blossomed, his performance in college algebra withered. Manny found that trying to court and keep up with a subject he previously had difficulty in was impossible and he began to put more time into the relationship.

And so my mind is on four classes, a part-time job and a newly found girl. So I'm just like all over the place. It was a very new role for me. I didn't really have any relationships back then so I was like, I didn't really care at the time. Having an official college relationship like blew my mind. I was like I actually have a girlfriend!

I dropped the math class but I would still get up and go to school like I was when I had the math class because I would make her a sack lunch or something. I was really into this relationship. I would make her a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a banana, and an orange. What I didn't know is that she was allergic to peanuts! So she would give her mom the sandwich.

At the end of the semester, Manny secured a solid GPA, only because the two C's he earned were in remedial courses and did not count towards his GPA. He knew this was not good enough. When I asked him how he felt at the end of his first semester at North Community College he replied, "dang."

Dang. It was a dang moment when I ended up dropping the college algebra that year, but it was a very defining moment when I ended up making an A in the intro to computer class and then the two C's in the remedial courses. I was like man, you needed to work a little harder on that.

During the fall Manny also started a part-time job. He was commuting 30 minutes to get to college and another 45 minutes to get to his job at Abercrombie and Fitch. In the spring, he made the decision to only take nine hours, college algebra, English I, and a history course. By the end of the semester he had dropped the English course.

There was a time when I stopped going full-time. I enrolled in college algebra again to get that out of the way. I got in a regular English class, a history class, and...well I think only those three. I dropped down to part-time because I still had my part-time job. I ended up dropping my English class, which was bad. One I wasn't doing as well as I thought I would be and second of all, there was another student who was having the same problems and she said she was going to drop and I said you know my grade isn't picking up. The last pop quiz we had I didn't do well so I dropped out. At the same time I had my other two classes and I did okay in those.

Manny spent the next few semesters barely balancing a part-time school and work load. It would take him four years to complete his Associate's degree and he admitted it was due to a lack of passion.

Why did it take so long? Well like I said at the beginning of our conversation I just truly didn't have a mindset to go to college for myself. And at one point in time like in my third, going into my fourth year I started taking less classes. So we're talking like two classes per semester.

Manny also began spending more time with his girlfriend. In his second year at North Community College he moved into his girlfriend's parent's house. He didn't feel the decision was entirely his own, rather he felt a bit coerced.

Well it wasn't intentional for me. It wasn't my initial plan to move out of my parent's house and move into my girlfriend's house. It just sort of happened because my girlfriend at the time wanted to make it easier for me to go to my Abercrombie job. She lived in the village so it was a little closer. That's where, I guess you know, the whole moving situation somehow happened. I don't know how it happened. I told [my parents] I was just going to spend the night at their place a couple times a week just to go to work. My dad's like okay, mom was like be careful.

Manny's part-time job eventually became a full-time job and college even less of a priority. By his third year, he was taking only six hours and was still unsure of what he wanted to major in.

I was taking classes at the time, but I didn't know exactly what I wanted. By the time it hit year three, three and a half, I was thinking oh man, maybe I can go for you know an Associate of Technology or something around there, maybe computers or something. I was already following another pathway just for an Associate of Arts, which was you know the whole general degree. I think I talked to an advisor, in fact I remember I talked to an advisor, but I think whenever I initially saw the Associate of Technology it had a lot to do with advanced mathematics, which scared me a bit. That's why I ended up taking the path to the Associate of Arts because it only goes up to I think college algebra or trigonometry or something.

In the fall of 2008 Manny finally earned the credits to be awarded an Associate of Arts degree. When I asked how exciting that accomplishment was at the time, he downplayed his achievement.

When I got the degree or when I was able to sign off for the degree, I was like okay, awesome, and I got this little card on whether I want to walk or not and I was like no, I don't want to walk. I kept on thinking about it and maybe like three months prior I thought you know if I were to walk I'm only graduating with an Associate's of Arts of all

things, okay? But then if I didn't walk, well at least I'm receiving you know my degree in the mail. It's not a bachelor's and so just kind of compared myself to both of my sisters. I was just thinking okay maybe I'll just walk with my bachelor's but not with my associates.

I felt like I accomplished something. I was like well okay, I got to this point so let's keep on going. It was kind of like that change of heart, like at that direct moment when I got that degree in the mail my mom's like oh, here, here's your degree and I was like, ooh if I can accomplish this...I've got some more classes to go so let's go ahead and finish.

During his last semester at North Community College, Manny had attended a few college fairs and there he was introduced to Distinctive University. Distinctive University was the only college Manny applied to as a transfer student. Later in the interview Manny also revealed his girlfriend was attending Distinctive University as well. Graduating with a 2.6 cumulative GPA, he applied and was accepted as a computer information systems major.

I only knew very little of what Distinctive University was. As time progressed within those four years at the community college actually there was a college day that came around, I don't remember whether it was 2007 or 2008? Around that time the representatives of the different colleges actually came around. I was like oh, Distinctive University? What's going on here? I've heard the name you know very vaguely before, but you know just seeing what they got to offer within the programs and where are you located and I was like what? You guys are located there? Oh my gosh, you know?

Due to low test scores and marginal grades, Manny was not accepted into any of the colleges or universities he applied to in high school. Unlike his sisters, who attended the same prestigious university, Manny would begin his higher education career at the local community college. Lacking a true passion for education, Manny spent four years at North Community College before earning an Associate of Arts degree. Every semester he would drop courses as he struggled in math and English. Working part-time and putting significant energy into a new romantic relationship also affected Manny's progress towards earning a degree. Although Manny earned an AA degree, he marginalized that accomplishment by comparing it to his sisters' earned baccalaureate degrees. At that point, he decided he would earn a baccalaureate degree and transferred to Distinctive University in the spring of 2009.

Distinctive University

Manny's first impressions of Distinctive University were positive. He enjoyed the size of the large school stating it was not as "massive" as the school his sisters attended. He also believed he could continue to make average grades with minimal effort, similar to his experience at community college.

The first year I thought that was going to be like a breeze walk because you know I was thinking okay, maybe the university's not as easy as or supposedly easy as community college but I wasn't really thinking much...right? I was thinking okay, I can get by with this, you know, whatever degree I'm going for with like C's and B's; yeah, C's and B's would get the degree...

Still working part-time, Manny enrolled in 12 hours which included a technical communications course and pre-calculus, both required for his major. Manny did not perform very well that semester, earning one C and two D's. He dropped the pre-calculus course after meeting with his professor for advising.

I had 12 hours, yes a full load plus the part time job. Accounting I ended up making a D; the pre-Calculus I ended up dropping it around November of that year because I was talking to the professor back and forth about getting help and stuff and going to CASA to get help as well. I want to say the communications course I was actually doing okay in and psychology I ended up making a C or B...maybe it was a really high C.

Impressed that Manny sought out help early on in his academic career at Distinctive University, I asked him how he became aware of the options for academic support available to him. CASA is Distinctive University's math support lab, and Manny's pre-calculus professor advised students to get tutoring.

She encouraged us to go but I think like maybe a very small percentage of the students actually started going and I knew that mathematics was not my strong point and so that's why I went to get some help.

Even with the tutoring, pre-calculus turned out to be too difficult for Manny to succeed. Manny was not able to pick up the concepts well enough to progress and he was barely able to keep afloat in the class: “I was more like the guy whose head was under water, just a little bit with the nostrils out and like a straw just sticking out of the water...yeah I was that guy.” At the end of his first semester at Distinctive University, Manny had a 1.33 GPA and was on academic probation.

The following semester Manny decided to change his strategy.

I need to change my strategy when it comes to the next few courses that I want to take...and so luckily with the next few courses I put myself back to three classes instead of four classes. But I changed my strategy and I ended up making an A in organized psychology. Then I was taking a math class again, yeah I decided to take that one again, so those three classes, the organized psychology, another computer information class and pre-calculus.

What'd I do differently? I decided to push myself. I decided to find a way to push myself, to you know get myself to make better grades and actually do some studying.

His strategy was successful and he earned an A and two B's, but unfortunately earned a D in pre-calculus. His semester GPA of 2.8 boosted his cumulative GPA to 2.1, which placed him in good academic standing. The following semester Manny hoped his new strategy would continue to positively impact his GPA and he enrolled in 13 hours. The D in pre-calculus allowed Manny to advance to calculus, which was a requirement for his program. At the end of the spring 2010 semester, Manny had failed calculus and was once again on academic probation. Needing the calculus course to progress on the degree plan, in the summer of 2010 Manny enrolled in three courses against his advisor's advice.

Let's fast forward to summer of 2010, alright. In the summer of 2010 I decide to take the calculus course one more time and I ended up taking one of my logistics courses and another health class. When I went to the advisor, I think I talked to Bishop, but I was just asking about summer options; what would be a good amount of classes. I remember Bishop telling me that two's a good amount, but three's just pushing it, and I thought to

myself, you know, back then I wasn't even pushing myself, so why not just push myself. I was thinking I might as well just ahead and push myself and see if I can get out of this situation that I'm in.

Manny made the decision to take calculus during the shorter summer session based on advice from his younger sister.

I talked to my little sister about how's it going with her classes over at A & T and she says, oh, you know, it's going okay; she's about to graduate in August of that year. She mentioned that mathematics is an everyday thing, you can't just push it off from one day and you know expect it to kick in another day. I think the class set up that I had was like on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday so I needed to practice that stuff every day but I wasn't practicing every day. So when I was talking to her about that a summer course came in and I was thinking okay, well this class is Monday through Friday for two months so I decided okay, I'll do that. Two months, that's not bad; it's an everyday thing and like my sister said math is an everyday thing. If I can practice that everyday maybe I'll be able to get somewhere.

Manny earned an A and a C in two of his summer courses, but failed calculus despite studying harder and utilizing the university's math lab, CASA: "I was actually doing the practicing and what not and reaching out for a tutor or going to CASA to get some help but I still didn't make it out of there." Even though Manny had always had problems comprehending math, he found math courses at Distinctive University were especially difficult compared to the delivery at North Community College.

When I took the tests over at CASA it just felt like an isolation jail cell or something in that office or testing center. I don't know, something about that building just kind of gives you the feeling it probably used to be a jail or something. I don't know, but that's what a lot of my peers will talk about, like how that we'll be going into that building itself is really unusual.

Everything else before coming to Distinctive University was paper. Here the tests are just delivered through computers and I was thinking okay, maybe this ain't too bad. The only bad thing is that when you show your work, you can't show it on the computer, you can only show it on this little piece of paper they give you and only for certain questions. I was also used to actually taking math tests on paper, just solely on paper in community college, elementary, high school, you know? I mean growing up as a person with paper and pencil but not so much a computer, it was a crazy transition. I didn't know what to expect, I mean I thought when taking the math course I was thinking you know hey, okay...paper...paper test, but no, no paper test, just go to the CASA building, take a

photo ID, sit in front of a computer; you get this much time and you only get these little formulas, it was like okay, cool...I think, but no, not so much.

Earning a failing grade in calculus that summer also earned Manny his first academic suspension. Manny was distraught.

I got the F and then that's what really dropped my GPA and then my first suspension. My first suspension of anything; I mean I've never been suspended in elementary, high school, junior high, or anything like that. I was one of those not really the bad kids, just a guy who follows the rules.

After I got the letter in an email, which was in August, I cried and then to tell my mother and father about it...felt like, ahh, felt like the bottom of the barrel. You can step on me and I would look like cow poo, that kind of thing. I told my mother right away, I waited to tell my dad; he just kind of had this look as if like well, what were you thinking, what were you doing? Were you playing games, or were you doing this, or that? Or like what the heck is going on, you know? And I just told him straight, I told him like I just didn't study enough.

Manny decided to contact the associate dean of the college to get advice on his next steps. He wanted to know of others had “been in my shoes.” The advice he received made him feel better, but he still “cried my eyes out.”

I told him that I was suspended for the first time ever, you know in my entire college career and it was kind of small talk, maybe like less than a 20 minute conversation. He mentioned something on the phone like oh, this is your first suspension? And I was like yes, sir, it's my first suspension ever. I mean like what is it I can do to get back into Distinctive University and he just kind of told me to take little steps - you know this is what you've got to do. Also, writing the letter, which I guess you and everybody else on the council read. He also told me okay, you know just take a class or something in the fall.

