An Examination of Effects on GPA, Academic Goals, Study Skills, Time Management Skills, and Perceptions of the Impact of Mentoring on Academic Progress, at a Midwestern Technical College

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Abstract

Higher education administrators are responsible for assisting suspended students with reentry into an institution if a student's suspension appeal is granted. Interventions and retention efforts vary, but one effective method may be faculty/student mentoring. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to assess the effects of structured mentoring on students who had been on academic and/or financial aid suspension. The quantitative section examined the differences in students' cumulative GPA, the frequency of completion of academic goals, students' perceived study skills, and students' perceived time management skills, before and after the mentoring program. The qualitative section explored students' perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on their academic progress. A total of 68 participants were included in the quantitative section of this study, and a total of eight participants were interviewed for the qualitative section of this study.

Results indicated that mentoring might have a positive impact on students' GPA and perceived study skills. Results also indicated that mentoring might not have an impact on students' frequency of completion of academic goals and time management skills. The qualitative data showed positive perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on students' academic progress, and four themes emerged, including better meeting academic goals, development of productive study skills, improved time management skills, and positive impact of the mentoring program. The quantitative data showed a positive change in students' cumulative GPA and perceived study skills, which was consistent with themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Future research should focus on the results of mentoring at different institutions, in different locations,

students who had not completed the program, mentors' communication style, staff as mentors, the impact on suspended students' academic journey, the impact on the different suspensions, and the impact on the lower GPA range versus the higher GPA range.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to all of the first-generation students, like myself, who have faced barriers to success in college but persevered because a caring faculty member mentored them and told them they could do it.

Acknowledgments

Numerous people made this journey possible for me. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Winship and Dr. Chen for all of their encouragement and feedback. Thank you to Dr. Korb and Dr. Norton for continually providing insightful notes and for being gracious enough to indulge some of my ideas. Several of my colleagues have helped shape my vision of this study and mentoring. I have much appreciation for Julie Misak, who took on the task of conducting the interviews. Her commitment to learning all that she could about the process and making sure that the interviews were productive was inspirational. I would also like to thank Michelle Case for her peer review work and her insightful interpretations of the qualitative data. My colleagues that serve on the SAP committee, Bonnie Engelken, Pam Layman, Lacey Ledwich, Lynsey Shipman, and Denise Varrientos, have embraced the mentoring program and supported my vision for helping suspended students realize their goals. Their insight and camaraderie have always boosted my spirits when I felt we weren't making a difference. My deepest gratitude goes to Pam Layman, Shelby Lowen, Julie Misak, Vrenda Pritchard, and Linda Sessions, the faculty mentors who are the heart of this study. These ladies have mentored suspended students for several years and have shaped my commitment to and vision for this program. With their guidance, many suspended students have found their way out of academic peril and achieved their goals. I want to also acknowledge and thank my family for helping me make it through this journey. My husband and daughter have been my biggest cheerleaders. They have sacrificed time with me, endured my obsession with this research, and still found it in their hearts to love me. Finally, and most importantly, I must thank my mom for knowing that her first-generation daughter must go to college so

long ago in 1987. She learned how to fill out the FAFSA, let me live at home, and made sure that I went to college, all while being a single mom. Those struggles have given me the passion for helping students who just need someone to cheer them on.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Postsecondary institutions face the challenge of retaining undergraduate students and seeing them through to graduation. Retention rates are " . . . the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall . . . " (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020, para. 1). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), 81% of first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students at four-year institutions enrolled in fall 2017 were retained. However, only 62% of first-time, full-time degree-seeking students at two-year institutions were retained. The retention rates for first-time, part-time students were lower than those for full-time students. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse (2020) revealed that 24.4% of first-time students who enrolled on a part-time basis left college after the first year compared to only 13.1% of full-time students.

Lack of integration into the college environment can often lead a student to academic and/or financial aid suspension (Kelley, 1996; Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2014), which negatively impacts retention and persistence of students (Tinto, 1993). Once suspended, the chances of graduating decrease, according to Denovchek (1992), who studied the persistence of previously suspended students at a large public college and found that approximately 25% went on to graduate or continue enrollment. Berkovitz and O'Quin (2006) also found that academically suspended students were less likely to graduate than their peers who were in good academic standing. While suspended students may be required to sit out a specified amount of time before returning to school, this stop-out period may not benefit them (Dill, Gilbert, Hill, Minchew, &

Sempier, 2010; Johnson, 2006). Johnson (2006) found that students who stop out, or do not attend college for a period of time, for any reason, have a higher rate of attrition. Furthermore, Dill, Gilbert, Hill, Minchew, and Sempier (2010) studied the effectiveness of an intrusive intervention for at-risk students and found that it " . . . demonstrated that an active intervention process for suspended students is more effective in retention than requiring them to stay out of school for a semester" (p. 285). Knowing that an intervention process has helped students become integrated into the college environment highlights the importance of higher education administrators making intervention strategy a priority (Hoell, 2006; Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001).

Administrators are responsible for assisting suspended students reentry into an institution if the student's suspension appeal is granted. Interventions and retention efforts vary, but one effective method may be mentoring. Salinitri (2005) stated "Mentoring is about creating an enduring and meaningful relationship with another person, with the focus on the quality of that relationship including such factors as mutual respect, willingness to learn from each other, or the use of interpersonal skills" (p. 858). Bierema and Merriam (2002) describe a mentor as a wise person, guide, or friend. It is agreed that mentoring can happen in different situations, such as organizational or educational settings, and can have a profound effect on the mentor and protege (Bierema & Merriam, 2002; DeAngelo, Mason, & Winters, 2016; Henry, Bruland, & Sano-Franchini, 2011; Rose, Rukstalis, & Schuckit, 2005; Salinitri, 2005). In higher education, mentorship is effective when there is an emotional commitment " . . . beyond sharing degree requirements and academic information" (Baker & Griffin, 2010, p. 4). In fact, we know that effective mentoring, whether informal or formal, increases college student

retention for all types of students (Austin, 2006). However, the question remains if a structured faculty/student mentoring program for suspended students could help them overcome their academic success barriers. This study will examine a faculty/student mentoring program and its effects on persistence, academic self-management behaviors, and students' perceptions of mentoring.

Background

Students encounter many difficulties that may cause them to be involuntarily suspended from college (Houle, 2013). If college students do not maintain satisfactory grades, they may choose to withdraw from courses to avoid academic repercussions. However, suppose students decide to remain in classes and earn unsatisfactory grades. In that case, they may be put on academic probation and eventually academic suspension, based on their institution's academic grade suspension policy (Houle, 2013). Students who receive federal financial aid are also subject to suspension if they have not met their institution's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy standards (Federal Student Aid: An Office of the U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Houle (2013) found five factors that may lead a student to be academically suspended. These factors include not being integrated into the college environment, earlier life experiences, financial issues, not using the support services, and reluctance to seek help. In a study conducted by Isaak, Graves, and Mayers (2006), it was found that students on probation had more significant emotional and stress-related barriers to academic success than their peers in good academic standing.

Additionally, probationary students identified procrastination, time management, and study skills as obstacles to their academic progress (Isaak, Graves, & Mayers, 2006).

Holland (2005) studied students on probation, their reasons for being put on probation, and how to build self-efficacy for probationary students. Students in the study reported several contributing factors to their probation status, including inadequate preparation for coursework, employment demands, personal illness, caregiver responsibilities, and parenting. Overall, several circumstances precipitate suspension, but what about the consequences of suspension?

Students who appeal their academic or financial aid suspension and are allowed to return to school face barriers to success (Suchan, 2016). Research has shown that a low-developed academic identity can lead to stress and impact students' feelings of self-worth, which can decrease their motivation to succeed academically (Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn, & Chase, 2003; Houle, 2013; Suchan, 2016). Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn, and Chase (2003) studied the effects of grades on engineering and psychology majors and found that " . . . students whose self-worth was highly contingent on academics were especially affected by bad grades" (p. 513). It was also posited that "This pattern of results is consistent with the idea that academically contingent students are especially vigilant for failure. For them, academic failure indicates that they are worthless; consequently, they respond to disappointing outcomes with more intense decreases in affect as well as drops in self-esteem" (Crocker et al., 2003, p. 513). Houle (2013) found that as a result of suspension, students faced different emotional consequences. These consequences, which included shame, isolation from the college, loneliness, embarrassment, depression, and anxiety, may impact students' success once they have been reinstated and should be addressed by the institution's administrators or leaders.

If students are reinstated and allowed to return to college, they may need a support system to help them overcome the behaviors that led to the suspension. Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) stated "Students who are struggling academically may benefit from career planning assistance in determining academic goals. Time management, study skills, anxiety management, and an appropriate course load may also be helpful for building confidence, and, ultimately, academic success" (p. 287). In all, institutions must find ways to help at-risk students deal effectively with the consequences of suspension and their personal and academic barriers to success (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Houle, 2013; Suchan, 2016).

Formal faculty/student mentoring programs can provide the support that struggling students need (Santos & Reigadas, 2000). Interaction with faculty and peers, including informal interactions, helps students succeed in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Studies show that students have higher persistence rates in college if they have a positive faculty mentor (Peele, 2010; Grantham, Robinson, & Chapman, 2015). However, these studies routinely focus on informal faculty/student mentorship. While positive, informal mentorship is ineffective for those students who choose not to articulate their needs and reach out to faculty. First-generation students, whose parents have no postsecondary experience, are an example of students who lack knowledge of higher education (McFadden, 2016; Redford & Hoyer, 2017). They often don't reach out for assistance and are generally reticent to ask questions and advice of faculty, leaving them isolated from informal mentorship (Jenkins, Miyazaki, & Janosik, 2009). Similarly, adult learners have many stressors outside of their academic pursuits, such as family and

career, and may not have the time or energy to connect with faculty in an informal manner (Wyatt, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Many higher education institutions have structured mentorship programs in specific academic areas that contribute to students' overall academic and personal success. Studies have found that formal academic programs explicitly designed to enhance academic performance and personal development are effective (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, the impact of structured mentoring programs on suspended students' cumulative GPA, completion of academic goals, perceived study and time management skills, and students' perceptions of a mentoring program's impact on their academic performance has not been extensively studied. This mixed methods study is designed to quantify the effect of a structured mentoring program and seeks to provide a qualitative lens through which to understand students' narratives. To truly understand mentoring, one must have a clear picture of students' perceptions of a mentoring program on their academic performance in addition to the quantitative outcomes. The current study is intended to decrease the shortage of research about structured faculty/student mentoring programs for suspended students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods convergent parallel study was to assess the effects of structured mentoring on students who had been on academic and/or financial aid suspension at a Midwestern technical college in Kansas. The quantitative part of the study examined the differences in GPA and the students' frequency with completing academic goals from beginning to end of the mentoring program. Additionally, the

quantitative part of the study examined the impact of mentoring on the students' perceived study skills and time management skills. In the qualitative part, 8-10 mentoring program completers were interviewed for a more detailed understanding of the program. The interviews allowed the participants to share their perceptions of the mentoring program's impact on their academic performance. The intent of this research was to analyze the traits of suspended students, the factors that can lead to suspension, the challenges they face if reinstated, and how intentional, structured mentoring from faculty can provide an additional layer of support for them.