At Distinctive University, Manny was still navigating his first real relationship as well. Manny and his girlfriend had been dating for five years and three months before they broke up. The energy he put into the relationship clearly impacted his studies, but their break-up devastated him. He clearly remembered the length of time they had been together because the break-up was a painful one, and it was not initiated by him.

Being a student supposedly in love and being a student concentrating on work and being a student concentrating on school all at the same time was tough, but then you know having one big part of my world just like break down on me, it was kind of like glass shattering, you know? You drop something and it just shatters. When I wanted to celebrate Valentine's Day that year two days before the actual Valentine's Day she asked me well why would you want to celebrate two days before? I thought it would be a good idea, maybe something spontaneous, you know that kind of thing, but it didn't happen that way.

Basically what happened was I was hanging out with her little brother and then she comes up to me and says hey, I need to talk to you privately, and I was like oh, okay, thinking like maybe she might want me to do her a favor or something...grab a bite to eat or something but no, she sat me down and just says like boom right then and there she wanted to break up...straight up. Those words didn't initially hit me until maybe a day after because at first she had the serious look, yes, and when she said the word break up I just said okay. It was almost like shock, maybe disappointment. I wasn't like tearing up or anything but I was just like kind of feeling like a little bit of a tear on the inside. The day after, that Monday or Tuesday, like that's when it all just kind of broke down on me. I was just asking her why, why, why, why? You know, why this, why that? Why, what went wrong, that kind of thing.

It was a pretty bad day after that. It was a rainy day. I ended up driving to my parents' house just like sobbing and wet from the rain and all this other craziness. I didn't even pick up my phone when my newly ex-girlfriend was calling me while I was making the drive in the heavy rain. We're talking couldn't even see 20 feet in front of you in that kind of rain.

Manny felt blindsided by the break-up; even more so because he was living with her parents at the time. In retrospect, he saw where they were growing apart from one another.

Thinking back, from now, or at least maybe a couple months ago, around 2009 I think, we would be in the same place, like in the same room together sometimes, but we wouldn't really talk to each other much. We'd just be on our own little laptops, just kind of like kind of checking out Yahoo or video games. I can see it now, but back then I didn't see any of that. I was just like we're not arguing or anything; I don't think even once we really argued during the time that we actually dated...

The break-up significantly decreased Manny's motivation to do anything well and contributed to his low grades leading up to his first academic suspension.

Heeding the advice of the associate dean in the College of Technological Advancement, Manny enrolled in two math courses at North Community College that fall. Manny earned a C-

in calculus, which was not transferrable, but gave him some hope: "...so close but yet so far. It was a disappointment, but at the same time I learned a lesson...I can actually do math!"

Manny spent the fall concentrating on the math courses, working part-time, and preparing for his older sister's wedding. Early in his college career he and his sister had an intense disagreement which he did not feel comfortable sharing, but had previously reconciled. Manny wanted to share this aspect of his relationship with his sister because during one of her visits home, he experienced his first alcoholic drink with her and her fiancée. After the major heartbreak he experienced, he accompanied them to a local Mexican restaurant and ordered his first drink.

Around that time my...sister, my older sister and her husband or fiancé at the time came down to visit the friends and the family ended up going to a Mexican place. Most of her friends actually already knew that I wasn't really much of a drinker and both my sisters didn't expect me to order my first Dos Equis at a restaurant. I was just like you know just get it, whatever, go ahead, so I ended up ordering just one beer and everybody had like this really shocked look on their face. Especially with my older sister, she's like what? You got a beer? And I said, what, so what? So I just drank my first one right there, right then and there. This time around I just kind of had that loss of motivation, all this other stuff so I was just like forget it...

Manny had three more beers that night before he decided wallowing in a bottle of beer was not the best way to handle his sorrows. Earning the C- in calculus gave him the jumpstart he needed and Manny began to prepare his readmission from suspension paperwork.

The readmission from suspension process in the College of Technological Advancement at Distinctive University required Manny to write an essay describing the events that led up to an academic suspension and changes that will be implemented to ensure academic success upon return. Manny took this letter very seriously as he was determined to get back into school.

I did actually put some thought into the letter. I was thinking I'm pretty sure these people can tell whether you're BS-ing or not so I was like okay alright let's put some thought

into this. So, I put some thought into it. I think it took me like two weeks, yeah, about two weeks to actually write. The first three days to plan out what it is that I wanted to say and then for the rest of that week to actually just come up with a draft. And then for the whole week after that I started going to get some writing help at the writing center over at North Community College just to kind of see if I could get a good flow out of the paper itself. I just wanted to make sure, you know, to get back in and not disappoint, basically, myself. So at the end of 2010 I just started slowly picking myself back up, you know, brushing dust off my shoulders, put my hat back on, that kind of thing...

Even with the writing help, Manny was nervous about his chances of being readmitted.

I was very nervous because coming from a background of low grades, not really trying hard enough and you know growing up being compared to my sisters with their A's and B's and me with my C's and D's or B's and C's I was thinking I have a lot to lose. If I don't come back I'll probably hate myself if I didn't come back, so I had no choice. Yeah, I made myself have no choice.

Manny was readmitted back into the computer information systems program for the spring of 2011. Receiving the acceptance letter in the mail lifted a great weight.

It was a sigh of relief, a big sigh of relief. During my time over at the community college, I was just kind of like freaking out a bit you know doing the whole math class and then finding out that I only got a C- out of that I'm just like arrghhh this is not going to help my chances to get back into Distinctive University. Then getting the letter saying hey, you're accepted back, only under some conditions, I was like okay, I'm down with that! But at the same time I still wish I would have gotten at least a B or C+ or something in my calculus class.

Manny was ecstatic about his return, but right away had serious thoughts about his career path, especially because he had yet to pass calculus, a prerequisite for many upper level computer information systems courses.

I was accepted back into that program and then I counted out how many classes or semesters I had left over to determine the possibility of me getting out of school before 2014. I kind of had this little range of how many semesters I really wanted to stay in school, right? And obviously, CIS is the trend technology's going in and I'd have more options, but I decided I was going to switch over to the LS major.

Manny did a little research on the Leadership and Supervision program researching possible careers. Even though he didn't know much about the field, he wanted to get his degree as soon as possible.

I wasn't very specific back then, what I was specific about was okay, if I can get back into CIS, how much of a time table I have to actually cross the stage. I was told, let's see I think it was Bishop I was talking to that day, like in between 2014 and 2015 somewhere around there, and I was like oh, that kind of sucks. I thought about looking at something else and then he busted out the little LS paper. He started counting the credits, like what transferred and what wouldn't transfer, just to kind of like look at my options and what not. Then he tells me that my time was like cut by like maybe a year or a year and a half you know in order for me to actually graduate and get out there and start working.

Manny's first semester back from suspension was not easy. Underestimating his own abilities seemed commonplace for him, and the low self-esteem coupled with previous academic difficulties increased his insecurities: "It was a little intimidating because in the back of my head it was don't screw it up...you know that type of mindset." At the end of the spring semester, Manny had performed well in his leadership courses, but his cumulative GPA was a 1.99, which put him on continued academic probation. Instead of taking an easy route that summer, Manny enrolled in finite math, which was a requirement for his new degree plan. With help from his family, he passed the course with a B-.

I think that was the only class I took because I remember my brother-in-law was pushing me to do better and better in that class. He had actually taken the calculator away from me to actually get the concepts. I didn't have to rely too much on the calculator, but every once in a while you kind of had to have the calculator for certain work, but he like just took it away from me so I said okay...

My [little] sister was like moral support you know, you got this down, you know, that kind of stuff...or like show that test whose boss or something. The same thing with my brother - he'll tell me, he'll probably have a glass of wine or something while helping me out and then sometimes every once in a while he'll be like look...you gotta look at it this way...you pass this class, you don't have to worry about another math class for a while, and I said, okay...alright, sounds good.

Passing the finite math course with a B put Manny's GPA above a 2.0, which was enough for him to be in good academic standing. This was a major confidence boost for Manny as he progressed towards a baccalaureate degree. Despite doing well in math that summer, Manny decided to visit the office of student disabilities to be tested for a learning disability.

Yeah, it boosted my confidence so I ended up taking technical statistics, one of my major classes with Professor James and I ended up making a B in statistics. That was the year I enrolled over at student disability services. My ex-girlfriend actually was the one who implanted the idea into me actually some years back. She was the one that kind of told me to go get tested but...like a typical guy I am sometimes, you know, I could be just a little nonchalant. I already knew I had a very weak foundation in mathematics.

They found out that I had, besides mathematics, something in reading or like some sort of comprehension. I don't remember my results but I got accommodations for the mathematics part, which was actually mostly what the accommodation's for, it was extended time on the exams and using not a scientific calculator but more like a full function calculator.

Manny was also able to take his math tests not in CASA on the computer, but in the disability services office on paper, which helped him comprehend functions he previously had difficulty comprehending.

I had accommodations when I took finite. All three of my exams including the final I had to do all those on paper, every single one of them. So during that time my brother in law was telling me how to do steps on certain problems on paper and I'm like okay, so I can do this on paper.

Manny took a step that year that many students hesitate to take. Recognizing he may be dealing with depression, he scheduled an appointment with counseling services: "And then that same year also I was enrolled over at the counseling services to see their shrinks." Manny laughed when he called them shrinks, but he clearly valued their service because he continued to see them over the next year.

There was a slight realization, actually major realization, it was after the break up and I didn't know who else to turn to, actually, so I mean besides my own family, but they're not shrinks or anything like that or pastors or you know reverends or anything, so I just

thought you know heck, why not. Because at that time I was thinking what else do I got to live for, you know? [I was] definitely that low. On their little pre-test before they start interviewing or before they send you on to the shrinks, I was a couple points away from being supposedly like suicidal. I was on a low end of my life, but I was not I was not going to take my own life. I know life goes on after a bad break up, after a school suspension, after whatever kinds of crud I was going through at that time and I was surprised. I think it was like 50 questions of yes and no front and back on a piece of paper with a couple of handwritten parts saying how do you feel today, yeah, so that was like a low point.

I'm pretty sure they didn't in the beginning believe me [that I was not suicidal], but getting tested at the student disabilities and then over at counseling services, helped me through. Earlier today before I met you I actually ended up thanking my counselor so I gave her like a shake of the hand and stuff like that.

Manny had described himself as passive and not popular with the girls and I asked him if counseling services helped him with his personal relationships. He had not made a lot of friends in college, but he felt the counseling helped increase his self-image. Even so, he made a conscious decision not to pursue any new relationships with the opposite sex.

So with the opposite sex actually it was actually okay. In finite I kind of like flirting around a little bit with some of the girls...but for the rest of the semester and following into the fall of 2011 and then the spring of 2012, I was just like you know let's just go ahead and get lined up, you know, concentrate more in class. I just made a personal decision to just keep going and just don't worry about it; I mean I'll find a girl later on after two days from now.

Distinctive University was a spectrum of experiences for Manny, positive and negative. Distinctive University was the only college Manny applied to as a transfer student, partly because his girlfriend was already attending. His first two years offered major heartbreak both personally and academically. The dissolution of his first real romantic relationship and his first real academic failure sent Manny into a mild depression. After four semesters, Manny was placed on academic suspension and required to sit out of Distinctive University for one semester. It would take self-reflection, counseling, and much academic support for Manny to regain the desire and commitment to continue his education. Returning from academic suspension and

taking advantage of the student services at Distinctive University, Manny saw academic success for the first time and would be receiving a baccalaureate degree in a matter of days.

Conclusion: Feeling Myself a Little More

Our last interview together was just two days away from graduation and Manny was feeling very positive. The previous two semesters at Distinctive University went well academically for Manny. He became more active and vocal in group projects and began to take more of an interest in himself and his well-being. In the past Manny was his own worst critic, but he was beginning to be more supportive of himself; “Yeah, there are days, but more and more I’m starting to like myself a little more for being myself.”

At that time, Manny’s biggest concern was graduating and finding a career. He still felt some of the pressure being the middle male child who had yet to graduate primarily because in his culture, he should be the one taking care of his aging parents, not his sisters, who had previously graduated and had good paying careers. Manny felt he should have already been doing big things in the world already.

After the summer of 2010 I think that’s when I felt like I was out of control, like I thought these are big shoes I gotta fill with family. Finances, [my] parents’ future retirement or being some kind of help because most people in the Latino community or whose families are Hispanic usually don’t send their parents to retirement homes or anything. I mean they usually just like live with one of their children, so that’s like one of the big shoes I kind of like thought was out of my reach at that time. I wish I could have graduated earlier...

Manny was proud of the accomplishment only a few days away and knew his family was proud as well.

Okay so mom’s proud, my dad...I don’t know, he didn’t really say much...I’m pretty sure he’s proud, but I guess that’s a dad thing, like they don’t really say it but they think

yeah...I'm proud of you. My younger sister, she's like good job! High five, you know like that kind of thing.

Manny spent his youth feeling compared to his sisters' accomplishments and there was still lingering inadequacies. Even though a baccalaureate degree was on the horizon, he still felt his abilities were questioned by his older sister.

My older sister, she's like so...you are graduating this year, right? That was the question that I got, the first question that I got from her after I was talking about graduating and she's like, so you are graduating this year, right? And I said I don't know if that's supposed to be a joke or being sarcastic, or that's actually serious, but I told her yes, I am graduating this time around.

I felt like it was a little sarcastic or like to belittle my character in a way because there were a few times where I said okay, I think I will graduate this year, I will graduate this year, I will graduate this year and time after time, it's like no I got more credits to go, I got more credits to go, I got more credits to go...

I feel like, well I mean not exactly in a mean way, but yeah like I got something to prove. Even though I don't really have to prove anything to her, because she's not my boss or a deity or anything like that you know, I mean it's just a way to show like yeah, even the underdog can like accomplish something. I'm always rooting for the underdogs because I've always felt like an underdog. I mean from the beginning of school, I was an underdog just because I couldn't grasp certain subjects as quick as they were. I couldn't make the A's they were. I couldn't get as many jobs that were as high paying as they were...and then not to mention the LS degree, it's considered an underdog degree to the business management degree.

While Manny felt like the underdog, he did appreciate the value of his degree.

The professors within this degree field tell us to be leaders and to be well-rounded. I mean not just the one aspect of management the business college teaches. They only do one aspect where our LS program does the whole leadership and being well-rounded with computers, human resources and all that.

I asked Manny if he was concerned that his parents looked down upon his degree because it was not the traditional business, science, or engineering degree his parents wanted him to pursue similar to his sisters.

I think for them it was more like what it is that they hear on TV or the radio that defines success quote/unquote. Like engineering, but I was never all that great at math. I mean heck, I even looked at a differential equations book that my former roommate, who was

taking the mechanical engineering classes over at Roberts University. He showed me the book and I told him, so ah, where's the numbers? He says, dude yeah, there's no numbers, you gotta make up your own numbers. I was like what? What? And he's like yeah, you gotta make up your own numbers. Then like the whole doctors and lawyers, I mean I always found science to be interesting, but just not too interesting, not to where I just want to cut up a person and say alright, here's an implant, or hey, I'm going to take this cancer out of you, oh, sorry, that's your spleen, or that kind of thing...or even a lawyer, I'm not even that great at arguing! So those were not for me. I was still trying to find myself within the first four years and ended up with another four years to finally figure out I wanted to stick with this.

I am always interested in knowing what knowledge my participants would convey to their children in the future and also to other students based on their own academic experiences. Manny replied, after he found a wife “who's pretty good at math,” he would just stress for them to be “better,” similar to what his father wanted for him.

My parents are more like telling me to go out there and make yourself somebody or at least that's something that my dad would say. He would say, son, don't be like me, go out there and be somebody. What he means behind that is that is don't give up on education just to start working right away because you'll end up like me breaking your back, playing in the dirt, mud, or whatnot, heat, cold, whatever. He actually just wanted me to you know go out there, get like a nice office job with whatever type paycheck like; just be a businessman or something, just be better, yeah.

Manny also wanted to make sure his children learned to trust God and to trust that God would lead them to success, however success was defined. Manny grew up Catholic, but by seventh grade started attending a Baptist church with his best friend. Manny thought this trust would be important because there was a time when he lost trust and faith in God.

The time of my initial suspension I ended up hating myself, but also I ended up hating God, too. Well okay, that's too strong; I ended up blaming him for a very long time. Actually, from the fall of 2011, I believe, for about almost one whole year I didn't go to any church whatsoever or anything. I probably didn't understand his plan and then my best friend he would tell me that like yeah, there was a couple of trials and tribulations that Jesus had to go through as well.

For other students who might be struggling after transferring to Distinctive University, Manny had simple advice, to “kick butt and take names.”

Okay, so with academic difficulties, worse comes to worse, you can get tested over at the student disability office; if you're having personal issues, look into counseling...just don't give up. Like we said earlier, you know, kick butt and take names, so just don't give up at all. I think that's what it all comes down to is you just have to keep fighting and if you're at a point where you're about to give up, just pick yourself back up. I mean everybody, everybody falls...but they eventually get back up and do whatever it is that they love or they want to do.

Manny was planning on kicking butt and taking names while break dancing across the stage in a few days. In parting I asked who Manny would be at 37 years old, ten years from now. He laughingly replied he had not thought that far, but in the ideal world he would have himself figured out.

The ideal situation? I want to say okay at least I got myself figured out... in a career, I guess a girlfriend, maybe a wife, maybe traveling around the world maybe for work purposes and or vacationing, I don't know. [With family], probably build a little more relationship with every one of them... maybe have a business or that one invention or two or three that I got in my head somewhere just waiting to be picked out.

Manny's story is simply one of perseverance. Battling personal insecurities, learning disabilities and depression, Manny's journey to higher education took well over eight years. While he was still contemplating what life would look like after he crossed the stage to receive his diploma, Manny had accomplished a major endeavor and should be extremely proud of reaching that goal.

Analysis

After writing the global impression of Manny, three major themes emerged and will be presented in detail: Marginalization, Coping Mechanisms, and Coming of Age. Each theme will be supported by critical events which happened in Manny's life.

Marginalization

It was clear during our time together that Manny was impacted by being the middle child of two overachieving sisters. Through the lens of others, Manny felt marginalized as they compared him to the successes of his older and younger sisters. Elderling and Knorth (1998) defined marginalization as a process by which a person “becomes distanced from the conventional institutions in society (e.g. family, education, labor market)” (p. 1). Manny discussed several moments in his life where he felt distanced from the success of his sisters. He felt as though their accomplishments were unattainable to him and that others in his life saw this as well. As I journeyed through Manny’s life story, I found that family members, educators, and others, whether intentional or unintentional, played an active role in Manny’s feelings of marginalization. It was also evident that Manny also marginalized his own accomplishments as he compared them to his sisters’.

Manny responded to my initial question regarding his aspirations to attend college by immediately comparing himself to his two sisters. From a very early age he remembered his sisters interest in education as well as he remembers his own indifference towards education as he stated his sisters were “really gung-ho” since elementary school and even knew what university they wanted to attend. On the other hand, Manny never saw himself attending college and only at the insistence of his parents did he attend. One of the major reasons Manny never saw himself as college material was because of his early academic difficulties. When I asked him what kind of student he was he replied he was an “okay” student but immediately compared his academic acumen to sisters: “...my sisters came back with grades, they’d come in with like you know A’s and B’s or all A’s.” He followed up that thought by pointing out he, on the other hand, was “every once in a while an A, B student.” While Manny never stated his parents made

any comparisons between siblings, others did. Manny recalled elementary school teachers expecting him to be a “genius” because of his older sister’s academic prowess, only to be disappointed and make comments such as “why are you getting this type of grade...I had your sister...”. The comparisons led Manny to see himself as “just that middle kid” who did not achieve much.

Manny also made other references to being the middle child and marginalizing his worth. When we spoke about English as a second language in his home, Manny discussed not being fluent in the language. While his sisters were able to speak and write Spanish, Manny could not, which prevented him from communicating with his extended family. Once again he saw himself as the middle child who failed: “I’m still like that struggling dude, that middle child struggling dude who made D’s in Spanish...”

Being the middle child can lead to feelings of marginalization according to some theorists. Stewart, Stewart, and Campbell (2001) stated that middle children “may feel like they were squeezed out of their families. They may believe that they have nothing about them that made them special and worthy of their family’s attention or esteem...” (p. 363). Being a middle child myself, I resonated with Manny’s feelings. Even earning an Associate’s degree did not promote feelings of pride in Manny, instead he downplayed its importance because it took him four years to earn and he had not yet accomplished what his sisters had accomplished: “It’s not a bachelor’s and so I just kind of compared myself to both of my sisters. I was just thinking okay maybe I’ll just walk with my bachelor’s but not with my associates.” Even on the eve of earning his baccalaureate degree from Distinctive University, Manny was still feeling marginalized, this time by his older sister who questioned if he was actually graduating this time around. Manny described being compared to his sisters as being the underdog his entire life: “I was an

underdog...I couldn't grasp certain subjects as quick as they were, I couldn't make the A's they were...I couldn't get as many jobs that were as high paying as they were..."

Feelings of marginalization coming from growing up being compared to two high achieving siblings played a vital role in Manny's narrative. These feelings and experiences did have a negative effect on Manny's self-esteem, but we also see in the narrative that they helped him shape who he wanted to be.

Coping Mechanisms

As Manny moved through high school, his lack of self-esteem became more prominent. It was obvious Manny internalized the comparisons to his sisters, but he also developed a practice that appeared to be a mechanism for defense. Low self-esteem not only impacted Manny's view of himself but it how he chose to cope with it told a story of a young man degrading himself before anyone else could in an effort to minimize pain.

Throughout the interviews with Manny, he would make reference to himself in a derogatory manner. Self-deprecating behavior appeared to be Manny's way of maintaining some semblance of control over certain circumstances in his life. For Manny, it was important to him to put himself down before others did. While some of this behavior was discussed in relationship to his sisters, "... I'm still like that struggling dude, that middle child struggling dude...", Manny also referred to himself in a negative manner in regards to his academics and his personal life.

Academically, Manny believed he was not very smart. In high school, he referred to his SAT scores as "embarrassing." He addressed his difficulties with English and math, but called himself a "dummy" when he described the error that was made when he signed up for college

algebra: "...like a dummy I am at times I totally believed the system and I said man, I am smarter than I initially thought..."

In his personal life, I pondered the absence of relationships in this narrative, both male and female. The only time he mentioned a significant relationship was during our discussion about his time at North Community College when he mentioned that was also the time he had his first real relationship. In high school Manny let me know he was not considered popular, "not like the football players..." Instead, Manny told himself he was not good enough to approach girls so he would not be disappointed by rejection. Manny kept his intentions towards girls at bay: "I would be like oh she's hot! But only from a distance because...I'm not good enough..." Manny thought downgrading himself before others did would protect him from hurt and disappointment. It was not lost on me that the five year relationship he had with his girlfriend was the only real relationship he had been in during his 27 years. Manny's lack of self-esteem and inexperience seemed to inhibit him initiating any other relationships with the opposite sex after the break-up.

Using words like "dummy" and "not good enough" to self-define appeared to be Manny's defense mechanism for low self-esteem. If Manny could put himself down before others did, perhaps he could survive disappointment intact.

Coming of Age

While there were clear examples of Manny's lack of self-esteem and self-deprecating behavior, Manny's story also exhibited a journey towards some positive self-discovery. How did Manny begin to move away from others' definitions of himself that were previously explored? How did Manny move towards seeing himself in a more positive light? There were several

critical incidents during Manny's time at Distinctive University that exemplified his coming of age.

Throughout Manny's secondary education experience he saw himself as not the best student. Manny acknowledged trouble in math as early as elementary school when he had difficulty in simple math where "4+4 which should equal 8, I thought it was maybe like 6 or 7." Basic English was always a problem as well. Others, specifically teachers, also added to Manny's definition of himself by comparing him to his high achieving sisters. Experiencing difficulty with math at North Community College and Distinctive University added to Manny's belief that he was not capable of high achievement. It was not until Manny decided to get tested for a learning disability at the Office of Student Disabilities that he began to see himself as someone capable of having academic success. Making the decision to get tested was empowering. Getting the proper accommodations allowed Manny to focus properly and he eventually earned a B in finite math, which lifted his esteem: "Yeah it boosted my confidence...I actually ended up taking statistics...I ended up making a B..." Those grades did indeed propel Manny to continue to earn high grades and boost his GPA as well as develop an attitude of perseverance and determination as evidenced by his advice to students facing academic difficulty: "just don't give up...kick butt and take names."