Significance of the Study

This study provided insight on the effects of a faculty/student structured mentoring program on students who have been on suspension. There is limited research addressing suspended students and their journey after being reinstated. Suchan (2016) stated:

> Despite the significant amount of research that exists on college student experiences and, in particular, college student attrition and retention, there is a dearth of research on students who have been academically suspended and later reinstated. There is even less empirical research on students who have experienced both ends of the academic continuum: academic suspension and subsequent academic success. (pp. 201-202)

Researchers have recommended that more research be conducted on how to retain suspended students (Houle, 2013; Suchan, 2016). Specifically, Suchan (2016) noted that more qualitative research that " . . . explores the experience and academic resilience of academically suspended college students from a qualitative standpoint must be

conducted-giving voice to these students' perspectives and insight into their lifeworlds" (p. 202). The current study sought to fill this gap in research by focusing on both quantitative and qualitative data exploration. Previously suspended students in the mentoring program were interviewed to gain deeper insight into their experiences after being reinstated to the institution and working with their mentor.

The findings of this study are valuable to student support services, faculty, and administrators in higher education who are seeking to improve or implement intrusive interventions for students who have been reinstated after being on academic and/or financial aid suspension. Houle (2013) studied suspended students and found that those students benefitted from unstructured and voluntary communication from their advisors, and recommended that institutions " . . . increase direct communication with students on academic suspension" (p. 92). Student services administrators and personnel may use this research to integrate mentoring strategies into their services, thus creating more robust communication and support strategies for suspended students who have been reinstated. The results of this study are also valuable to faculty and academic administrators who are seeking to increase retention of suspended students through mentoring initiatives.

Delimitations

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008) "Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study" (p. 134). The study was delimited to at-risk students in one institution who had been on academic or financial aid suspension. Students in the study were mentored during spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, and fall 2019 semesters. The students involved in this study had

declared a general education major or a pre-tech health studies pathway. Only students who were enrolled in classes at the beginning of the semester and enrolled in the second eight weeks of classes were included in the study. Students starting at mid-semester, who had only eight weeks in which to complete the requirements of the program, could feel stressed about the time commitment necessary for the mentoring program and were therefore not included in the study.

Assumptions

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) described assumptions as " . . . postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research" (p. 135). The following assumptions were made for this study:

- Participants understood the survey questions completely and answered them honestly.
- Participants were actively involved in the mentoring program.
- Faculty mentors followed the mentoring program structure and completed mentoring duties in good faith.
- The participants understood the interview questions and answered them to the best of their knowledge.

Research Questions

Five research questions which were based upon the research as stated in the Background section of Chapter 1, were utilized to examine the effectiveness of a formal faculty/student mentoring program.

Quantitative Research Questions

Research Question 1. To what extent is there a difference in students' cumulative GPA before and after the mentoring program?

Research Question 2. To what extent is there a difference in the frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program?

Research Question 3. To what extent is there a difference in students' perceived study skills before and after the mentoring program?

Research Question 4. To what extent is there a difference in students' perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program?

Qualitative Research Questions

Research Question 1. What were students' perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on their academic performance?

Definition of Terms

1. Academic Suspension: "Students on Academic Grade Probation who, at the conclusion of their probationary semester, do not achieve a cumulative GPA of 2.0" (WSU Tech's Academic Code of Conduct policy 5-01).
2. Adult Learners: Adult learners are categorized as 25 years of age and older (Kasworm, 2014). They have not attained an undergraduate degree but may have attained some college credits. According to Wyatt (2011), these students are also referred to as nontraditional students.
3. Financial Aid Suspension: A status a school assigns to a student placed on financial aid warning but failed to make satisfactory academic progress during the warning period (WSU Tech's SAP policy 3-13).

4. Financial Aid Warning: "A status a school assigns to a student who is failing to make satisfactory academic progress. The school reinstates eligibility for aid for one payment period and may do so without a student appeal" (Federal Student Aid, 2018, p. 1-15).
5. First-Generation Students: Students who are the first in their family to attend college (McFadden, 2016).
6. Formal Mentoring: For this study, students are paired with a faculty mentor and required to work with that mentor on academic skills development as a stipulation of their post-suspension academic plan. Formal mentors are usually trained in some aspects of mentoring and don't have a prior relationship with the student, according to Rose, Rukstalis, and Schuckit (2005).
7. Informal Mentoring: Relationships that develop from non-mandatory, out-of-class interactions between students and faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
8. Mentor: For the purposes of this study, a mentor is a faculty member at the institution selected for this study and participating in the institution's formal mentoring program. A student who has been on suspension has been assigned to the faculty member to receive extra guidance. The faculty member usually does not have any prior interaction with the assigned student and works with the student on prescribed concepts to help the student succeed in college.
9. Mentoring: According to Rose et al. (2005) mentoring is " . . . a naturally formed, one-to-one, mutual, committed, nonsexual relationship between a junior and senior person designed to promote professional development, beyond any particular curricular or institutional goals" (p. 345).

Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter one covers the background, statement of the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. Delimitations, assumptions, research questions, and definitions of terms are included in chapter one. Chapter two explores the literature that is relevant to the topic. Chapter three summarizes the methodology of the study, including the research design, selection of participants, measurement instruments, and data collection procedures. Data analysis and integration, reliability and trustworthiness, researcher's role, and limitations are also detailed in chapter three. The results of the study are discussed in chapter four, and chapter five focuses on the conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The literature on suspended students and mentoring was reviewed to define the scope and current understanding of persistence, academic self-management behaviors, and perceptions of mentoring. In this literature review, the process of academic and financial aid suspension will be discussed, in addition to the traits of suspended students and factors that could precipitate suspension. Support systems and interventions for reinstated suspended students will also be explored, ending with the examination of structured faculty/student mentoring programs and their perceived effect on academically at-risk students.

Suspended Students

> In regard to the hopeful students who enter college each fall, Gates (2017) stated: But here's a sobering statistic that should concern us all: Based on the latest college completion trends, only about half of all those students (54.8%) will leave college with a diploma. The rest—most of them low-income, first-generation, and minority students—will not finish a degree. They'll drop out. (para. 2)

Some students have a difficult time adjusting to college. Tinto (2012) declared "The academic difficulties, social isolation, and sheer sense of bewilderment which often accompanies the transition may pose real problems for the individual. . . . Some are simply unable to clear the first hurdle to college completion and withdraw from further participation" (p. 46). Additionally, students are not all equipped to meet the academic standards of their chosen institution. If these standards cannot be met, students face probation or, worse, suspension. Tinto (1993) concluded "Though some students

experiencing academic difficulty will withdraw voluntarily to avoid the stigma of failure, many will endure until forced to leave" (p. 48).

While there are a plethora of reasons that precipitate failure in college, academic or financial aid suspension can be a significant factor in a student's decision to drop out of higher education (Denovchek, 1992; Houle, 2013). Academic probation, which can lead to academic suspension, is a common scenario in higher education. Chivukula & Renn (2017) observed that probation rates are not nationally tracked, but that "One empirical estimate is that about 20% of students at four-year institutions will end their first year of college in academic jeopardy" (para. 6). According to Kelley (1996):

> When a student is placed on probation, he or she is given the rationale for probation ("your GPA [Grade Point Average] has fallen below a predetermined level") and criteria for being removed from probation ("you must attain a GPA this term of at least …"). The consequences of failing to meet the stated criteria usually include dismissal from the college. (p. 28)

Students who choose to remain in classes and earn unsatisfactory grades may enter academic probation, and eventually, academic suspension, based on their institution's academic grade suspension policy (Houle, 2013).

Furthermore, students who receive federal financial aid are also subject to suspension if they have not met their institution's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy standards (Federal Student Aid, 2017). Schudde & Scott-Clayton (2014) reported findings of their 2014 study and stated "The results suggest that a substantial portion of Pell recipients at community colleges are at-risk for Pell ineligibility due to their failure to meet SAP grade point average (GPA) or credit completion requirements.

Approximately one-fourth fail to meet the GPA standard alone. When the credit completion requirement is taken into consideration, the first-year SAP failure rate approaches 40%" (para. 2). In brief, a suspension status has an impact on voluntary or involuntary withdrawal from college.

Traits of Students in Academic Jeopardy

While academic and financial aid suspension can create dire consequences for college students, specific student traits that contribute to a suspension status, or lack of persistence in completing their education, warrant further exploration. Student bodies are now composed of diverse groups of people whose characteristics and life experiences may create obstacles to success in college. "Of just the current undergraduate college student population, 52.9% are non-Hispanic white, 20.9% are Hispanic, 15.1% are black, and 7.6% are Asian, while graduate students are 61.2% white non-Hispanic, 13.6% Hispanic, 12.3% black, and 11.2% Asian" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018, para. 4). Furthermore, there are more women than men enrolled in higher education, with 54.9% at undergraduate status and 59.8% at graduate status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The number of adult learners has also increased since 2006. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the number of students age 25 and over increased by 11% between 2006 and 2016. Additionally, 7.4 million students 25 years old and over are expected to enroll in college for fall 2019. However, the number of students under age 25 also increased by 13% between 2006 and 2016 and is projected to increase by 5% between 2016 and 2027 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Finally, "Nearly a third of undergraduate students in the United States are first-generation" (EAB, 2019, para. 1).

Students from any background can encounter persistence issues in higher education, but some characteristics seem to precipitate academic jeopardy predominantly. Freer-Weiss (2004) posited "the characteristics . . . found in students who are not retained are also the characteristics of non-traditional students, academically 'at-risk' students and the general population attending community colleges" (p. 139). Researchers have overwhelmingly found a correlation between lower socioeconomic status and lack of persistence (Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1988; Hoell, 2006; Lichtenstein, 2002; Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003).

> For example, students from low-income families may, on average, attend lower quality elementary and secondary schools, receive less encouragement from their families to take advantage of beneficial schooling opportunities within a particular school, receive less educational instruction at home, be less likely to have parents who stress the importance of obtaining a college degree, or receive less encouragement to remain in college when academic or social difficulties arise during college. (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003, p. 593)

Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (2003) found in a study of students at a full tuition subsidy college that family income has a direct impact on a student staying in college. "The probability that the person with a $40,000 family income remains in school for more than six full terms is 25% higher than the probability that the person with $5,000 in family income remains in school more than six full terms" (p. 602). According to Zeisman (2012), financial difficulties affect college students in general, and can "be burdensome and lead students to work more hours (if possible), or spend a considerable

amount of time under stress about how to pay for tuition, books, housing, and other expenses" (p. 108).