Manny's choice to change his major initially started off as making a decision on which program would allow him to earn a baccalaureate degree the soonest. As we discussed Manny's major in more detail, we found out that Leadership and Supervision was a much better fit for Manny and towards the end of our interviews he was able to articulate that fit much better. He was no longer concerned that he did not meet his parents' mold by not majoring in a major such as business, rather he was able to articulate why his choice was the best for him: "They

[business] only do one aspect where our Leadership and Supervision does the whole leadership and being well-rounded with computers, human resources and all that.” Perhaps a younger Manny would have been resigned to the belief that the degree he was earning was second best. Most important, Manny had determined that college was indeed for him, and it was no longer something he was doing for his parents.

I didn't really see myself going to school in the beginning after I graduated high school but my mindset is different from what it was back then than what it is now. I started going to college because of my parents. Because they wanted to see me with a degree in my hand and as time went on that's when my mindset kind of switched over and I thought okay, maybe I could make something out of this.

Another critical event was Manny's decision to seek professional counseling at Distinctive University. Realizing that he needed someone to talk to about his impending depression was pivotal for Manny. Although he did not recognize it, Manny was potentially suicidal. It was then he realized “life goes on after a bad break up, after a school suspension, after whatever kinds of crud I was going through...” It took time for Manny to heal after an unexpected break-up with his long-term girlfriend and after the disappointment of an academic suspension, but he acknowledged he could not heal alone and made a very mature decision to seek out support. Seeking help, both academically and professionally, brought Manny to a place where he began to like who he saw staring back at him in the mirror: “...I'm starting to like myself a little more...” Manny began to exercise more and even engaged in what he considered flirting with a stranger in the lunch line.

Manny's sentiment that he was beginning to like himself more was perhaps the most intriguing glimpse into his developmental journey. At 27, Manny was finally coming of age.

Chapter Summary

While Manny's story was clearly one of persistence and perseverance, Manny's story could also be juxtaposed against one of a first generation American struggling to achieve higher education or a story about a middle child struggling to find his identity in a family of overachieving siblings. The obstacles Manny faced in his life may not be new, but they are uniquely his and he is still maturing and working towards a better him.

CHAPTER 9: COMPOSITE ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree. Narrative inquiry was used to capture the life stories of the participants as they journeyed towards higher education and the attainment of a baccalaureate degree. After writing a global impression of each participant, I analyzed each participant narrative using holistic-content analysis. Chapter five through chapter eight presented the stories and analyses for Daniel, Liberty, Shane, and Manny. During analysis, several themes emerged that were similar across the participants' stories. In this chapter I present a composite analysis of the major themes from the four participants' stories. The four themes that frame the participants' life stories are reluctance in seeking support, familial influence, perseverance, and maturation.

Reluctance in Seeking Support

The process of seeking help is important in the learning process. Unfortunately, according to Nelson-Le Gall (1985), "help-seeking has taken on connotations of immaturity, passivity, and even incompetence" (p. 56). Recent research informs that help-seeking behaviors are strategies that can be used to overcome problems that may be too difficult for people to solve by themselves (Roussel, Elliot, & Feltman, 2011). For the four participants in my study, seeking help was not a concept they embraced as they navigated academic careers.

Daniel and Manny were the only two participants that mentioned they had visited a high school counselor when considering their college aspirations. While Daniel was seeking assistance with the college process, Manny only sought assistance from his guidance counselor once he had been denied admissions by the colleges to which he had applied. In community college the participants had limited interaction with an academic advisor or other professional who could have assisted them with their academic progress. Daniel, Liberty, and Manny only sought the assistance of an advisor in the beginning of their academic career at their respective community colleges. While Daniel was guided into the computer field based on an encounter with an academic advisor, Liberty only met with an academic advisor to register for coursework she herself had picked out after perusing the academic catalog. Like Liberty, Shane picked up a degree plan during his community college experience and used it as a guide, never once meeting with an advisor to discuss his academic goals. While Manny spoke with an advisor regarding academic placement exams, he never sought the advice of one when he encountered academic difficulties at North Community College.

At Distinctive University, participants encountered academic difficulties during their first year. Transfer orientation at Distinctive University is designed to give students an introduction to the support available to them on campus to ensure their academic success. During orientation students not only meet with their academic advisor, but they are introduced to an entire network of academic and personal support services such as tutoring and professional and career counseling. Liberty was unsure of her attendance at the required orientation while Shane attended the transfer orientation but did not see the value in the experience.

As the participants began to experience academic difficulties, none of them initially sought help from a professor, advisor, or took advantage of the myriad of services designed to

foster student success. Daniel admitted that he was reluctant to seek help because of a fear of the unknown. Daniel's fear stemmed from not knowing what to expect transferring from a community college to a four-year institution. The fear Daniel felt was intensified by Distinctive University's size, which was intimidating to him. He was unsure of whom to go to get his questions answered; even if he did know where to go he also acknowledged he was scared to even ask questions. For Liberty, academic difficulties arose out of her inability to manage employment and school. Liberty was determined to not take out student loans to finance her education but the stress of managing a full-time work load with a full-time class load became overwhelming. Liberty chose to take time away from school to save money to pay her tuition. Liberty did not seek the advice of a financial aid counselor or academic advisor who may have been able to guide her toward other options for paying for school rather than simply making a decision to stop out. Shane made decisions regarding his academic career based on advice from friends and family. He never engaged an academic advisor as he took courses his sister recommended and in which his girlfriend enrolled. Even after he began to have difficulties in math courses, he never sought tutoring or asked his professors for help. For Manny, the journey to an associate's degree took four years partly due to the fact that he did not seek assistance from an advisor regarding his academic goals. He recalled speaking to an advisor once, but made a decision to follow a particular degree plan only because it required less math.

The reluctance to seek support contributed to a similar outcome for all participants, academic suspension. It was only after the participants were determined to return from academic suspension that they were forced to have a conversation with an academic advisor about their academic goals and plans for academic success. Academic advising is not required for all students at Distinctive University, but it is a requirement for students returning from academic

suspension. All four participants met with their advisors while on academic probation, and they began to see the value of seeking help. Daniel, Liberty, and Shane engaged in relationships with their advisors that bloomed as their guidance became essential in their persistence from semester to semester. Shane shared that his advisor Carla often went out of her way to ensure he was aware of deadlines. Daniel told of how his advisor Bailey welcomed him back to school after suspension with open arms and encouraged him along the way. Manny was the only participant who sought both academic and personal counsel as he began to see a psychiatrist for what he perceived to be depression. As he neared graduation Manny also acknowledged how helpful his counselor had been and thanked her for helping him get through a tough time in his life.

Familial Influence

The positive and negative influence of family was prevalent in the stories of all four participants. The families of Daniel, Liberty, Shane, and Manny had a significant impact on their pursuit of higher education. There was an expectation from family that all four participants achieve higher education, but there was a disconnect between the expectation and the familial support necessary to ensure academic success. None of the participants entered college with an understanding of what the academic demands of college would entail nor were they able to rely on their family for advice when they encountered academic or financial difficulties.

Daniel, Shane, and Manny were first-generation college students and there was no knowledge of the higher education process handed down from their parents. The familial influence for Daniel spanned generations. It was the hope of not only his parents, but also his grandparents that he would earn a college degree and make a better life for himself than they had. Even with that influence, Daniel was not prepared to navigate the unfamiliarity of higher

education; he spoke of having questions and not knowing who to ask to get them answered. Even though Manny had sisters who had gone, or were going through the higher education process, he did not gain a significant benefit from knowledge they could have imparted. Liberty's father had attained both a baccalaureate and master's degree, yet she was ambivalent and naïve about the effort it took to attend a college or university. She believed college was an extension of high school; therefore, she never invested time or energy into preparing for the college experience. Even with the intervention of extended family who was concerned about her lack of focus, her pursuit of higher education was lackluster because she was uncertain about her future goals and refused to commit completely to her education. While Shane's parents encouraged him to go to college, he recalled their actions to indicate otherwise. They were not involved in his high school academic career and were absent in any preparation for college. Unfortunately, when all four encountered academic difficulties, their families were able to provide little support and guidance.

Perseverance

Schmitt (2012) defined perseverance as “committing oneself to goals and priorities set, regardless of the difficulties that stand in the way” (p. 21). In a study on college student potential, Schmitt determined perseverance was one of 12 dimensions of college success. Among the four participants in this study, perseverance referred to a steadfast determination to achieve a goal despite encountering difficulties that temporarily derailed their persistence in college.

Returning to a university after encountering academic difficulties may suggest that a student persevered, but the four participants in this study persevered through personal obstacles

as well as academic hurdles. All participants discussed moments in their lives when they doubted their ability to earn a degree for varied reasons. Daniel spoke of the mounting pressures of school, work, and having to financially take care of his parents, but he persevered and according to him, gave it all he had to manage the expectations placed upon him. Fighting depression, Daniel managed to meet the financial needs of his family's household while struggling in college. Both Liberty and Daniel worked full-time jobs in order to pay their own way through college; neither of them benefitted from a significant amount of financial support from their parents throughout their educational career. Working full-time often meant taking a lighter course load, struggling through a semester, or specifically for Liberty, making the decision to not enroll in a particular semester due to financial constraints. Although Shane and Manny did not share the same financial burdens, work sometimes took priority over school and affected their performance. None of the four participants let the demands of having to be employed permanently derail their goals of higher education.

Personal conflicts also posed a threat to the participants' perseverance and persistence towards a degree. Liberty, Shane, and Manny experienced unhealthy relationships in their youth that caused turmoil in their lives. Liberty found herself in an unhealthy marriage as well as a codependent relationship with a man with a substance abuse problem. The demise of Manny's first romantic relationship played a significant role in his feelings of depression, yet he recognized the need to seek support from the campus' counseling department. The relationship between Shane and his father was as integral to his success as it was his failures. Daniel exhibited a difficulty in forming supportive relationships with faculty on campus which did affect his ability to work through academic conflicts. Having to take multiple courses from a

difficult professor did hinder Daniel's attempts at academic success, but in the end he persevered through the courses even if he barely made passing grades.

For three of my participants, Daniel, Liberty, and Manny, their perseverance had actually paid off. Daniel earned his baccalaureate degree in May of 2012 and Liberty and Manny graduated from their respective colleges in December of 2012. For Daniel, Liberty, and Manny it had taken almost ten years to earn a baccalaureate degree. Shane had not completed the requirements to earn a baccalaureate degree as of yet and was still taking courses towards a degree in mechanical engineering technology.

Maturation

All four participants went through a process of maturation during their tenure at Distinctive University. While being placed on academic suspension was certainly an eye-opener, all participants experienced other critical events in their lives that propelled them to mature and make positive changes in their life. For Manny, maturation became evident as he started to come into his own and accept himself for who he was. He began to make his own decisions and felt proud about doing that. Perhaps the most telling indicator of Manny's maturation was when he realized he might need professional help for the bouts of depression he was experiencing. Seeking help for a possible learning disability as well as for mental health concerns showed that Manny had matured in his decision-making process.

Daniel was forced to "grow up quickly" when he took over the financial responsibilities of his parents' household, but maturity came when he learned to be proud in his circumstances. Academic suspension had left him bitter and depressed, but an encounter with a nurturing

professor helped him see his situation through a different lens. Pride overcame the fear and Daniel matured into a young man not afraid to fight for what he valued.

Liberty and Shane started their interviews with me by presenting a very strong façade. They spoke of independence, strength in resolve, and appeared to not suffer from the lack of self-esteem that Daniel and Manny may have experienced. Instead, both Liberty and Shane came to the first interview with a mask on and it took time to peel back layers to reveal their actual fears and insecurities.

Liberty presented herself as having always been a person with a strong personality and she prided herself on being aggressive and confrontational. She resented her mother for being passive and dependent, but as her story progressed, I began to see how her own insecurities impacted critical decisions she made. Entering into a relationship as significant as marriage at such an early age signified that Liberty was looking to meet a need or fill a void in her life. Engaging in another co-dependent relationship with her former boss was another example of Liberty's perceived strength and independence. Both relationships implied that Liberty was not as strong as she perceived and perhaps went looking for the support she desired from her father in other men. As Liberty matured, she set aside the confrontational behavior of her youth and put away the mask that hid her insecurities. She began to acknowledge that she needed to make changes in order to move forward. Liberty accepted that she herself was the only person keeping her from succeeding. Going through a process of maturation allowed Liberty to see her role in her failures and she began to make more mature decisions regarding her academic goals and her personal relationships. She began to see a change in her relationship with her parents and entered into a new relationship with her current fiancé only after making sure they had similar goals and values.