First-Generation

While low-income students encounter persistence issues, it is commonly agreed that first-generation students also face challenges in higher education that their continuing-generation peers don't encounter as frequently. First-generation students are those whose parents, whether adoptive or biological, have no postsecondary experience (McFadden, 2016; Redford & Hoyer, 2017). Some of the challenges that first-generation students face include lack of knowledge about college, low-income families, lack of family support, subpar college readiness, and other barriers (McFadden, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2006). Zeisman (2012) further explained that first-generation students have many of the traits of students on probation and that "These characteristics include hours worked per term, less rigorous academic preparation, family obligations, and having to commute to campus" (pp. 51-52).

Due to these obstacles, first-generation students are less likely than continuing-generation students to attend college and more likely than non-first-generation students to drop out of college (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Choy, 2001). Henry (2014) explained that:

> Students who have had family members previously enrolled in a university have the benefit of life narratives to help guide them along the path, providing empathetic and knowledgeable support when things are rough. Without a similar support system and corresponding cultural values with regards to education, it seems unreasonable to expect first-generation students to perform on the same level. (p. 11)

Low-income, first-generation students may have a higher probability of delaying college, working full-time, and attending college only part-time. Additionally, they are more likely to attend college closer to home and live off-campus (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students may have the challenge of not having family members, such as parents, to call for guidance when they have questions about college. Consequently, this results in extra pressure and stress on the student to build a support network of faculty, mentors, role models, and advisors. This lack of guidance can result in decisions that could negatively affect their education (Fishman, Ludgate, & Tutak, 2017; Reid & Moore, 2008).

First-generation students also have a higher probability of coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, leaving them with fewer financial resources to pay for college, contributing to lower persistence (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Evans, 2016). "A larger percentage of first-generation college students than continuing-generation students came from lower earning households; that is, households making $20,000 or less (27 vs. 6%) and $20,001 to $50,000 (50 vs. 23%)" (Redford, 2017, p. 4). Due to this disparity in socioeconomic status, first-generation students may be more dependent on student loans than their continuing-generation peers and have an increased propensity to leave college due to the cost. Redford and Hoyer (2017) stated "A higher percentage of first-generation college students (54%) than continuing-generation students (45%) reported they could not afford to continue going to school as a reason for leaving college without a postsecondary credential" (p. 4).

College Readiness

Furthermore, lower socioeconomic status leads to additional challenges for first-generation students. These students often come to college unprepared for the rigors of college-level work, coming out of high school with lower GPAs, ACT and SAT scores, and lacking the self-management behaviors to persist in college classrooms (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Conley (2008) defined college readiness as " . . . the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed-without remediation-in a credit-bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program" (p. 24). Lack of academic preparation for college precipitates a higher probability for first-generation students to be placed in remedial level courses. Chen and Carroll (2005), in a study of the course-taking habits of first-generation students, discovered that once in college, first-generation students' course-taking practices and academic performance lagged behind their peers. They tended to complete fewer credits and trailed behind their peers in academic achievement. Moreover, they were also more likely to be enrolled in remediation courses and were more likely to withdraw from courses or repeat them. These results led to lower bachelor's degree completion compared to their continuing-generation counterparts. Chen and Carroll (2005) found that:

> First-generation students, in particular, needed remedial help: 55% took remedial courses during their college years, compared with 27% of their counterparts whose parents held bachelor's or advanced degrees. . . . Among those with bachelor's degree goals who attended 4-year institutions, 45% of first-generation

> students took at least one remedial course, compared with 21% of students whose parents had at least bachelor's degrees. (p. 12)

Additionally, first-generation students are more likely to attend community colleges, less likely to graduate on time, and more likely to choose careers that help their communities by working in the public and not-for-profit sectors, which pay less than for-profit fields (EAB, 2018). They are also less likely to have a mentor and do not know where to turn for assistance when dealing with processes at their college (EAB, 2018). The challenges of navigating colleges' systems may be more difficult for first-generation students whose parents have not attended college and can't lend much guidance. "First-generation students could not receive help from parents in the admissions process due to a lack of "college knowledge" about how to prepare for, apply to, and pay for college" (Engle et al., 2006, p. 39). This lack of guidance can lead to increased disillusionment with college and an increased propensity toward dropping out of college altogether. Chen and Carroll (2005) found in a National Center for Education Statistics longitudinal study that first-generation students were more likely to start at a community college but less likely to enroll full time and continuously. Even with those considered well-prepared academically, the persistence rates were lower than their peers with college-educated parents and higher rates of leaving college without a degree. Redford and Hoyer (2017) further found that "Ten years after they were sophomores in high school, a lower percentage of first-generation college students than continuing-generation students had obtained a bachelor's degree (20 vs. 42%)" (p. 4).

Minority Status

While first-generation students, in general, have persistence challenges, minority students, who often come from lower socioeconomic and first-generation households, also tend to have lower rates of college readiness and persistence. Melzer and Grant (2016), who investigated the personality traits of underprepared first-year college students, found that minority students are more likely to be less prepared for college than other groups of students. They also are underrepresented in higher education. Kim (2011) reported that:

> The younger generation in the United States no longer achieves a much higher level of education than its predecessors. As of 2009, 37.8% of U.S. adults aged 25 to 29 had obtained at least an associate degree, only marginally higher than adults aged 30 and older (35.1%). Only two groups, Asian Americans and whites, made notable gains over their elders (65.6% versus 54.2%, and 44.9% versus 38.5%, respectively). No gains were observed for African Americans and Hispanics (24.7% versus 25.0%, and 17.9% versus 17.9%, respectively). For American Indians, however, attainment rates for young adults were lower than their older counterparts (16.9% versus 21.6%). (p. 1)

Adult Learners

While first-generation and minority students encounter problems in college, adult learners also have unique challenges in higher education that their traditional counterparts may not experience. These challenges can create dissonance in adult learners' academic endeavors that, if not addressed, lead to persistence issues. MacKinnon-Slaney (1994) stated "The entry into higher learning is a major turning point for many adults. This is a

transition that potentially can change the life course and has short-range and long-range implications. It requires dedication and commitment on the part of adults who have multiple commitments" (p. 271). Research has shown that adult learners have different stressors than traditional students that may prevent them from being successful in college, including family, child care, work conflicts, and gaps between high school and college attendance (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Kasworm, 2014; Montfort, 2017; Tinto, 2006). Giancola, Grawitch, and Borchert (2009) conducted a study of the effects of different stressors on adult students in which the results showed that "Adult students tended to report their greatest stressors coming from the workplace. They rated workplace stressors significantly higher than personal life stressors . . . ", and " . . . their personal life stressors significantly higher than their school stressors . . . " (p. 252). Kasworm (2014) agreed that " . . . most adult undergraduates are typically not able to be intensively involved due to work and family obligations, to the financial demands of full-time enrollment, to enrollment in distance education, or to participation in evening/weekend/accelerated degree programs. Thus, there is a disjuncture between an assumed ideal world of student engagement and the reality of adult student life commitments" (p. 69).

Due to increased responsibilities, adult learners tend to enroll only part-time rather than full-time (Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Lundberg, 2003). Furthermore, part-time enrolled students are less likely to persist than those who are enrolled full-time (Lundberg, 2003). Adult learners have unique questions that they must ask as they face the challenge of higher education.

> How am I adjusting to this life transition (divorce, loss of job, birth of a baby, death of a spouse, promotion, new opportunity, return to school)? What coping skills do I have? Am I adapting adequately to the return to school? How will my family react to all the study time I need next term? How can I balance my time and my responsibilities more effectively at the end of the term when papers are due and exams are scheduled? Will this transition back to school work out for me? How can I be effective in this educational environment? (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994, p. 271)

Additionally, adult learners don't typically have financial assistance from their parents, and a lack of financial resources may impact adult students' persistence rates. In a study of 437 returning adult students, between the ages of 25-67, enrolled in a Bachelor of Science program in Workforce Leadership or Occupational Training and Development, Bergman, Gross, Berry, and Shuck (2014) found " . . . no significant differences in persistence outcomes by gender, race/ethnicity, or age" (p. 97). However, those who did persist tended to " . . . more strongly agree that their instructor/advisor was responsive, that they received encouragement from home, and felt the institution overall was responsive to their needs. Prior learning assessments and receipt of financial aid were also positively associated with persistence" (p. 97). Consequently, the study concluded that adult learners who agreed that they had the money to finish college had higher chances of persistence than those who did not.

Combination of factors

Overall, the first-generation, minority, and adult-learner traits can combine to create a tenuous narrative for students in their first year of college. Engle & Tinto (2008)

found in a Pell Institute report that low-income, first-generation students, are "nearly four times more likely – 26 to 7% – to leave higher education after the first year than students who had neither of these risk factors" (p. 11). Moreover, the authors reported that low-income, first-generation students have higher rates of leaving after the first year of college, no matter what kind of institution they attend (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Low-income, first-generation students also have other dominant traits, such as minority status.

> As our analysis shows, they face a number of challenges that make it difficult for them to be successful in college. They disproportionately come from ethnic and racial minority backgrounds with lower rates of college participation. They also tend to be older, less likely to receive financial support from parents, and more likely to have multiple obligations outside college, like family and work, that limit their full participation in the college experience. They take fewer classes each semester as they balance these multiple obligations, and frequently stop out as family circumstances—such as changes in jobs, finances, and health—dictate. (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 20)

Often, low-income, minority, and first-generation students are also adult learners, which further increases the likelihood of lower persistence. For example, in a study of undergraduate, minority adult learners, Montfort (2017) found that the participants who had performed poorly academically reported that,

> . . . lack of preparation was the general sentiment of the subthemes, which were: I wasn't prepared, lack of high school preparation, lack of course preparation, and online courses were among those areas discussed. Even though the nine participants in the study had prior college experiences, each of them stated they

> lacked preparation. One participant indicated that the courses he did not do well in while in high school were the same courses he failed in college. This led him to struggle in the classroom. (p. 105)

In summary, any student at any time can make decisions that plunge him or her into academic jeopardy. Still, there are several characteristics and life-experience factors that may build obstacles to their success in college. These contributing factors that put students at-risk include first-generation background, lack of college readiness, minority status, and being an adult learner. Additionally, these characteristics often accompany one another and can create negative persistence scenarios for students. These scenarios, which will be discussed in the next section, are further exacerbated by environmental factors in college, such as the social and academic domains and academic challenges that are difficult for at-risk students to overcome and can lead to academic suspension.

Causes of Suspension

Transition to College

Unsatisfactory grades trigger academic probation and subsequent suspension, but deeper issues contribute to academic difficulties that warrant exploration. The transition to college can be challenging for some students and can lead to low retention. Feldman and Newcomb (1969) found that first-year undergraduate students' self-image was "Compounded by frustrations involved in moving from a system where one is an established member -- the former high school and home community -- to a system where one is only a novice. Therefore, regardless of the degree to which the new college environment matches what the entering freshman expected, he [or she] faces a variety of unexpected academic, intellectual, and social challenges" (p. 89).