Shane wanted to be seen as a successful businessman who could take higher education or leave it. This mask slowly faded to reveal a young man who was actually unsure of himself and what he had to offer the world. By the end of our time together, Shane had revealed a fear of not being successful, especially in achieving a baccalaureate degree. The process of maturation allowed Shane to see that he did not have all of the tools to be successful in life, yet. This was true even in his relationship with his father, which he initially decided was not essential, but by the end of our interviews he admitted he clearly valued.

Conclusion

Reluctance in seeking support, familial influence, perseverance, and maturation were common themes that emerged from the stories of Daniel, Liberty, Shane, and Manny. These four themes provided an opportunity to understand how unique critical events in each of their lives led to a similar learning outcome.

The reluctance of the four participants to seek academic and financial support through academic advisors and counselors was detrimental to their success in pursuing higher education. Not having the proper knowledge to make thoughtful decisions regarding their academic goals negatively affected their academic persistence. Shane amassed a number of credits as he cruised through college with no direction while Manny struggled through four years of community college before finally earning an associate's degree. Daniel's intimidation of Distinctive University could have been alleviated by cultivating relationships with advisors and professors. For Liberty, seeking support from financial aid counselors could have resulted in financial support which would have decreased her need to work full-time. In the participants' stories it

was clear that not interacting with an academic advisor, faculty member, or other professional early in their academic careers played a vital role in their academic failures.

The families of the four participants had a significant impact on how the participants viewed higher education. For Daniel and Manny, earning a college degree satisfied an expectation placed upon them by their parents and grandparents in anticipation that higher education would provide a better life and more opportunities than were afforded to them. Liberty's family was instrumental in her perception that a college degree was easily attainable. While her parents and extended family expected her to attend college, they did not impart the knowledge that education is a privilege that came with hard work, not an automatic right.

Despite the difficulties they encountered throughout their academic journey, the participants persevered once they decided to truly commit themselves to their education. Shane persevered through a splintered relationship with his father. Liberty and Daniel persevered through difficult financial burdens while Manny persevered through a haze of self-doubt and depression. Encountering academic suspension could have derailed the drive and persistence of the participants, but instead it propelled them take personal inventories and reevaluate the effort they put into their academic experiences. All four participants realized personal circumstances, behaviors, attitudes, and commitments had to change in order to reach their academic goal of earning a baccalaureate degree.

Finally, maturation was critical in the participants making the positive changes in their lives necessary to reach personal and academic goals. Self-acceptance was critical in Manny's maturation while self-reflection was important in Liberty's journey. Both Manny and Liberty matured to a place where they recognized certain behaviors as detrimental to their success and

began to make appropriate changes to overcome personal challenges. For Daniel, maturation came when he stopped being bitter and became proud. Shane also relinquished the belief that he was a self-made man who did not need much help to be successful in life. Maturity allowed Shane to recognize he was still a work in progress.

CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION

In this chapter I present a summary of the study revisiting the first nine chapters. Following the summary, I discuss the findings of the study with the literature. Second, I present how the findings answered the research questions posed in the study. Third, I discuss implications for practice. Fourth, recommendations for future research will be explored. Finally, I provide a personal reflection from my perspective as the researcher.

Summary of the Study

In chapter one, I presented a background of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study. I also discussed my perspective as an administrator in higher education. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree. This qualitative study was guided by an overarching research question and three sub-questions.

1. What were some of the experiences of two-year community college students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree?
 - a) What were the initial barriers to persistence towards a baccalaureate degree prior to academic dismissal?
 - b) What critical incidents occurred during the academic dismissal period that enhanced or impeded the students' reenrollment at the four-year institution?

- c) What were the factors that influenced persistence after return from an academic suspension dismissal?

Qualitative paradigm was utilized to understand how students made meaning of their experiences as community college students who encountered academic difficulty upon transfer to a four-year university. More specifically, narrative inquiry was ideal to highlight the life stories of the study participants from their first aspirations to attend college to their continued persistence towards baccalaureate degree attainment.

Chapter two reviewed the literature beginning with the prevalence of student transfer from two-year community colleges to four-year institutions of higher education. Several definitions of transfer were explored to understand the diversity of the transfer student population. Barriers to transfer student persistence at the four-year university were presented. Some barriers impacting student persistence were demographic characteristics, state and institutional policies, and lack of academic and social integration. A review of literature surrounding student departure from institutions of higher education in the form of academic suspension was introduced. Finally, literature on factors that had a positive impact on persistence was presented. Some factors that fostered student success included non-cognitive variables, academic preparation, institutional support, and diverse learning opportunities.

Chapter three presented the research design and rationale for the study. The site Distinctive University, a pseudonym, was described. Participant selection was addressed which detailed the use of gatekeepers. Data were gathered through three interviews with each of the four participants chosen for the study. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. The holistic-content approach presented by Lieblich et al., (1998) was used to analyze the data. Trustworthiness and research parameters were also addressed.

Chapter four provided an explanation of the findings and detailed my decision to present the global impression and analysis for each participant in separate chapters. Each chapter introduced the participant and began with the participant answering the grand tour question presented in the first interview. Chapters five through eight presented the participants' rich narratives. Chapter nine presented a composite analysis which introduced several core themes that emerged across the participant narratives.

Discussion of Findings Similar to the Literature

A review of the literature surrounding the prevalence of transfer students in higher education revealed relevant factors that both facilitate and impede the success of students transferring from two-year community colleges to four-year institutions of higher education. As I reviewed the findings from my study with the literature, I found many similarities. The participants in this study encountered several of the barriers researchers previously found to have a negative impact on transfer student persistence. I found academic preparation and academic and social integration were barriers that significantly impeded the success of all participants in my study. As a side, race, gender, socio-economic status, and age were demographic variables researchers found to have an impact on academic persistence and degree attainment for community college transfer students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Dennis et al., 2008; Wang, 2009). All four participants were minority and one participant, Liberty, was an African-American woman.

The participants' integration into the academic and social culture at Distinctive University after they returned from academic suspension facilitated their academic persistence and degree attainment. I also found institutional support played a considerable role in their success as well.

Academic Preparation

Townsend (1993) discussed the community college transfer student's experience at a four-year institution as being a contrast to the academic culture at the community college. Townsend found that the participants in her study were not prepared for the academic rigor and the competitiveness of their academic counterparts. Additionally, the transfer students in the study found that university faculty was unsympathetic and unwilling to provide assistance in filling in gaps in the students' learning. Most of the participants in this study articulated similar feelings after transferring to Distinctive University. Daniel found Distinctive University challenging partly because he felt professors were unavailable. His first experience with adjunct professors came at Distinctive University, and he was unprepared for the lack of response he received from adjuncts and teaching assistants. In community college Daniel felt his instructors were accessible and present. Shane also felt the pressure of not being adequately prepared for the academic rigor at Distinctive University. Shane likened community college work to high school level work. He felt that in community college if he just showed up for class and put in minimal effort the professor would "pass you pretty much." He realized after being placed on academic suspension that what was passable at community college was failure at Distinctive University. Liberty was under the impression that she could also manage the academic rigor at Distinctive University and was not prepared for the amount of homework she was responsible for in some of her classes.

Wang (2009) found that academic preparation at the community college was a significant predictor of academic success and that taking remedial courses in community college had a negative impact on the attainment of a baccalaureate degree. Manny had taken remedial courses

in community college which prolonged coursework and affected his academic self-efficacy, both of which Wang indicated were possible results of remedial coursework.

Academic and Social Integration

The lack of academic and social integration of all participants negatively impacted their academic success and persistence at Distinctive University. According to Townsend and Wilson (2009), academic integration constitutes interaction with “faculty and staff both inside and outside of the classroom” and social integration as “co-curricular or student-life activities” (p. 406). Townsend and Wilson articulated that transfer students who encountered academic difficulty in their first semester indicated “social isolation and lack of support” as reasons for their difficulties (p. 414). None of the participants were engaged in study groups, social or cultural organizations, or had interaction with faculty outside of the classroom. Recall Velez and Javalgi (1987) found that living and working on campus are strong predictors of academic success for all students. Living and working on campus allows for the opportunity to engage with peers and faculty. None of the participants lived on campus; they commuted daily to campus instead. Additionally, all of the participants had financial responsibilities that demanded off-campus employment, some of which was full-time. Daniel was unable to fully integrate and experience campus life because he was financially responsible for his parent’s household. Both Daniel and Liberty worked full-time jobs to pay for college themselves; both found themselves with little knowledge of the support services available to them when they encountered academic difficulties because they spent such a limited amount of time on campus. While Manny was also employed, he seemed to self-impose social isolation, which was different from the other participants. He did not speak of many friends and only had one significant relationship during his time at Distinctive University.

Astin (1993) found positive relationships between faculty-student and student-student involvement and positive student outcomes. After Shane returned to Distinctive University from academic suspension, he indicated getting a peer tutor and engaging in study groups with his classmates had a positive impact on his grades. He also found spending more time on campus and in the library motivated him to perform better. Manny also found the decision to take advantage of several support systems at Distinctive University had a profound impact on his academic and social success. Engaging with staff allowed Manny to establish meaningful and helpful relationships while he was becoming more confident in his own abilities.

Daniel also was an example of how positive interaction with faculty and staff resulted in positive student outcomes. Daniel's chemistry professor was the first faculty member in his career at Distinctive University who provided him with a safe and nurturing place to grow. Dr. Bingham exhibited a passion for students and their self-worth that had a major impact on Daniel's pride. Once Daniel committed to seeking academic advising, he also found his academic advisor Bailey to be extremely motivating and supportive. When Liberty was able to make the decision to devote herself full-time to her studies her interactions also changed. Liberty found herself more active in her major college and interacting with peers. Liberty realized that engaging her professors was the impetus she needed to do well academically. She also surrounded herself with classmates who were persevering despite their personal circumstances and that motivated her as well.

Institutional Support

Creating a campus climate that supports transfer students is one of the most important steps an institution can take to foster student success. Transfer centers (Pope, 2004), orientations designed specifically to meet the unique needs of transfer students (Roof & Cawthon, 2004), and

clearly communicated policies and procedures (Alpern, 2000) are all factors that can positively impact transfer student matriculation and persistence. Sound, accurate, and empathetic advising was more influential on the success of the four participants. Flaga (2006) found that relevant, up-to-date advising at both the two-year and four-year institutions can play a positive role in student persistence, but more importantly, Bell (2004) indicated that advising works best when advisors are also “sensitive to the emotional issues transfer students encounter, including financial concerns, fear, and self-doubt” (pp. 72-73). All participants were required to see an advisor after returning from suspension and found themselves wondering why they had not sought out an advisor previously. Finally, seeking assistance from an academic advisor or other professional was the pinnacle turnabout for the participants in this study. All of the participants acknowledged that their relationships with their academic advisors after they returned from academic suspension impacted their perseverance, their understanding of policies and procedures, the follow-through needed to fulfill their academic goals, and their belief that they could be successful and attain a baccalaureate degree. Daniel, Liberty, and Shane acknowledged advisors who actively provided guidance and nurturing in addition to providing the pertinent information they needed to make sound academic decisions. Manny was able to benefit from institutional support in the form of professional counseling and services for his learning disorder. Taking advantage of these institutional support systems impacted his self-esteem and his belief that he could tackle even something as elusive as math, which he had wrestled with since childhood.

Discussion of Findings not Found in the Literature

While the literature is replete with information surrounding the academic successes and failures of community college transfer students as they persist towards baccalaureate degree

attainment, my findings indicated there was a gap in the literature. The two areas I explore in this section are help-seeking and its impact on student learning outcomes and a further exploration of working with students facing academic difficulties.