Lowe and Cook (2003) conducted a study of first-year students, their prior perceptions of college life, and their progress after one semester. The results showed that most of the students in the study had successfully managed their transition to college, but approximately 20-30% still had academic, social, personal, and practical difficulties. These students struggled to find the balance between work and school commitments, academic workloads, the lack of effective study skills, finances, and adjusting to life away from home. Lowe & Cook (2003) concluded,

> The problem associated with inaccurate prior perceptions is that it contributes to a disengagement from the educational (and social) aspects of university life. Such disengagement can have a detrimental effect on academic performance and the personal and social development of the individual. This, in turn, may have a direct impact on student retention. (p. 74)

Tinto (2012) agreed that the transition could be challenging. "The academic difficulties, social isolation, and sheer sense of bewilderment which often accompanies the transition may pose real problems for the individual. . . . Some are simply unable to clear the first hurdle to college completion and withdraw from further participation" (Tinto, 2012, p. 46). Reid and Moore (2008) also concluded that the transition can be overwhelming and that there is a need for families and schools to collaborate on helping students transition from high school to college. The study found that students tend to require more instruction on applying for college, the rigors of college coursework, technology, study skills, and time management strategies.

Integration into Institution

Students often have a more difficult transition to college when they don't feel integrated into the institution's social and academic domains. Tinto's Interactionist Theory stresses the necessity of academic and social integration and that student attrition is not always due to a student's traits or signal a shortcoming in that individual (Tinto, 1993).

> Interactive experiences which further one's social and intellectual integration are seen to enhance the likelihood that the individual will persist within the institution until degree completion, because of the impact integrative experiences have upon the continued reformulation of individual goals and commitments. Positive integration serves to raise one's goals and strengthen one's commitments both to those goals and to the institution within which they may be attained. (Tinto, 1993, p. 116)

Lack of integration into an institution's academic domain has a moderate effect on persistence for adult, non-traditional learners (Sandler, 2002). Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) described academic integration as the level at which the student is involved in the academic and intellectual life of the institution. Institutions that include students by providing them a road map to graduation, and supporting them academically, increase retention and graduation rates for those at all higher education institutions (Tinto, 1999). Lichtenstein (2002) concluded that "The greatest contributors to Hispanic student persistence are factors that increase student integration into college. Academic achievement in the early semesters of the college career, a measure of academic integration, is the strongest predictor of persistence" (p. 17).

Lack of integration into the social environment can further negatively impact persistence (Tinto, 1993). In a study of primarily female undergraduate, minority adult students, who had experienced academic difficulty, Montfort (2017) found that "Generally, the participants believed that a sense of belonging was needed in the classroom to develop inclusion and social integration" (p. 112). Additionally, participants in the Montfort (2017) study noted how interactions with faculty and staff had been positive and that they were able to develop social connections with classmates and faculty and staff. While social connections help students flourish in college, research has shown that first-generation, low-income, and racial/ethnic minority students struggle with social integration and building their social capital (Tinto, 1993). According to Terenzini (1995), first-generation students require more social integration since they spend less time socializing and have more difficulty making the academic and social transitions from high school to college. Furthermore, first-generation community college students often live off-campus and have jobs that prohibit them from engaging in extracurricular activities, which further complicates their assimilation into higher education (Jenkins et al., 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Moreover, first-generation students often don't understand the benefits of creating positive communication with instructors. Schwartz, Kanchewa, Rhodes, Cutler, and Cunningham (2016) studied 14 underrepresented (low-income, racial or ethnic minority, and/or first-generation) high school seniors who attended a summer workshop to help prepare them for college and found that they had little understanding of social capital and how to build it. In pre-interviews, most students communicated that they were hesitant, for many reasons, to reach out to faculty or search for assistance from a mentor or staff

member. The most commonly noted barrier was their " . . . tendency to rely primarily on themselves and their families" (Schwartz, Kanchewa, Rhodes, Cutler, & Cunningham, 2016, p. 55). In all,

> The frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff, and other students have repeatedly been shown to be independent predictors of student persistence. This is true for large and small, rural and urban, public and private, and 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. It is true for women as well as men, students of color and Anglo students, and part-time and full-time students. Simply put, involvement matters, and at no point does it matter more than during the first year of college when student attachments are so tenuous and the pull of the institution still so weak. (Tinto, 1999, p. 6)

College Readiness

The lack of college readiness can further exacerbate the difficulties of the transition to college. According to Conley (2008) "College readiness can be defined as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program" (p. 24). Tinto (2012) stated that "Academic difficulty typically reflects a situation in which the demands of the academic system prove too great" (p. 117). Academic preparedness, or lack thereof, is often a culprit in academic struggles. Even high-achieving students enter college unprepared to navigate a new environment and lack the academic skills needed for collegial level studies (Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, Von Hippel & Lerner, 1998).

Tinto (2012) posited that more students from diverse backgrounds are entering college ill-equipped to effectively deal with the academic requirements of college, therefore increasing the probability of academic dismissal. "Though some students experiencing academic difficulty will withdraw voluntarily to avoid the stigma of failure, many will endure until forced to leave" (Tinto, 2012, p. 48). According to the 2019 ACT annual report, the percentage of ACT-tested graduates ready for college classwork (37%) was lower than the previous year (38%). Additionally, 36% of 2019 graduates met none of the ACT benchmarks, representing an increase from 2018, which was 35% (ACT, 2019). Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) asserted "If standards are set too high, beyond the reach of students' current ability to perform, many will struggle, become frustrated, and perform poorly" (p. 124). The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board (2010) identified the critical issues in the college readiness debate and reported in 2010 that nearly 60% of students in the United States were not academically prepared for the rigors of college-level work. This report concluded that the college readiness gap in public colleges and universities is very high in less-selective four-year and open-access two-year institutions. At the same time, it is nominal in selective four-year colleges.

Remedial education is the common route for underprepared students, which does not earn college credits and often leads to delayed or never reached graduation dates (Chen, 2016; Ganga, Mazzariello, & Edgecombe, 2018; The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). According to Bautsch (2013) "Remedial education refers to classes taken on a college campus that are below college-level. Students pay tuition and can use financial aid for

remedial courses, but they do not receive college credit" (p. 1). The goal of remedial courses is to improve students' competency level in the subject matter so they may be successful in a college-level credit-bearing class (Ganga et al., 2018). Underprepared students often require remediation in math and English, and "All told, as many as 60% of incoming freshmen require some remedial instruction" (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, p. 2). Kramer, Osgood, Bernotsky, Wolff, Merlino, Garcia, and Kramer (2016) stated " . . . 28% to 40% of students enroll in a remedial course at least once in their college careers" (p. 435). Additionally, Chen (2016) reiterated that remediation levels are high, particularly at community colleges, where more than two-thirds of the students are required to take at least one remedial level course. It was also found that four in 10 students at public four-year institutions have to take remedial level courses and that

> . . . college remediation overall was widespread, affecting both disadvantaged and advantaged populations. For example, among students who began at public 2-year institutions and came from high-income or college-educated families, a majority participated in remedial education (59% and 65%, respectively). Among students who began at 4-year institutions, about a third of students in these groups (33% and 31%, respectively) participated in remedial education. In addition, nearly 30% of students who entered highly selective 4-year institutions took one or more remedial courses during their undergraduate career. (Chen, 2016, p. vi)

Overall, the outcomes of remedial education are not always positive, and students who have taken remedial level courses take longer to earn a degree and have a decreased

chance of earning a degree or credential (Bautsch, 2013; Ganga et al., 2018; Jimenez, Sargrad, Morales, & Thompson, 2016).

Self-Management Behaviors

While the lack of academic preparedness is a leading cause of academic probation and eventually suspension, other factors in students' lives contribute to this challenge. The most prevalent factors are self-management behaviors.

> Also contributing to student success is a set of academic self-management behaviors. Among these are time management, strategic study skills, and awareness of one's true performance, persistence and the ability to utilize study groups. These self-management behaviors require students to demonstrate high degrees of self-awareness, self-control and intentionality. (Conley, 2008, p. 24)

Mastery of study and time management skills, family and work commitments, and financial management are essential to building the necessary self-management behaviors for a successful higher education experience (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Conley, 2008; Holland, 2005; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips, 1990). "Another important set of academic behaviors is student mastery of study skills necessary for college success. Important study-skill behaviors include time management, stress management, task prioritizing, using information resources, taking class notes, and communicating with teachers and advisors" (Conley, 2008, p. 26).

Students often identify time management and other self-management issues as reasons for academic jeopardy (Isaak et al., 2006). In a survey of probationary students who attended an academic success workshop, it was found that the reasons for their probation included poor preparation for course work, employment commitments,

personal illness, and roles of parent and/or caregiver (Holland, 2005). On the other hand, students interviewed by Byrd and MacDonald (2005) identified effective time management skills as necessary for balancing course homework with work and family commitments. Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, and Phillips (1990) found that effective time management skills help students deal with the daily struggles of college. "Students who perceived control of their time reported significantly greater evaluations of their performance, greater work and life satisfaction, less role ambiguity, less role overload, and fewer job-induced and somatic tensions" (p. 760). Macan et al. (1990) additionally concluded " . . . we found that students who had participated in a time management seminar reported engaging more frequently in time management behaviors than did those who had no prior training, but those who had attended the time management workshop experienced no less stress than those who had not" (p. 767).

Mastery of time management and study skills can further be curtailed by family and work commitments. Kelley (1996) explained:

> Sometimes external situations inhibit student performance. "Stable" suggests that environments are unlikely to quickly change. For example; family and social environments are often stable. Students in unhealthy environments that prohibit study and preparation may not be able to change the situation or performance. Other students may lack the social support necessary to value a college education. Some may experience social pressures at college that guide them to behaviors that are not conducive to learning. (p. 30)

In a college readiness study, family factors were noted as a driving force in some of the respondents' higher education endeavors (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005). Some participants

expressed that family obligations had stopped them from attending college, while other respondents communicated the importance of family support and encouragement (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005). Montfort (2017) concluded in a study of undergraduate, minority adult learners, that subjects who had performed poorly academically, reported family responsibilities as a factor. Overall, previous research has shown that adult students have many responsibilities that demand their attention (Tinto, 2006; Wilson, 2016).

Furthermore, adult students who also work find it difficult to prioritize higher education over their job obligations. Even if adult students have support from family, Bergman et al. (2014) found that "However, as students felt more strongly that their work and classes conflicted, their odds of persisting decreased by about 78%" (p. 97). Moreover, Yum, Kember, and Siaw (2005) posited that adult students may not have a great deal of control over their job commitments and may end up being forced into choosing between their education or their job.

Lastly, students without a clear vision of, and commitment to their goals, have a more difficult time finding the motivation to persist in higher education (Houle, 2013; Tinto, 2012). "Presumably either lofty goals or strong commitments, or both, will lead individuals to persist in very difficult circumstances. Conversely, modest goals and/or weak commitments may lead persons to withdraw" (Tinto, 2012, p. 46). Students may lack clarity of goals for various reasons, but one significant factor is their low commitment to their chosen major or program of study. Hoell (2006) explained that "There are other students who are forced into majors, either by their well-intentioned parents, the requirements of a particular scholarship or award, or even misinformation regarding a funding program. The wrong major can, at minimum, make a student

disengaged or miserable and at most, get a student in academic and financial trouble" (p. 133). Additionally, Bergman et al. (2014) found in their study of adult learners that educational goals were highly related to persistence and that as students increased their academic aspirations, " . . . the odds of persisting increased about 90% controlling for all else" (p. 97). Adult learners also need to be confident that education is the answer to their goals to be committed to persistence (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994).

In summary, several environmental and academic elements in higher education can negatively impact students' academic progress and attainment of a degree or credential. While these elements are very common and seem inconsequential, they can lead to academic and/or financial aid suspension, producing dire consequences for the student. The transition to college is often fraught with social, personal, and academic difficulties that can test students' commitment to higher education. Consequently, students who experience a lack of integration into the campus environment can feel a disconnect that drives them to voluntarily or involuntarily withdraw from college. College readiness levels also affect how a student transitions to higher education, and the prospect of having to spend time in remedial level courses can dampen one's enthusiasm for continuing his or her academic journey. Finally, lack of mastery of time management, stress, task prioritization, study skills, and goal commitment can cause students to struggle in a college environment that they are ill-prepared to navigate successfully.

Consequences of Suspension

Once a student starts encountering academic difficulties, he or she may enter academic probation. If the probationary status results in academic suspension or

dismissal from an institution, a student will experience several consequences. Academic probation, as described by Arcand & LeBlanc (2011), " . . . can be seen as a transition between unsatisfactory performance to either acceptable academic standing or to dismissal" (p. 2). Probation, which is the precursor to suspension and not as detrimental to a student's success, can be emotionally damaging, nonetheless. It causes many students to give up on college without even attempting to raise their grades due to a lower sense of academic ability and confidence (Lindo, Sanders, & Oreopoulos, 2010). Houle (2013) declared that academically dismissed students represent 25% of all college departures. In interviews with suspended students, Houle (2013) found that they encountered many different feelings, including embarrassment, humiliation, and shame. Overall, many didn't want others, such as family, faculty, and other college personnel, to know about their academic dismissal. "For many students, the shame of being on academic suspension was so profoundly humiliating that they limited the people with whom they shared this important challenge. As a result, many students felt alone and cut themselves off from the support of their peers or academic professionals" (Houle, 2013, p. 64).

This lack of communication with others and loss of confidence leads to a lack of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy is "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which forms the foundation for other self-efficacy researchers, states that self-efficacy is important because it influences what courses of action individuals choose to take. According to Vuong, Brown-Welty, and Tracz (2010) "Individuals are more inclined to engage in tasks about which they feel

competent and confident and shun those that they do not" (p. 52). Self-efficacy is related to higher persistence rates and college students' overall success, whether it is academically or socially (Bandura, 1986; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). Moreover, Bandura (1986) suggests that people who have high self-efficacy will perform actions that are needed for success, and those with low self-efficacy will not exhibit those needed behaviors and are more likely to fail.

Overall, " . . . a well-developed academic identity, which is reflected in strong academic self-worth, plays a critical role in academic success" (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000, p. 178). In a study of self-efficacy and first-year college students, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) concluded:

> There was compelling support for the role of self-efficacy and optimism in lst-year college students' success and adjustment. Self-efficacy directly and indirectly showed powerful relationships to academic performance and personal adjustment of these lst-year college students. Optimism, through its effects on challenge- threat evaluations, was related to academic performance and adjustment. (p. 61)

Further, in a study of first-generation college students, it was found that positive GPA and persistence rates were a result of academic self-efficacy (Vuong et al., 2010). However, first-generation students fared worse than second-generation students, with lower GPAs and lower academic persistence rates (Vuong et al., 2010). Krumrei, Newton, Kim, and Wilcox (2013) also found in a study of college success in first-year college students that academic self-efficacy and attention to study were predictive of

first-semester end-of-year GPA. Furthermore, adult learners also experience self-efficacy issues since they have been out of high school for a more extended period. They may not know how to navigate the systems and processes at their college and may lack the confidence to advocate for themselves with faculty, staff, and others (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994).

Not only do students suffer emotional consequences from academic probation and suspension, but they also have lower graduation rates.

> Not surprisingly, underrepresented students on probation (GPA below 2.0) after the first semester are the least likely to graduate. This suggests that additional improvements are needed in the nature and type of interventions beyond those required by policy—either when a student enters academic probation or earlier in their college experience. In the absence of such interventions, there is continued risk of not achieving positive individual and societal outcomes. (Gershenfeld, Hood, & Zhan, 2016, p. 483)

Likewise, only a small percentage of suspended students who appeal their suspension and are reinstated to the college achieve academic success in later semesters (Denovchek, 1992; McDermott, 2008).

Support Systems

Holistic Approach

If suspended students are reinstated, institutions need to help them regain and further develop their self-efficacy, increasing their chances for retention and, ultimately, graduation. McGrath & Burd (2012) stated:

> Although often challenging, retention efforts for academically struggling students benefit both the individual and the institution. Higher retention rates typically lead to higher graduation rates, key measures of institutional success. In addition, public institutions have an ethical and fiscal commitment to assist students who are struggling with the academic demands of college rather than passively allowing them to fail. (p. 43)

Assistance for academically struggling students should take a holistic approach and focus on addressing students' academic, as well as their psychosocial barriers (Isaak et al., 2006; Krumrei, Newton, Kim, & Wilcox, 2013; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994; Trombley, 2000; Vander Schee, 2007). White (2019) concluded in a study of first-generation, low-income, and students of color and the effects of a first-year college course that:

> This research study further supports the theories of Tinto and Astin and further supports the need to understand students as holistic individuals with a variety of different needs and challenges. A higher education experience is not simply academic; there are many other factors that affect a student's experience and understanding how to support and connect students to the campus community is integral to being an effective higher education institution. (p. 127)

Krumrei et al. (2013) stated " . . . holistic student success involves both academic performance and life satisfaction" (p. 19). The same finding was echoed in a study by Trombley (2000), who found that students who had performed poorly academically often cited personal problems as the main factor. "Interventions that focus on how to balance their education with their personal commitments would be ideal for these students"

(Trombley, 2000, p. 247). Additionally, MacKinnon-Slaney (1994) stated about adult learners that "A holistic systems approach to individual issues, family issues, and career-education issues blended with an understanding of the university environment and the services that are offered can facilitate the learning process for adult learners" (p. 273).

Therefore, to effectively assist students in academic jeopardy, an intrusive, holistic intervention must be used. An intervention of this sort should focus on stress management, time management, goal setting, study skills, financial literacy, social capital acquisition, and self-management techniques (Isaak et al., 2006; Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000; Trombley, 2000). Zeisman (2012) studied first-generation students who had been on academic probation and found that there were areas " . . . in which many of the participants struggled regardless of academic standing. These areas – 1) self-management, 2) conflict with professor, 3) financial difficulties, 4) family situations, and 5) physiological symptoms – appear to negatively impact many of the academically struggling first-generation college students" (p. 157). Furthermore, in an analysis of a first-year experience class and its effects on first-generation, low-income, and students of color, several themes emerged that need to be addressed. The themes were motivation, personal responsibility, campus resources, and time management (White, 2019). It was stated that:

> If particular attention can be given to including these themes in a students' first year journey, it will help strengthen them to be able to persist and stay on track. The positive influences noted in the data collection not only affected students' academics but also their outlook, emotions, social life, and other parts of their holistic well-being. (White, 2019, p. 117)

Krumrei et al. (2013) also found that "Other psychosocial variables that were predictive of college students' life satisfaction included: stress and time management, involvement with college activity, and emotional satisfaction with academics" (p. 19).

Helping students focus on structuring time, setting goals, planning, and carrying out academic tasks, can enhance students' academic skills. MacKinnon-Slaney (1994) found that adult learners have to relearn how to learn and how to adapt to the changes that occur with each new term. "Reading skills, writing, listening skills, computer literacy, management of library databases, time management, study skills, and oral presentation skills are central to competence in the academic arena" (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994, p. 272). Students who don't deal well with stress may benefit from stress management or relaxation training. Additionally, students who are emotionally dissatisfied with academic life should be encouraged to find a better fit within the institution, such as a different major (Krumrei et al., 2013).

Mentoring and Intrusive Interventions

It is evident from previous research that faculty play a crucial role in student satisfaction and retention (Baker & Griffin, 2010; Florence, 2017; Melzer & Grant, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Evans (2016) concluded in a study of first-generation students:

> Participants shared that their relationship with faculty was one of the most important elements of their educational experience. Students felt that building relationships with their faculty helped them to feel more comfortable in class. Repeatedly students gave examples of how faculty helped them to integrate into the campus through simple acts such as recognizing them on and off campus,

> meeting at a coffee shop to provide extra help, and providing office time for reasons other than coursework. Students felt that when faculty went above and beyond their normal role they did so because they wanted students to succeed. (p. 55)

Similarly, Komorraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) found in a study of undergraduate students, that students who found their professors to be " . . . approachable, respectful, and available for frequent interactions outside the classroom are more likely to report being confident of their academic skills and being motivated, both intrinsically and extrinsically" (p. 339). Student-faculty interactions outside the classroom are beneficial to students and help enhance the academic experience for them. These interactions, however, are most helpful when academically related and should focus on personal growth and critical reasoning skills.

Student persistence increases when students feel that faculty are accessible and care about them (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Through faculty and peer support, a sense of belonging can motivate a student to persevere beyond the first year of college (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). McNair, Albertine, Cooper, McDonald, and Major (2016) stated that "One of those critical elements of the campus climate is a caring educator-an element of student success that cannot be quantified or measured by an efficiency scale" (p. 80).

Informal vs. Formal Mentoring

While informal mentoring from faculty can increase retention, it doesn't necessarily help those students who are reticent to reach out with questions. First-generation, minority, and lower socioeconomic status students tend not actively to initiate

communication with faculty. Still, research shows that students who have more frequent contact with faculty and staff are more likely to persist in college (Tinto, 1999). According to Schwartz et al. (2016) social capital refers to the networking relationships that students form and that grant them access to resources, opportunities, and possibly mentoring. Though this may be, first-generation students are unaware of how to build social capital by asking questions and advice of faculty, leaving them isolated from the benefits of informal mentoring (Jenkins et al., 2009; Terenzini, 1995). However, these are the groups that need contact with faculty the most. Komarraju et al. (2010) found that at-risk students are most likely to perceive faculty as being disinterested in their academic progress, leading to a lack of motivation to continue in college.

The benefits of relationships with faculty are beneficial for students from underprivileged backgrounds, first-generation status, or minorities. As stated by Komarraju et al. (2010) " . . . as student bodies increase in diversity, it is important that faculty members consciously reach out to ethnic minority students who may not find it easy to approach them" (p. 340). In a qualitative study of African American males by Wood and Turner (2010), and the factors that affect their academic success, the majority of the subjects discussed the role of faculty in their persistence. Students cited personal attention from faculty as a factor in their success. "By giving personal attention, students described how faculty; (a) were friendly with students from the onset; (b) checked in on student academic progress; (c) listened to student concerns; (d) were proactive in addressing performance issues; and (e) encouraged students to succeed" (Wood & Turner, 2010, p. 143). Positive faculty interaction is also essential for adult learners. Davidson and Holbrook (2014), in a study of adult students and persistence, concluded

that instructors play a key part in course completion. "Pairing adult learners with an academic peer or coach who can respond to their questions and needs could serve as an academic support in cases where professors may have more students in a class than they are able to accommodate in a more supportive manner" (p. 87).