Help-Seeking and its Impact on Student Outcomes

During data analysis the aspect of help-seeking emerged as a common theme across all of the participants. While transfer student orientation was required for all transfer students when each of the participants enrolled at Distinctive University, none of the four participants saw value in their orientation experience and did not rely on any information they would have gained during the orientation to assist them when they encountered academic difficulties. Not one participant consistently sought the advice of an academic advisor at Distinctive University before encountering academic difficulty and being placed on academic suspension.

I was intrigued by the concept of help-seeking and especially its impact on student outcomes. While the literature on the need for academic support is plentiful, there is less research on how students take advantage of the resources that are available to them. The notion of help-seeking and who does or does not seek help arose as a gap in the literature but was clearly a finding in this study.

Nelson-Le Gall (1985) indicated that while help can be necessary, it had “been characterized, until very recently, as a degrading activity to be avoided” (p. 56). Further, Nelson-Le Gall noted that help-seeking had taken on “connotations of immaturity, passivity, and even incompetence” (p. 56). Based on these beliefs of help-seeking it is not surprising that the participants in this study did not seek any help when they encountered academic, financial, and other difficulties. What factors affect who does and does not seek help? Nelson-Le Gall (1985) in a review of theories surrounding help-seeking found that cultural norms, social roles, and age

can impact the norms of “independence and social reliance” (p. 57). For instance, Nelson-Le Gall indicated in Western societies it is more acceptable for women to perceive the need for help and then seek help. In relation to the educational setting, students may not seek help “because the very act of seeking help may be perceived by the teacher and other students as a failure to benefit from the teacher’s instructional efforts” (p. 60). Making a request for help can also lower a student’s self-esteem as it is seen as acknowledging an “inability to cope with a failure...” (p. 60).

Payakachat, Giubbino, Ragland, Norman, Flowers, and Stowe (2013) conducted a thorough review of the literature surrounding academic help-seeking and found barriers to academic help-seeking are prevalent and range from student goals to beliefs about help (Butler, 1998; Butler & Newman, 1995; Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein & Zivin, 2009; Eisenberg, Golberstein & Gollust, 2007; Ferla, Valcke & Schuyten, 2010; Karabenick, 2004; Skaalvick & Skaalvick, 2004):

Academic help-seeking behavior is associated with motivation, ego-achievement goals, classroom norms, and characteristics of helpers. However, students who need academic help do not always seek it because doing so may be negatively viewed as an admission of their inability to succeed without support...Additional barriers to help-seeking include an inability to perceive or admit the need for help; an inability to act on a determined need, attitudes, and beliefs concerning the help; or the perception that the help would be of no benefit. (p. 1)

In their own study on the help-seeking behavior of pharmacy students at a public university, Payakachat et al. (2013) found that academic help-seeking behavior is “directly associated with the perception of faculty helpfulness and indirectly with the perception of academic competence” (p. 4). Among the students in their study, there was the perception of help-seeking as “threatening” and those students who were “trying to avoid being negatively perceived by other students” were less likely to seek help.

In my own findings I came to similar conclusions concerning the help-seeking behaviors of the participants in my study. Manny struggled initially with asking for help because he suffered from low self-esteem although he was the only participant who spoke to a professor about his academic struggles and was referred to tutoring. I believe that the constant comparisons to his high-achieving sisters left Manny fearful that asking for help when he was struggling in math or Spanish would only prove that he was indeed the failure he thought he was. For Daniel, the overwhelming fear of the “unknown” stifled his ability to ask for help. The size of Distinctive University and the unapproachable nature of faculty, coupled with a cultural background that internalized fear, Daniel missed several opportunities to get help because he was too afraid to find someone of whom to even ask questions. For Liberty and Shane it appeared that their decision not to seek help was to enable them to continue to wear the mask of independence they projected to others. They were both afraid to have others see them as immature and incompetent, as Nelson-Le Gall (1985) stated keeps some of us from asking for help. The reality for Liberty and Shane was that they were immature and incompetent, which is expected of young people their age, but it was more important for them to be *perceived* as fully competent.

Help-seeking behaviors have been found to be enhanced by safe, secure relationships. Roussel, Elliot, and Feltman (2010) examined Nelson-Le Gall’s (1992) findings that “close relationships, familiarity, and friendship are positively related to instrumental help-seeking” and found a link between friendship goals and instrumental help-seeking in their study on the influence of achievement and social goals on help-seeking from peers (p. 400). Elliot and Reis (2003), conducting research on attachment and exploration in adults, found that “secure attachment in adulthood affords an unimpeded, appetitive exploration in achievement settings”

(p. 328). This research is relevant to my study because it suggests that positive, secure relationships of any kind in an academic setting can facilitate help-seeking without the stigmas that are typically attached to asking for help.

Familiarity, security, and close relationships affected the behavior of all participants once they decided to seek help. While being placed on academic suspension forced them to consult with an academic advisor to return to Distinctive University, all participants continued to engage in help-seeking after their return and even once they were in good academic standing. Manny was the only participant who sought out support for a learning disability and depression. In my position I do not encounter many students who initiate self-referrals to our counseling center or disability services offices therefore Manny was an enigma to me. His girlfriend was instrumental in him seeking help for a learning disability. Unbeknownst to her, she also played a role in him seeking mental health counseling as well. Daniel, Liberty, and Shane all became very familiar with their academic advisors and this led to a higher comfort level in seeking help from professors, peers, and other academic support services available on campus.

Working with Students Facing Academic Difficulty

While much of my literature focused on the barriers to and factors that facilitate the persistence of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions, the literature review did not focus on what impact academic difficulty has on students who are placed on academic probation and academic suspension, and how higher education professionals should work with this population. All participants in this study experienced academic suspension and the frustrations and doubts that accompany failure. The findings in my study provided an indication of the emotional toll of academic failure on students. Research has shown that students on academic probation can be successful by first accepting personal responsibility for

their own actions and then making conscious decisions to change behaviors they associated with their own failure (Demetriou, 2011; Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, & Atwood, 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006).

Demetriou (2011) indicated it is essential for those of us working with students facing academic probation and suspension to understand and utilize applicable student learning theories and how they can assist us in helping students attain their educational goals. Demetriou found Bernard Weiner's theory of attribution in achievement vital in dealing with probation students because the theory tells us "how individuals interpret events and how that interaction influences motivation for learning and future leaning behaviors" (p. 16). If advisors can assist students with the belief that the cause of previous performance issues can change, then students can see that a previous outcome does not have to be repeated. Demetriou's assessment of the use of attribution theory in interactions with students in academic turmoil could have been a useful intervention with all participants in this study. I recall Daniel's first interaction with a professor who was failing him and Daniel attempted to explain his circumstances. Like some of us do in higher education with low-achieving students, instead of helping Daniel understand his role in his own failures and working with him to make appropriate changes, he was immediately dismissed.

Tovar and Simon (2006) argued that students who see probation as an opportunity for change are likely to "emerge from it with positive outcomes or advantages" (p. 359). According to the researchers, when students embrace the concept that coming out from probation requires a "new focus on self-control" they can be successful and move towards degree attainment (p. 359). While I do not believe the participants in my study saw probation or academic suspension as an "opportunity" for change, I believe all of them benefitted from the reality check forced upon them. It was clear in the findings that each participant exhibited new behaviors surrounding their

locus of control. All four students changed their study habits, became proactive in seeking guidance and support, and clarified their personal and academic goals.

Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, and Atwood (2007) found an 18% increase in probation student retention in a program at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro using a motivational/empowerment model in advising. Kamphoff et al. identified “personal responsibility, positive affirmations, goal setting/life planning, and self-management” as essential in any program or intervention designed to foster student success in students facing academic difficulty (pp. 399-400). Goal setting and self-management were important in the success of the four participants in my study. Goal setting encourages students to “evaluate the requirements of learning tasks adequately” and self-management recognizes students’ “ability to manage themselves and continuously plan and monitor their behaviors in pursuit of their goals” (Kamphoff et al., 2007, pp. 401-402). Liberty and Shane realized that one of the reasons they were not successful was because they did not set goals. Having an elusive goal of just going to college was not sufficient enough of a motivator to keep them focused on their education. Once they both set the goal of attaining a baccalaureate degree and decided to get the degree for themselves and no one else, they began the task of evaluating their efforts, as Kamphoff et al. (2007) referred to. All participants were able to self-manage as they made decisions to study more, work less, seek academic support, and change other behaviors that were detrimental to their success.

Summary of Findings Relevant to the Research Questions

An overarching research question with three sub-questions were developed from my desire to understand how community college students made meaning of their academic

difficulties after transferring to Distinctive University. Critical events in the lives of the participants answered the research questions introduced in chapter one.

Research Question One: What were some of the experiences of two-year community college students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree?

The higher education experiences of the participants were diverse, yet there were some similarities. The choice to attend community college after high school instead of enrolling at a four-year institution varied across the participants. Daniel graduated from high school with a reputable GPA but chose to attend a community college primarily because of financial concerns. Both Liberty and Manny were limited in their choices after high school because of marginal grades and test scores. For Shane, the decision to attend a community college was influenced by his girlfriend. Only Daniel seemed to struggle academically at the community college, but they all had earned high enough cumulative GPAs to transfer to Distinctive University.

All four participants encountered academic difficulties within their first year after transferring to Distinctive University. There were several factors that impeded the participants' abilities to succeed academically. The impact of family dynamics and dysfunctions played a large role in all four participants' experiences. Daniel was heavily influenced by family expectations that seemed to conflict with one another at various times in his academic journey. On one hand, Daniel's parents desired for their son to earn a higher education degree to ensure a better life, yet, there was the expectation that he would take care of his parents' household when they were unable to work and financially support themselves. The stress of working full-time and pursuing a baccalaureate degree was one of the factors that impacted Daniel's ability to

focus on school. Liberty was distracted by her family going through a tumultuous time. Facing the demise of her parents' marriage, Liberty's emotional state was in disarray as she was angry with both parents for different reasons and her rebellion manifested itself in a self-harming way. Distancing herself from her father also placed a financial strain on Liberty as she initially refused his financial support, and in turn her father refused financial support when Liberty's grades began to falter. Shane's relationship with his father impacted his behavior for a large part of his youth and continued to have an effect on his behavior in college. Shane vacillated between wanting to be like his father and wanting to distance himself from his father as much as possible. Shane's own contradictions in his personal, academic, and professional goals impacted his persistence. For Manny, self-doubt and low self-esteem negatively impacted his academic self-efficacy. Growing up with two high-achieving sisters often left Manny wondering what his strengths were and where he fit in. This marginalization I described in the analysis of Manny's narrative had a profound impact on his belief that he could be successful.

The participants' experience of encountering academic difficulty after transferring to Distinctive University was an experience the four shared. Their backgrounds, beliefs, influences, and behaviors were all unique even as they shared the experience of being placed on academic suspension. I also found the specific barriers that impeded their persistence, the critical events that enhanced their reenrollment, and the factors that facilitated their persistence after readmission from suspension were also varied.

Research Sub Question A: What were the initial barriers to persistence towards a baccalaureate degree prior to academic dismissal?

All four of the participants attended a transfer student orientation upon transfer but reflected that the experience was of little to no help as an introduction to the university. Academic advising is a resource designed to assist students navigate both their academic and social experiences in college, yet none of the participants sought the advice of a professional advisor when they first began to experience academic difficulties. Being commuter students, all four participants were limited in their peer interactions, which affected their academic and social integration on campus. The participants also worked, which affected their time spent on campus engaging with peers in study groups and interacting with faculty members. Financial concerns arose for two of the participants and became an obstacle to continuous, full-time enrollment. Both Daniel and Liberty were working to pay for their education in its entirety. Shane and Manny were employed, but did not share the same financial concerns Daniel and Liberty did.

All four participants encountered academic difficulties within the first two semesters of their enrollment at Distinctive University. Three of the participants indicated they never spoke to a professor about getting help at the initial onset of their academic concerns. For the three participants enrolled in engineering technology majors, math was a barrier to their academic persistence. Interestingly enough, math is a foundation for many engineering courses and Daniel, Shane, and Manny all indicated encountering problems with math courses at Distinctive University. The three indicated that the course delivery was vastly different from the classroom experience they had at their respective community colleges. Liberty's academic problems were not necessarily indicative of a deficiency in a particular area but her own lack of focus.

The barriers to persistence the participants encountered were similar to those found in research on transfer student persistence. Financial concerns, lack of academic advising, and lack

of academic preparation were some of the barriers that impacted the persistence of the participants.