Intrusive Formal Mentoring

Holistic assistance for suspended students can be provided through formal faculty mentoring programs, which create structure by addressing self-management, academic, and social capital skills, allowing proteges to connect with faculty, consequently increasing the proteges' self-efficacy. Overall, intrusive interventions, such as mentoring, advising, or coaching, are more effective than non-intrusive measures (Abelman & Molina, 2001; Coleman & Freedman, 1996; Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001). Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida (2001) studied the effects of low and high advisors' involvement in assisting students on probation. The results showed that students who received high-involvement assistance experienced more academic success than those who received low-involvement assistance. Furthermore, Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida (2001) stated:

> In conclusion, we feel that high-institutional involvement is effective in providing assistance to students experiencing academic difficulty, especially for those students who have difficulty in seeking help, but to make the program effective, administrators should provide comprehensive activities and fully commit staff and physical resources to the project. (p. 45)

Similarly, Abelman & Molina (2001) studied the effects of intrusive interventions on at-risk students and found that more intrusive interventions " . . . produced higher

cumulative grade-point averages and retention rates for all at-risk students" (p. 32). Comparable results were also reported by Coleman & Freedman (1996), whose study concluded that probationary students who participated in intrusive measures had higher rates of returning to good standing than nonparticipants. Finally, Arcand & LeBlanc (2011) studied the effects of an academic companion program for students who had been required to withdraw from their program of study due to unsatisfactory grades. The students met with their companions weekly for one term and the meetings focused on five elements of academic success including " . . . (a) defining or refining academic and/or professional goals, (b) developing essential learning strategies, (c) enhancing course content knowledge, (d) improving writing skills, and (e) examining personal challenges" (p. 6). Participants in the companioning program expressed that they did not know what was expected of them in college prior to working with their academic companion and were not aware of how difficult the transition would be from high school to college. However, after spending time with their academic companion, they had developed a more robust understanding of what they needed to do to be successful in college. Overall, more intrusive interventions for probationary students are effectual in raising GPAs and returning students to good standing.

Since students are not always willing to connect with faculty, but it is proven that contact with faculty increases retention, it is possible that an intrusive, formal mentoring program for suspended students could help at-risk students to persist once they have been reinstated. Formal mentoring can create a structure for suspended students and, at the same time, allow them to connect with faculty, who are instrumental in retention and academic growth for students. According to Salinitri (2005):

> Mentoring is about creating an enduring and meaningful relationship with another person, with the focus on the quality of that relationship including such factors as mutual respect, willingness to learn from each other, or the use of interpersonal skills. Mentoring is distinguishable from other retention activities because of the emphasis on learning in general and mutual learning in particular. (p. 858)

Melzer and Grant (2016) studied underprepared students and concluded " . . . there are social support needs and dispositional issues that impact academic outcomes in this population. These needs can be addressed through administrative support for increased emphasis on career counseling and greater social and emotional supports through mentoring programs" (p. 102).

While several intrusive interventions assist students in academic jeopardy, faculty-student mentoring can create a strong academic foundation for students as they work on grade recovery and the progression to good standing with the institution (Baker & Griffin, 2010; Salinitri, 2005). According to the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey (2018) "Among recent college graduates (2013-2018), professors represent the predominant source of undergraduate mentorship. Nearly two-thirds of recent graduates who agree or strongly agree that they had a mentor during college say that mentor was a professor (64%)" (p. 5). Salinitri (2005) evaluated a formal mentoring program that utilized preservice teacher candidates to mentor first-year university students. The mentored students earned higher GPAs than students in the control group and had lower occurrences of failing courses in their first semester. Mentees also communicated that their confidence had increased. According to Salinitri (2005) "The findings from this study show that mentoring as an intervention for students with low proficiency levels has

a dramatic effect on retention" (p. 867). Similarly, Baker & Griffin (2010) reported that their research on faculty-student interactions " . . . reinforce the importance of these relationships, suggesting that they are critical for everything from building students' capacity as scholars, fostering degree aspirations and retention (especially in the sciences), and promoting the success of students from underrepresented backgrounds" (p. 2).

Summary

There are several dominant traits of students who enter academic jeopardy, including lower socioeconomic, first-generation, minority, and/or adult learner status. The different causes of suspension, which are exacerbated by these dominant traits, include difficulty transitioning to college and lack of integration into the college environment. Additionally, lack of college readiness, which leads many students to remediation, also contributes to suspension. Lastly, a lack of academic self-management behaviors, including time management, study skills, family factors, and lack of clear goals, can negatively affect a student. Institutions should use a holistic approach when assisting reinstated students. Formal faculty-student mentoring programs can be effectual in providing this holistic approach by giving at-risk students more opportunities to interact with and receive faculty members' guidance.

In summary, this chapter has created a foundation to further understand suspended students and the combination of factors that put them at risk for suspension, such as first-generation status, lack of college readiness, minority status, and adult learners. These traits can make it difficult to adjust to college and fully integrate into the college environment. Furthermore, self-management behaviors, or lack thereof, can cause

students to reach suspension status. In turn, suspended students often struggle with the consequences of suspension, such as shame and loss of confidence. Suspended students can be readmitted and assisted through this readjustment period through a holistic approach of mentoring and intrusive interventions, specifically through structured faculty-student mentoring.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the effects of a formal faculty/student mentoring program on suspended students' persistence, academic self-management behaviors, and perceptions of mentoring, at a Midwestern technical college in Kansas. In this chapter, several topics will be discussed, including the research design, selection of participants, measurement, and data collection procedures. Additionally, data analysis and integration, reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher's role, and limitations will be explained.

Research Design

The current study utilized a mixed methods research design. Specifically, the research design used the convergent parallel research method to assess the effects of structured mentoring on students who had been on suspension. With the convergent parallel research design, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected. The data are then analyzed separately to ascertain if the findings validate or invalidate each other (Creswell, 2014). The mixed methods design allowed both quantitative and qualitative data to be treated with equal consideration and emphasis, leading to a more thorough analysis of the effects of the selected mentoring program. The correlational research design was utilized for the quantitative section of the study. Lunenburg & Irby (2008) described correlational research as how one variable interacts with another.

The first variable for the quantitative section of the study was the study participants' cumulative GPA. The second variable was the frequency of participants'

completion of their academic goals. The third variable was participants' perceived study skills. The fourth variable was participants' perceived time management skills.

Additionally, the students' perceptions of the mentoring program's impact on their academic progress were explored in the qualitative section of the study through interviews. The case study research method was used to collect and examine the interview data. According to Creswell (2014) the case study method allows the researcher to develop "an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 14). For the interviews, eight program participants who completed the program were interviewed for a more detailed understanding of the program.

By combining the quantitative survey data with the qualitative interview data, the researcher developed a more robust understanding of the mentoring program's effectiveness. Cook & Cook (2008) best summarized the effectiveness of this research combination:

> Whereas qualitative research might be thought of as a close-up picture that provides great detail but does not show the broader background, surveys seem more akin to a panoramic snapshot that displays an expansive landscape without capturing specific details. (p. 99)

Selection of Participants

The location of this study was a Midwestern technical college located in Kansas. The population for the quantitative section of this study was students who were either on academic or financial aid suspension or both, and participated in the mentoring program as a condition of their suspension appeal being granted. Students on academic

suspension had a grade point average (GPA) below 2.0. A student on financial aid suspension had a GPA below 2.0 or had not met the college's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy standards for financial aid recipients. Furthermore, participants had to be enrolled in general education courses for the semester in which they were mentored. The convenience sampling method was chosen to select participants for the study. According to Tanner (2012) a convenience sample " . . . reflects the fact that the sample was probably an intact group chosen because of its accessibility rather than because it manifests the statistical properties of the population" (p. 133). The selection of the study sample was limited to students who had participated in the mentoring program at the technical college during spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, and fall 2019 semesters. Potential participants must have filled out both the pre- and post-surveys, attended 75% of the required meetings with their mentor and received a completion status from their mentor. A total of 68 participants were included in this quantitative section.

The purposeful sampling method was used to select participants for the qualitative section of this study. The potential participants were required to meet the following criteria to be selected to participate in the qualitative section of the study. These criteria include that they must have attended 75% of the required meetings with their mentor and enrolled in a subsequent semester at the college. A total of 10 participants volunteered, and eight were chosen to be interviewed for this study.

Measurement

Quantitative instrument. Survey questions were developed specifically for the mentoring program and focused on measuring the participants' changes in the frequency of completion of academic goals, perceived study skills, and perceived time management

skills, before and after the mentoring program. The questions were constructed based on the skills taught to students in the mentoring program, review of literature, and guidance from a subject matter expert. The questions were housed in the college's preferred survey instrument service, and the executive director of institutional effectiveness provided the researcher with login credentials. In this section, the quantitative instrument will be discussed in-depth, including an explanation of format and content. Additionally, the instrument's validity will be addressed.

The three questions provided the mentors insight into how frequently the mentees completed their academic goals and how they perceived their study skills and time management skills.

How frequently participants completed their academic goals was measured by one question. Participants were asked to finish the statement, "I complete my academic goals . . . ", with the selection of a word from a Likert scale to indicate the frequency of completion of their academic goals. The answer options were very frequently, frequently, occasionally, rarely, and never.

Participants' perceptions of their study skills were measured by one question. Participants were asked to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "I feel that I have strong study skills", with the selection of a phrase from a Likert scale to indicate their perceptions of their study skills. The answer options were strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Participants' perceptions of their time management skills were measured by one question. Participants were asked to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "I feel that I have strong time management skills", with the selection of a

phrase from a Likert scale to indicate their perceptions of their time management skills. The answer options were strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Quantitative instrument validity. Oluwatayo (2012) defined face validity as " . . . researchers' subjective assessments of the presentation and relevance of the measuring instrument as to whether the items in the instrument appear to be relevant, reasonable, unambiguous and clear" (p. 392). To test the validity of the survey questions, the researcher utilized face validity, which was accomplished by having several people check the questions for effectiveness. During the fall 2017 semester, the researcher piloted the questions with students in the mentoring program and then worked with a subject matter expert at Baker University to review students' responses and identify issues in the wording of the questions. During the pilot phase of the questions, the program mentors were asked to review the questions and give feedback on what should be asked, how the questions should be worded, and what type of rating scale should be used. The program mentors were also asked to assess if the questions measured what they were intended to measure. This review and editing process took place from October 2017 to December 2017, and the questions were ready to be officially used by January 2018. Additionally, before and after the pilot phase, a subject matter expert at Baker University and the researcher's advisor were asked to review the questions and submit recommendations for improvement. After the questions were officially integrated into the mentoring program, the mentors were asked to debrief on the questions' effectiveness.

Interview instrument. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect qualitative data for this research. To develop the interview questions (see Appendix A),

the researcher began by writing questions that addressed the quantitative research questions for the study. Interview questions were developed by referencing the pre-and post-survey questions and questions used in other published research. These interview questions focused on participants' completion of academic goals, study skills, and time management skills, before and after the mentoring program. The researcher then developed interview questions to address the qualitative research question about participants' perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on their academic progress. The first interview question focused on their general perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program. Additional questions focused on the participants' opinions of how they completed academic goals, managed time, and perceived the strength of their study skills, before and after the mentoring program. Furthermore, a question was designed to assess their most important takeaway from the program, and the final question prompted the subjects to give any additional thoughts or insights about the mentoring program that they did not communicate when answering the other questions. The researcher's dissertation advisor and research analyst reviewed the initial draft of questions, and modifications were made, resulting in a list of nine questions.

According to Creswell (2014) interviews should utilize open-ended questions that will allow participants to voice their opinions. Additionally, the questions should be semi-structured to allow for follow-up questions that may arise (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The questions for this study were open-ended and allowed for the formulation of a deeper understanding of the effects of formal faculty/student mentoring on students' academic skills and perceptions of mentoring.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at Baker University on June 8, 2020 (See Appendix B). The proposal was approved by the Baker University IRB on July 22, 2020 (See Appendix C). The participating technical college did not require an approval review. Instead, permission was sought from the vice president, general education & health sciences, on June 9, 2020, through email. Approval from the technical college to conduct the study using the GPA, survey, and interview information was granted to the researcher on June 11, 2020 (See Appendix D).

The first step in the collection of quantitative data was to collect the cumulative GPAs of participants for spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, and fall 2019 semesters. The executive director of institutional effectiveness at the technical college provided the data in an Excel spreadsheet format. Data included the cumulative GPA before and after the mentoring program. Names were removed from the spreadsheet before being distributed to the researcher, and each student was assigned an identifying number to ensure students' confidentiality.

The second step in the collection of quantitative data was to retrieve the archived quantitative questions data and organize the data in an Excel spreadsheet. Three survey questions were utilized in the study. The researcher gathered the archived results once permission to conduct the study was granted by Baker University and the technical college.

The last step was to collect qualitative data from the interviews with students who had previously participated in the mentoring program. To invite previous participants to

volunteer for the interviews, a letter was sent to their home address and email. The Executive Director of IE at the technical college provided the students' contact information in an Excel spreadsheet format. Mentees were sent a letter if they had actively participated in the mentoring program during spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, and fall 2019 semesters. Students who were willing to be interviewed contacted the researcher through email and their name was forwarded to the interviewer so the interview could be scheduled.

The consent form was included with the invitation letter, and students were asked to sign and return it if they agreed to participate. The consent form asked the participant to consent to having the interview recorded and transcribed for the study (see Appendix E). The interview protocol was sent to the participants before the interview to allow for preparation (see Appendix F). A list of students who agreed to participate was sent to the interviewer, who then contacted the volunteers to schedule the interview. The list contained the students' preferred emails and telephone numbers. The semi-structured individual interviews were conducted through teleconference, were recorded, and lasted approximately 30 - 40 minutes. During the interview, notes were taken by the interviewer to help for further understanding of respondents' comments. Once the interviews had taken place, they were transcribed, and participants were assigned an identifying number to ensure students' confidentiality. The consent forms, audio recordings, and transcription documents were stored on a secure database. Transcripts were then emailed to participants to review and make any corrections or add final comments. The semi-structured interviews began on September 15, 2020, and ended on September 24, 2020.

Data Analysis and Integration

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) stated that "You should carefully consider each of your research questions or hypotheses and determine the respective statistical analysis that would be appropriate to test each one" (p. 200). The following research questions and hypotheses were investigated in this study.

RQ1. To what extent is there a difference in students' cumulative GPA before and after the mentoring program?

H1. There is a difference in students' cumulative GPA before and after the mentoring program.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to address RQ1. The students' cumulative GPA before the mentoring program and students' cumulative GPA after the mentoring program were compared. A paired-samples *t*-test was chosen for the hypothesis testing since it examines the mean difference between a pre and post-test. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, an effect size is reported.

RQ2. To what extent is there a difference in the frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program?

H2. There is a difference in the frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to address RQ2. The frequency of completion of academic goals before the mentoring program and the frequency of completion of academic goals after the mentoring program were compared. A paired-samples *t*-test was chosen for the hypothesis testing since it examines the mean difference

between a pre and post-test. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, an effect size is reported.

RQ3. To what extent is there a difference in students' perceived study skills before and after the mentoring program?

H3. There is a difference in students' perceived study skills before and after the mentoring program.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to address RQ3. The students' perceived study skills before the mentoring program and students' perceived study skills after the mentoring program were compared. A paired-samples *t*-test was chosen for the hypothesis testing since it examines the mean difference between a pre and post-test. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, an effect size is reported.

RQ4. To what extent is there a difference in students' perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program?

H4. There is a difference in students' perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to address RQ4. The students' perceived time management skills before the mentoring program and students' perceived time management skills after the program were compared. A paired-samples *t*-test was chosen for the hypothesis testing since it examines the mean difference between a pre and post-test. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, an effect size is reported.

RQ5. What were students' perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on their academic progress?

The qualitative data collected to address RQ5 were collected through interviews with program participants for a more detailed assessment of the program. The researcher used an inductive category development approach to identify trending themes in the interviewees' responses. According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), induction in qualitative data analysis involves starting with a large data set and organizing the information into smaller sub-groups of themes and patterns. "The analytic procedure falls essentially into the following sequential phases: organizing the data, generating categories, identifying patterns and themes, and coding the data" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 231).

Prior to organizing the data, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews verbatim. The participants were then given the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and send any corrections or additional comments to the researcher. To organize the interview data, the researcher removed any identifying data from the transcripts and assigned an identification code to each transcript to protect the subject's identity. Identification codes were Student 1-Student 8. Data summary tables were created in Excel spreadsheets to allow for ongoing organization of data, so information would not be lost.

The researcher first reviewed the transcripts paragraph by paragraph to become more familiar with the data and identify the overall big ideas. According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), these big ideas will become altered as the analysis progresses, but they provide an initial structure for developing the study's findings. The researcher then reviewed the data line-by-line and coded the data by marking the transcriptions with notes and highlighting recurring words, phrases, and ideas. Categories were then formed

based on the coded data, and the coded data were grouped into those categories. Then, themes emerged based on the analysis of the categories. This process led to more in-depth data analysis, allowing the researcher to compare and contrast categories and form the themes, or major findings, of the study. Furthermore, this process allowed the researcher to identify theme connections and explore if the subjects' perceptions of mentoring were consistent with the literature related to the study (Creswell, 2014).

Integration in mixed methods research is the " . . . point in the research procedures where qualitative research interfaces with quantitative research" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 220). Furthermore, even though integration is commonly absent from mixed methods research, it is a practice that affords the researcher a more thorough understanding of the research topic (Bryman, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). For this convergent parallel design study, the merging approach was used to integrate quantitative and qualitative data. When using the merging approach, the quantitative and qualitative data are integrated simultaneously for analysis and comparison (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetters et al., 2013).

Reliability and Trustworthiness

Qualitative validity focuses on " . . . those strategies used by researchers to establish the credibility of their study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125). Moreover, qualitative validity is conceptualized through trustworthiness, rigor, and quality of the study (Golafshani, 2003). According to Creswell (2014) there are several strategies for ensuring validity in qualitative research. Credibility in qualitative research can be demonstrated by ensuring that the viewpoints of the researcher and participants are accurately represented in the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking,

according to Creswell (2014), is the process of sending results to participants so they may confirm the accuracy of the data, which builds credibility. For this study, the interview transcript was sent to each interviewee, and their input and recommended changes were solicited. The interviewees requested no changes.

The researcher chose to use self-reflection in the study as a method to acknowledge researcher bias and develop trustworthiness and authenticity. The process of self-reflection in qualitative research helps to communicate openness and honesty to readers. Additionally, it builds validity by ensuring that the researcher monitors his or her perspectives and acknowledges biases (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher self-reflected during the data analysis process by journaling and recording reflective thoughts, feelings, and insights related to the research.

Lastly, the researcher chose to utilize peer debriefing to establish trustworthiness. With this process, a colleague examines the researcher's field notes and data and poses questions that help the researcher analyze the data from a different perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell, 2014). Barber & Walczak (2009) explained that the focus of peer debriefing is " . . . to challenge assumptions about the data, manage subjectivities of the primary researcher, and provide alternate interpretations of trends in data to ultimately create knowledge that is more robust and vetted than the researcher could produce working alone" (p. 7). For this study, the researcher located one peer debriefer to ask questions regarding the researcher's interpretations of the data and to question if interpretations were a result of the researcher's biases or subjectivities. The peer debriefer also examined the researcher's coding of data and recommended

modifications. Based on the peer debriefer's suggestions, minor wording changes were made in three categories, and two supporting ideas were added.

Researcher's Role

Qualitative validity, according to Creswell (2014), can further be displayed through a researcher's self-reflection. The researcher's lens can be utilized to establish the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Golafshani, 2003). Several factors presented the potential for biased assumptions and preferences during the study. One potential bias is that the researcher had worked in higher education for 23 years at the community college level. Secondly, the researcher was a first-generation student in 1987 when she first entered college. Her college career did not include a community college but was nonetheless filled with strife during her transition to college. Lastly, she had created the mentoring program two years before the study started to assist at-risk students who had been on academic suspension. Subsequently, she began collaborating with the Financial Aid department to provide a more intrusive intervention for those students whose financial aid suspension appeal had been granted.

During the study, the researcher remained mindful of her potential biases and initiated measures to ensure trustworthiness, rigor, and quality. First, she acknowledged that these biases existed and initiated measures to minimize subjectivity. To assist with accurate interpretations of the interviewees' responses, the interviews were recorded, and transcriptions were sent to the participants for review. This review process allowed participants to provide further comments if they felt that was necessary. Furthermore, the researcher worked closely with her dissertation advisor and research analyst to receive consistent and objective feedback and guidance.

Limitations

Lunenburg & Irby (2008) described limitations as "factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalizability of the results" (p. 133). Limitations of the quantitative section of this study include:

1. The smaller sample size of the study which could affect the generalizability of the quantitative data.
2. The participants chosen for the interviews were limited to students who had completed the majority of the requirements of the mentoring program, had enrolled for a subsequent semester at the college, and had volunteered to be interviewed. This limitation could impact the transferability of qualitative data to students who don't persist in mentoring programs.
3. Mentors' different levels of persistence, style, and frequency of communication with mentees could have affected students' experience of the mentoring program.
4. The participants chosen for the interviews were attending college at the same institution located in the same Midwest area. This limitation could impact the transferability of qualitative data to students in different geographics areas and institutions.

Summary

Chapter three, in summary, described the mixed methods research design that was utilized for this study. The selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, and data analysis and integration were described in detail. Additionally, reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher's role, and limitations were discussed. The results of the data analyses are detailed in Chapter four.

Chapter 4

Results

The study's primary purpose was to assess the effects of structured mentoring on students who had been on academic and/or financial aid suspension. Chapter four focuses on presenting the results of quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Students' data were collected for spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, and fall 2019 semesters. This study's population was students at a Midwestern technical college in Kansas who were either on academic or financial aid suspension, or both, and participated in the mentoring program as a condition of their suspension appeal being granted. Participants on academic suspension had a GPA below 2.0. Those on financial aid suspension had a GPA below 2.0 or had a GPA above 2.0 but had not met the college's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy standards for financial aid. The study sample was limited to students who had completed both the pre-and post-surveys, attended 75% of the required meetings with their mentor, and received a completion status from their mentor. A total of 68 participants were included in the quantitative section.

Quantitative Data Analysis Results

RQ1. To what extent is there a difference in students' cumulative GPA before and after the mentoring program?

H1. There is a difference in students' cumulative GPA before and after the mentoring program.

Outliers were detected and five outliers were found. The outliers were excluded from the following analysis. The results of the paired samples *t*-test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(62) = -5.65$, $p < .001$, $d = -.712$. The average GPA for the participants before the intervention ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .90$, $n = 63$) was significantly lower than the average GPA for the participants after the intervention ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.00$, $n = 63$). The research hypothesis was supported. Therefore, the intervention might have a positive impact on students' GPA. The effect size indicated a large effect.

RQ2. To what extent is there a difference in the frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program?

H2. There is a difference in the frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program.

Outliers were detected and zero outlier was found. The results of the paired samples *t*-test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(67) = -1.62$, $p = .109$. The average frequency of completion of academic goals for participants before the intervention ($M = 2.81$, $SD = .80$, $n = 68$) was not different from the average frequency of completion of academic goals for participants after the intervention ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .65$, $n = 68$). The research hypothesis was not supported. Therefore, the intervention might not have an impact on students' frequency of completion of academic goals.

RQ3. To what extent is there a difference in students' perceived study skills before and after the mentoring program?

H3. There is a difference in students' perceived study skills before and after the mentoring program.

Outliers were detected and zero outlier was found. The results of the paired samples *t*-test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(47) = -2.19$, $p = .033$, $d = -.316$. The average of participants' perceived study skills before the intervention ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .62$, $n = 48$) was significantly lower than the average of participants' perceived study skills after the intervention ($M = 2.10$, $SD = .59$, $n = 48$). The research hypothesis was supported. Therefore, the intervention might have a positive impact on students' study skills. The effect size indicated a small effect.

RQ4. To what extent is there a difference in students' perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program?

H4. There is a difference in students' perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program.

Outliers were detected and zero outlier was found. The results of the paired samples *t*-test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(50) = -1.52$, $p = .135$. The average of participants' perceived time management skills before the intervention ($M = 1.90$, $SD = .78$, $n = 51$) was not different from the average of participants' perceived time management skills after the intervention ($M = 2.02$, $SD = .65$, $n = 51$). The research hypothesis was not supported. Therefore, the intervention might not have an impact on students' time management skills.

Qualitative Data Analysis Results

RQ5. What were students' perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on their academic progress?

Totally eight participants were included in the qualitative part of the study (seven females and one male, ages 21-44 years). Four participants (50%) were in the 20 – 29 age range; two (25%) were in the 30 – 39 age range, and two (25%) were in the 40 – 49 age range. Six of the participants reported that they were first-generation, and two participants said they were continuing-generation students. Finally, three of the participants were enrolled in general studies, two in the surgical technology program, one in the nursing program, one in the police science program, and one in the veterinary technician program.

Generally speaking, the participants reported positive perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on their academic progress. Four themes emerged from eight participants. These included better meeting academic goals, development of productive study skills, improved time management skills, and positive impacts of the mentoring program (Table 1 for the summary of qualitative results). All the names reported were aliases.

Table 1

Summary of Qualitative Results

RQ5 What were students' perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on their academic progress?	
Theme 1 Better meeting academic goals	**N**
Category 1.1 Increased confidence in meeting academic goals	7
Category 1.2 Intentional focus on academic goals	7
Category 1.3 Organized focus on academic goals	7
Theme 2 Development of productive study skills	
Category 2.1 Improved study skills	6
Category 2.2 Better prioritization of studying	4
Category 2.3 Designated study space	5
Category 2.4 More structured and organized notes	5
Theme 3 Improved time management skills	
Category 3.1 Improved management of workload with a calendar	8
Category 3.2 Better balance with school, job, and family obligations	5
Category 3.3 Decreased time spent cramming for schoolwork	7
Category 3.4 Better management of course workload	4
Theme 4 Positive impacts of the mentoring program	
Category 4.1 Better grades	7
Category 4.2 Increased confidence in pursuing education	5
Category 4.3 More likely to ask for help	4

Note. N = the number of participants mentioning the category.
Total sample included 8 participants.

Theme 1: Better Meeting Academic Goals. Seven out of eight participants reported that their ability to meet academic goals increased after the mentoring program. Participants reported positive changes, including more confidence in meeting their academic goals, more intentional focus on academic goals, and more organized focus on academic goals.

Category 1.1: Increased Confidence in Meeting Academic Goals. Seven participants reported that they felt more confident about meeting their academic goals after the mentoring program. For example, Sophia said that after the mentoring program, she was more confident in meeting her academic goals. She stated "Now my goals are like to get As and Bs. . . . So if I can maintain my grades, if I can . . . [keep] up with my assignments, up with my exams, up with my quizzes, then I know my goal is possible."

Category 1.2: Intentional Focus on Academic Goals. Seven participants reported that after the mentoring program, they started to focus on their academic goals intentionally. For example, Breanna said that she learned how to take baby steps when focusing on goals. She shared "I have improved a lot because it [mentoring program] taught me to be focused on certain things and actually take steps . . . you do one thing first, then you do another thing, and then it will lead you up to your goal."

Category 1.3: Organized Focus on Academic Goals. Seven participants reported that after the mentoring program, their focus on academic goals was more organized. For example, Breanna shared that before the mentoring program, she was unfocused and couldn't keep up with the demands of college. She stated "So after the mentoring program, it taught me that being organized really helps you . . . be put all

together . . . so there's like peace, and there's focus and without organization, there's really none of that."

Theme 2: Development of Productive Study Skills. Six out of eight participants reported that the mentoring program helped them to develop productive study skills. Participants reported positive changes, including improved study skills, better prioritization of studying, designated study spaces, and more structured and organized notes.

Category 2.1: Improved Study Skills. Six participants reported that after the mentoring program their study skills improved. For example, Anna stated "I feel really good about it [study skills]. . . . The things that I need a little more attention in studying I spend a little more time in that area, so I feel a lot better about my skills of studying." Breanna also shared "I would say that it [study skills] is much more organized and much more precise. It has helped me find different ways that work for me. . . . You know, finding different studying ways that can fit me and help me."

Category 2.2: Better Prioritization of Studying. Half of the eight participants reported that after the mentoring program, they became better at prioritizing studying. For example, Mark, who had problems managing his course workload before the program, explained " . . . when I get home from work and . . . school, the first thing I hit is my study, note-taking, reading my material for that week and getting ahead of work and handing in my classwork on time." Emma shared that she would not make studying a priority before the mentoring program and went out with friends even when she had unfinished homework or a test that was due the next day. When asked if she made

studying a priority after the mentoring program, Emma stated “Like I actually study . . . like you always see me studying . . . even on weekends I don’t even go out anymore.”

Category 2.3: Designated Study Space. Five out of eight participants reported that after the mentoring program, they designated space for studying. For example, Justine said “ . . . I have a school space set up in my room. . . . I went and got everything I can think of that can help me take my notes . . . I got notebooks . . . I got pens, highlighters. . . . I have a big calendar.” When asked if she had designated space for studying after the mentoring program, Emma stated “Yes, I absolutely do [have a study space]. So, here is my desk. And then my bookshelf [shows with camera].

Category 2.4: More Structured and Organized Notes. Five participants reported that after the mentoring program, they took more structured and organized notes. For example, Mark stated “I'm more organized with notes. . . . That [Cornell Notes] keeps me on topic more, answers the questions that . . . I asked and need answers to help with diagrams.” Anna shared that she would try to take notes in class before the mentoring program but couldn’t keep up with the lectures. She stated “ . . . by using the Cornell Notes, it kind of helps me break it down more, on how to take better notes and how for them to stick.”

Theme 3: Improved Time Management Skills. All participants reported that their time management skills improved after the mentoring program. Participants reported positive changes, including improved management of workload with a calendar, better balance with school, job, family obligations, decreased time spent cramming for schoolwork, and better management of course workload.

Category 3.1: Improved Management of Workload with a Calendar. All participants stated that after the mentoring program, they used a calendar to manage their workload. For example, Haley reported "I know that like every class is so different in the way instructors do things, so . . . keeping my little calendar . . . I started doing after . . . the mentoring program . . . it kind of helps me organize each class better." Mark, who also had time management problems, explained that he started using a calendar after the program to manage his workload. He stated "After the mentoring program . . . I'll write stuff out . . . for each hour of the day for like sleeping, eating, doing homework and stuff like that. It's gotten better since the mentoring program."

Category 3.2: Better Balance with School, Job, and Family Obligations. Five participants reported that they had a better balance with their school, job, and family obligations after the mentoring program. For example, Sophia felt that she learned how to balance her whole life from the mentoring program. She stated "I learned so much on how I manage my time. . . . So before I didn't even have a chance to work out and now, I have a time where I can fit in gym time, work, school, life." Justine reported "I'm now going for my new degree, a Bachelor's, and I'm using the same note-taking skills, time management skills to be beneficial in balance. Again, I'm working full-time, mothering full-time, schooling full-time." Breanna shared that she also had a better balance. She stated that " . . . I was struggling between balancing a lot of stuff. Once I got the balance between those things, I started improving my education."

Category 3.3: Decreased Time Spent Cramming for Schoolwork. Seven participants reported that after the mentoring program, they decreased their habit of cramming for assignments and exams. For example, Justine explained that before the

mentoring program, she tried to cram her homework into a small amount of time, but after the program, she learned how to plan ahead. She stated "I have a little bit more prep time. . . . Time to actually accomplish stuff. Before, I might have took a 30-minute task and tried to do it in 10 minutes, knowing it took 30 minutes." Sophia felt that the mentoring program helped her to stop cramming for school. She reported " . . . I was cramming a lot, and I still made the grade, but I was stressed because I was cramming every single night. . . . And so I've learned not to do that because I am more organized now."

Category 3.4: Better Management of Course Workload. Half of the participants reported that after the mentoring program, they managed their course workload better. Emma explained that she learned how to plan ahead and manage her course workload better. She stated " . . . I put in