Research Sub-Question B: What critical incidents occurred during the academic dismissal period that enhanced or impeded the students' reenrollment at the four-year institution?

All participants were devastated by being placed on academic suspension. All four experienced a myriad of emotions that ranged from denial to depression to humiliation. Daniel's initial response was to blame others for his predicament; he believed the lack of instruction on the part of some of his professors contributed to his low grades. When Manny received the suspension letter in the mail he cried and feared telling his father. Even though Distinctive University communicates academic standing to students through a number of communication channels, Shane did not know he was suspended until he tried to register for courses. Liberty understood her academic predicament and was devastated, but not surprised because she realized her focus had been misplaced on work and unhealthy relationships.

Each was required to stop-out for one semester before applying for readmission from suspension to their respective colleges. Research has shown that the reentry process is significantly impacted by a student's own commitments and behaviors. Santa Rita (1996) found that students who were successful had more of an incentive to pass. Those students in the study who were active during their time away, married or had financial concerns had more pressure to reenroll and persist towards a degree (pp. 5-8). Santa Rita also found that students who loafed during their academic dismissal period were among those who failed after returning to the university from academic suspension. All four participants in my study were actively engaged in some activity during their time away from Distinctive University.

After finding out his academic standing, Daniel spent two weeks in despair before he decided he needed to pick himself up and do something constructive. During his time away on academic dismissal Daniel earned two computer certifications. Even after he was denied readmission from suspension the first time, he took an additional math course at a community college at the advice of the readmission from suspension committee. Liberty was suspended two times from Distinctive University and both times she spent away from the university she held full-time employment. It was after the second suspension that Liberty truly realized she needed to get her priorities in order and earn a baccalaureate degree. For the first time ever, Liberty had been fired from her job and realized the kind of professional she wanted to be. She also experienced several internships which took her across the country; while she enjoyed her experiences, the internships were what she needed to realize her academic and career goals. Being suspended was an “awakening” for Shane and during his time on academic suspension he realized he wanted a return on his investment. Shane spent a year away from Distinctive University trying to secure a solid foundation in math and science by taking calculus and physics at a community college. While he was not successful in his math courses Shane was not deterred from trying to return and earn a baccalaureate degree. After acknowledging his academic dismissal, Manny contacted the associate dean in his college to get advice on readmission. Based on that advice, Manny enrolled in two courses at a community college and earned a C- in calculus. That C- was not transferrable but he realized he could do math and taking the course increased his academic self-efficacy.

As Santa Rita (1996) indicated, the activities a student participates in while on academic suspension can enhance readmission and persistence. All participants continued to pursue their goals by taking courses at community colleges or working in their desired field.

Research Sub-Question C: What were the factors that influenced persistence after return from an academic suspension dismissal?

Institutional commitment to readmission from suspension students enhanced the reentry and persistence for the four participants. Recall that research has shown institutional support in the form of academic advising and counseling, mentoring, and academic support workshops plays a positive role in the success of students returning from academic suspension (Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009; Woodard & Suddick, 1988). As readmission from suspension students, the participants were required to see an academic advisor until they were in good academic standing. Additionally, in their college, Daniel, Shane, and Manny were required to seek tutoring, visit with a career counselor, and attend learning support workshops. All three indicated these interventions were important in their continued enrollment at Distinctive University.

After returning to Distinctive University all four participants made significant changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and commitments to attaining a baccalaureate degree. Liberty and Daniel were able to reduce their workloads which allowed them to focus on school more. Daniel immediately saw success as his project team won a first place research award. Being more involved in her major, Liberty benefitted from major-specific communications and academic support, more familiarity with her professors, and influence from academically-focused peers. After returning from suspension Liberty had not earned less than a C in any course. Shane indicated he finally became a real student after returning from academic suspension. Instead of napping during and between classes, he spent time in the library studying. He interacted with peers by joining study groups for the first time. He also purchased books for classes and turned in assignments, neither of which he had done before. While Shane was still struggling with math, his effort increased immensely after his return. Manny returned to Distinctive University

with a renewed confidence in himself after earning the C- in calculus in the interim. His grades continued to increase as well as did his confidence. Manny also took it upon himself to seek help for two conditions he was wrestling with at the time – a learning disability and slight depression over the breakup with his long-term girlfriend. The support he received from these support services on campus helped Manny stay focused and persist towards earning a degree. Another factor that impacted Manny's persistence was seeking advice from his academic advisor on his choice of major. Finding a major more suitable to his strengths and interests positively impacted his grades and outlook in his future.

All participants became more engaged – academically and socially after returning from academic suspension. The impact that academic and social integration had on the participants academic success is consistent with the research that has indicated this type of engagement directly impacts transfer student persistence (Astin, 1993; Townsend & Wilson, 2009; Volkwein et al., 1986).

Implications for Practice

As a result of the findings from my research, in this section I provide several suggestions for higher education professionals who have the opportunity to engage community college transfer students who encounter academic difficulties at our four-year institutions.

1. Administrators must build an awareness that undergraduate advising interventions may need to extend beyond academic progress updates and advisors should be trained and prepared to have these advising conversations. Danis (2002) reported on readmission from suspension students at Penn State. His comments to the academic advising community regarding this student population were poignant. Danis referred to students

as potentially being distraught, dejected, and bewildered when they seek advising. He advises those of us working with these students to liken the exchange to a grief therapy session because these students can be in the various stages of grief, from denial to anger to resignation. As advisors, Danis indicated we must give students hope even in despair. Advisors have the unique position to give students hope for a second chance and Danis maintained it should be seen as a privilege to have the ability to make such a difference one student at a time (para. 8).

I believe advisors, faculty, counselors, and other higher education professionals always have the opportunity to give hope. Advisors should be trained and provided with professional development opportunities to teach them how to have realistic, yet hopeful conversations with students in academic turmoil. I echo many of Danis' thoughts on providing hope for students especially when they are considering dropping out of college versus stopping out. Our conversations should include alternatives for achieving the academic goals of the student even if it means those options are not at the institution they intended. These conversations should be realistic, yet empathetic to the multitude of concerns students face while pursuing a baccalaureate degree.

2. One of the findings from research on help-seeking behavior indicated students ask for help in situations of familiarity and friendship (Nelson-Le Gall, 1992). Peer advising and peer mentoring should not just be concepts embraced by programming for first-time-in-college students. Having a peer who experienced similar transition issues transferring from a community college to a four-year university might alleviate some of the initial fears students like Daniel faced when he first arrived at Distinctive University. Having at least one familiar peer relationship may serve as an introduction to other support services

available to community college transfer students. A peer advising or peer mentoring program for new transfer students would be especially vital for commuter students who are not able to spend as much time in social settings on campus or in study groups that would enhance peer relationships.

3. Higher education professionals should implement an on-going assessment of early intervention programming and readmission from suspension processes. As an administrator who plays a significant role in undergraduate student success I was disappointed that none of the students utilized their academic advisors at Distinctive University before they encountered academic difficulties. It was disturbing to me that Daniel indicated he did not even know where the advising services were located in his college. No matter where we want to place the blame, it is imperative that professionals who are engaged in student success initiatives implement procedures that capture students at various junctures in their academic careers. Orientations are designed to provide an introduction, yet a student may not see an advising professional again until years later. Mandatory advising for students who reach academic milestones, i.e. 30 hours, 60 hours, etc. is one way to invasively reach our students. Mandating that our probation students take advantage of tutoring, learning support workshops, and career counseling are also ways to impact student success. As Shane indicated, he was glad he was forced to take advantage of these services because he would never have sought out that kind of support on his own. While my own college has seen success in mandatory advising for our probation population, such policies should be implemented across the university and not exist in silos at a decentralized university such as Distinctive

University. As per my initial statement, any procedures and policies should be assessed strategically to determine their effectiveness in promoting student success.

Recommendations for Future Inquiries

The research design of my study was guided by several factors. First, my own world view lends itself to a more constructivist paradigm as I have over time embraced the concept that people can and do experience the same scenario differently. As an advocate for students in higher education I believe it is imperative to understand that students may experience the phenomenon of academic suspension, for example, and have different realities surrounding their situation. According to Glesne (2006), “no one perception is ‘right’ or ‘more real’ than another” (p. 7), and while it has taken some time, this understanding has aided in how I empathetically interact with students experiencing academic difficulty. Second, utilizing narrative inquiry as an approach came to me after my own “a-ha” moment with the participant in my pilot study where I came to understand how unanticipated (on my part) critical events in the lives of students have a direct impact on their academic persistence. While I believe narrative inquiry was appropriate for this study, the body of knowledge on community college transfer students facing academic difficulties at the institution of transfer can benefit from a phenomenological study which would include case studies on a larger population of students as well. The four participants in this study gave immense insight into the critical incidents that can be at play in the lives of this transfer population, and future inquiry could indeed garner more perspective using case studies and focus groups.

Another recommendation would be to diversify the student population studied. My study was delimited to undergraduate students at a large, public four-year research institution. Future research inquires using several sites is recommended to understand how students at private

schools make meaning of their academic difficulties, or how students at smaller public schools experience academic difficulty for example. While I gained an undeniable understanding of how my participants understood their circumstances, I also recommend more diversity across gender, which would yield more information on areas such as the impact of gender on help-seeking, and academic discipline, which might help us understand how differences in policies and procedures across college campuses impact student success.

Research is also needed to explore the attitudes and perceptions that faculty and professional advisors have on students facing academic difficulties. Research questions are needed to engage academia on their attitudes and should include, but not be limited to:

- Is faculty more willing to engage students facing academic suspension or do they write these students off as failures?
- Do academic advisors place complete blame on students for their academic problems or are we empathetic to the idea that college is a crucial time for development and our students may be facing multiple barriers to their academic goals?
- Do advisors and faculty have the time and resources to even assess the critical events occurring simultaneously while students pursue baccalaureate degrees?

Research to answer these questions would be beneficial to the body of current literature.

Finally I believe it would be beneficial to further explore college student attitudes about seeking help once they encounter academic difficulties. I found many studies surrounding the help-seeking behaviors of children in secondary education settings and those suffering from

physical and mental health issues, but little in relation to college students and none on transfer students specifically.

Personal Reflection

I have always been intrigued by higher education and how students experience college differently. My own college experience was meaningful in many ways because I had a strong support system which included parental presence, a strong high school curriculum that prepared me for the rigors of college level work, financial support by way of a full scholarship, and caring professors and mentors. As an undergraduate student I found personal satisfaction in not just in my own academic success, but helping others achieve their academic goals as well. My first employment in college was as a peer advisor for a TRIO program, Special Support Services. Working with Special Support Services and later as a counselor for Upward Bound, I realized my own career goals and became passionate about serving in a role where I could impact access to higher education.

After my own success in college it pained me to watch my younger sister, who had a similar support system, flail her first few years of college. I remember being in graduate school wondering how I could have been more of a positive influence on my sister's academic journey. I already knew I wanted a career in higher education, but witnessing my sister's experiences further ignited the passion that was kindled in undergrad. Over the years I have worked in admissions, enrollment management, and academic advising. My role in advising expanded my higher education vocabulary to include not only "access" but "retention" and "persistence" as well. In my new role as an assistant dean I encountered those students encountering academic difficulties and they reminded me of my younger sister.

Unlike my sister, many of the students at Distinctive University I worked with were transfer students whose experiences were very much different from my own. During my doctoral program I learned the importance of recognizing and even embracing your own biases as a researcher, but I did not truly understand that concept as an administrator. In creating policies and advising students who were attempting to return to the university from academic suspension I failed to realize that every student I encountered had a unique life story which affected not only their academic performance, but how they made meaning of their experiences and how that in turn affected their choices. When I was presented with the opportunity to achieve a personal goal of my own – earning a doctoral degree – I knew I wanted to research this new population of students that I was seeing in my office in academic turmoil. This group of students seemed to have one thing in common; many of them were community college transfers and encountered academic difficulty shortly after arriving at Distinctive University.

The intent of my study was never to generalize the experiences of community college students who encountered academic difficulty and were academically suspended. Although this study only allowed me to engage four participants I feel as though I have become a more passionate and empathetic administrator. I now make policy decisions and provide additional support to students thinking there is always more to this situation than I am immediately privy to. This study may not have a generalized impact on all four year institutions of higher education but I can say that it has impacted my own sphere of influence.

EPILOGUE

It has been some months since I have interacted with the participants of my study. Daniel, Liberty, Shane, and Manny all touched me in different ways. I have kept in contact with Daniel as he sends me emails every now and again to see how I am doing. Manny requested to join my LinkedIn network with a note saying “I hope you got an A++++ on your dissertation!” I thought it was important to share with the readers where the participants are now on their life journeys.

Daniel graduated from Distinctive University in May of 2012. After graduation he continued to look for employment in the computer engineering technology field. He was offered and took a job at Hewlett Packard in January of 2013. He is still with his fiancée.

Liberty graduated from the Hotel College at Distinctive University in December of 2012 with a 2.39 GPA. In her last semester she earned a 3.0 term GPA. She is now working in sales and catering as an administrative assistant at a well-known hotel and will be getting married in October of 2013.

Shane finished the fall of 2012 semester by earning his second academic suspension with a D in Calculus II. He is employed full-time at a national logistics company with plans to reapply for readmission from suspension in the spring of 2014.

Manny also graduated from Distinctive University in December of 2012. Currently he is still job hunting and is trying to keep his spirits high in the process.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



Knowledge to Go Places

Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office
Office of the Vice President for Research
321 General Services Building - Campus Delivery 2011 Fort Collins,
CO
TEL: (970) 491-1553
FAX: (970) 491-2293

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: May 08, 2012
TO: Carlson, Laurie
Carter, Carman, School of Education, Davies, Timothy, School of Education, Oltjenbruns, Kevin
FROM: Barker, Janell, CSU IRB 2
PROTOCOL TITLE: THE EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS RETURNING FROM ACADEMIC
SUSPENSION AT A FOUR-YEAR RESEARCH INSTITUTION
FUNDING SOURCE: NONE
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 12-3250H
APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: May 07, 2012 Expiration Date: April 24, 2013

The CSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled: THE EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS RETURNING FROM ACADEMIC SUSPENSION AT A FOUR-YEAR RESEARCH INSTITUTION. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol. This protocol must be reviewed for renewal on a yearly basis for as long as the research remains active. Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's Federal Wide Assurance 00000647 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under CSU's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please direct any questions about the IRB's actions on this project to:

Janell Barker, Senior IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1655 Janell.Barker@Colostate.edu
Evelyn Swiss, IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1381 Evelyn.Swiss@Colostate.edu

Barker, Janell



Barker, Janell

Approval is to recruit up to 4 participants with the approved recruitment and consent material. The above-referenced project was approved by the Institutional Review Board with the condition that the approved consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the IRB.

Approval Period: May 07, 2012 through April 24, 2013
Review Type: EXPEDITED
IRB Number: 00000202

APPENDIX B: EMAIL INVITATION TO GATEKEEPERS

Dear ALT (pseudonym) Members,

As many of you know I am currently working on my doctoral degree at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO. I am entering the final stages of my program which is my dissertation research. I am enlisting the assistance of members of the ALT to help me in gaining participants for my study. If you all agree to this role, I will be able to move forward with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to approve my study. Your participation is vital, but does not require much. Please see the outline below for more information on my study. If you agree to participate, co-chairs will be signing a letter of cooperation as per IRB requirements. I look forward to your participation.

TITLE OF STUDY: The experiences of community college transfer students returning from academic suspension at a four-year research institution.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: Despite decades of research on community college transfer students and the factors that impede and facilitate persistence there is still more to learn about the persistence of these students, and how they make meaning of their academic experiences. Further, very little research was found on community college transfer students who experienced academic difficulty and were subsequently academically dismissed from the four-year institution. There is a need to document the stories behind the academic difficulties community college students face when they transfer to four-year institutions of higher education. Thus, the purpose of this study will attempt to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: This study is guided by an overarching research question and three sub-questions:

1. What are the experiences of two-year community college students who transferred to a large, four-year research institutions and encountered academic difficulty, which culminated in an academic suspension dismissal?
 - a. What are the initial barriers to persistence towards a baccalaureate degree?
 - b. What critical incidents occurred during the academic dismissal period that enhanced or impeded the students' reenrollment at the four-year institution?
 - c. What are the factors that influenced persistence after return from an academic suspension dismissal?

PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION: As a member of the ALT I have working relationships with other assistant deans, directors, and upper level advisors who supervise advising centers across the campus. These gatekeepers also work closely with probation and suspension students. Members of the ALT will serve as college gatekeepers who will be able to identify the student profile I have developed: community college transfer students within their colleges who have been readmitted from academic suspension and are persisting in good academic standing.

After potential participants are identified by college gatekeepers using academic and admissions records and personal knowledge, I will send emails to potential participants introducing myself and my research. After participants are chosen, data will be collected in the form of two to three narrative interviews with each of the four participants over the course of the spring semester.

Best,

Carmen Carter

APPENDIX C: EMAIL INVITATIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Carmen Carter and I am a doctoral student at Colorado State University working on my dissertation entitled *The Experiences of Community College Transfer Students Returning from Academic Suspension at a Four-Year Research Institution*. I am interviewing two-year community college transfer students at the University of Houston who, after transferring to UH from a community college, encountered academic difficulty and were eventually dismissed from the university on academic probation. Further, I am interested in interviewing those students who completed the readmission from suspension process and are now in good academic standing at UH. The University of Houston has agreed to assist me in this research by providing contact information of students who may meet these criteria. I am interested in learning about your experiences as a community college transfer student who experienced academic difficulties, and is now progressing towards a degree in good academic standing.

Your participation would be of great help to the development of knowledge on this topic, as colleges and universities continually look for ways to assist their transfer student population. Participation in this study will require three interviews over the course of the spring, and possibly summer semesters. Each interview will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon location on campus. I realize this is a busy time of the semester. Please let me know if you are willing to meet with me for no more than six hours this semester to participate in this study. I assure you that I will fairly and accurately represent you in transcripts and in analysis. Precautions will be taken to provide maximum confidentiality; if we publish the results of this study, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

If you are interested in participating, please reply with your intent, any questions, and the best way to communicate with you. I will initially set up a phone interview to speak with you about the study.

If you have questions or concerns about my request, please do not hesitate to reply to this email or call me at 713-743-4098. You may contact Dr. Laurie Carlson, my dissertation advisor and principal investigator in this study, with any questions you may have via email, Laurie.Carlson@ColoState.EDU, or office: (970) 491-6826.

Regards,

Carmen R. Carter
Graduate Student

Laurie Carlson, Ph.D.
School of Education
Laurie.Carlson@colostate.edu

APPENDIX D: STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR GATEKEEPERS

Consent of Gatekeepers to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Transfer Student Persistence: The Experiences of Community College Transfer Students Returning from Academic Suspension at a Four-Year Research Institution

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Laurie Carlson, Assistant Professor, Chair, Counseling and Career Development

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Carmen Carter, Doctoral Candidate, Education and Human Resource Studies, College and University Leadership

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? Describe, at the 6th-8th grade reading level, why this person might qualify for the research study. What is it about them that make them of interest to the research team? (Please note that many word processors have tools to estimate the reading level of text.) You are being asked to participate in this study because you meet the criteria of a community college student who transferred to a four-year university and encountered academic difficulties, which escalated to an academic suspension dismissal. Upon your return to the university, you are currently in good academic standing progressing towards a baccalaureate degree.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? Under the direction of Dr. Laurie Carlson, Principal Investigator, and Dr. Timothy Davies, Methodologist, Carmen Carter, the co-principal investigator will conduct the interviews and analyze the information collected from the interviews.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study will attempt to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place at the University of Houston. Participation as a gatekeeper is minimal and only in the initial phase of securing participants for the study.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to provide the names of current students enrolled in your college to be possible participants in the study. Your personal and professional knowledge regarding student academic records and background will be vital in identifying prospective participants.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no reasons you should not participate in this study. All participant, gatekeepers, and locations will be given a pseudonym and the co-principal investigator assures confidentiality regarding all information obtained during the interviews.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? Loss of confidentiality is the only known possible risk for participating in this study. The likelihood of loss of confidentiality will be diminished by the co-principal investigator taking the following precautions:

- Participants, locations and other persons mentioned in the interviews will be referred to by pseudonyms throughout all areas of the research study including in transcripts, on tapes, in analysis and publication.

Gatekeeper Informed Consent, Continued

- It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? If applicable, describe any direct benefits. Note: these are different from compensation or reimbursements, or small thank you gifts; see later section of consent form. If there are no direct benefits to the participant, state this. List the anticipated benefits for conducting the research, if there are any anticipated benefits to a specific group or society as a whole.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? There are no monetary costs to the participant or gatekeeper.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no monetary or material compensation for participants or gatekeepers, but we hope your participation will allow us to make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on this subject.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, please feel free to contact:

Dr. Laurie Carlson, Principal Investigator, Laurie.Carlson@ColoState.EDU

Dr. Tim Davies, Methodologist, Timothy.Davies@ColoState.EDU

Carmen Carter, Co-Principal Investigator, crcarter@uh.edu

Gatekeeper Informed Consent, Continued

If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on May 7, 2012.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 4 pages.

_____	_____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study	Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____	_____
Name of person providing information to participant	Date

Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX E: STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Consent of Participants to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Transfer Student Persistence: The Experiences of Community College Transfer Students Returning from Academic Suspension at a Four-Year Research Institution

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Laurie Carlson, Assistant Professor, Chair, Counseling and Career Development

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Carmen Carter, Doctoral Candidate, Education and Human Resource Studies, College and University Leadership

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Timothy Davies, Professor, Community College Leadership

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You are being asked to participate in this study because you meet the criteria of a community college student who transferred to a four-year university and encountered academic difficulties, which escalated to an academic suspension dismissal. Further, this study is interested in students who, after returning from academic suspension, are currently in good academic standing progressing towards a baccalaureate degree. We believe your participation in this study will help us answer questions about community college students who experience academic difficulties after they transfer to large, four-year colleges and universities.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? Under the direction of Dr. Laurie Carlson, Principal Investigator, and Dr. Timothy Davies, Methodologist, Carmen Carter, the co-principal investigator will conduct the interviews and analyze the information collected from the interviews.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study will attempt to gain a better understanding of the experiences of two-year community college transfer students who transferred to a large, four-year public research university, experienced academic difficulty which resulted in academic suspension, and returned to successfully persist towards a baccalaureate degree.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place in a mutually-agreed upon location at the University of Houston. Three interviews to take place during the course of the semester will be necessary. Total time commitment should not exceed six hours.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to participate in three tape-recorded interviews regarding your experiences as a community college transfer student who encountered academic difficulties at the four-year university, as well as your subsequent success after returning from suspension. The questions will ask you to discuss your early aspirations to attend college. Follow-up questions during the initial interview will be crafted based on your responses. Follow-up questions for subsequent interviews will be developed after an analysis of prior interviews. The interviews will be tape recorded, but if you wish to speak in confidence without being recorded, you may do so at any time.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no reasons you should not participate in this study. All participants and locations will be given a pseudonym and the co-principal investigator assures confidentiality regarding all information obtained during the interviews.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

Loss of confidentiality is the only known possible risk for participating in this study. The likelihood of loss of confidentiality will be diminished by the co-principal investigator taking the following precautions:

- All participants will be given a pseudonym before the initial interview. Participants, locations and other persons mentioned in the interviews will also be referred to by pseudonyms throughout all areas of the research study including in transcripts, on tapes, in analysis and publication.

Participant Informed Consent, Continued

- Tapes and transcripts will remain in the possession of Ms. Carter with the exception of Dr. Davies and a professional transcriber.
- Ms. Carter will be the only person who knows the identity of the participants and the link between the participants and their pseudonyms.
- It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? While there are no direct benefits for participating in this study, you may benefit from knowing you may be making a contribution to the academic community by providing useful information that can impact policy development regarding community college transfer students.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? There are no monetary costs to the participant.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no monetary or material compensation for participants, but we hope your participation will allow us to make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on this subject.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, please feel free to contact:

Dr. Laurie Carlson, Principal Investigator, Laurie.Carlson@ColoState.EDU
Dr. Tim Davies, Methodologist, Timothy.Davies@ColoState.EDU
Carmen Carter, Co-Principal Investigator, crcarter@uh.edu

Participant Informed Consent, Continued

If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on May 7, 2012.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 4 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff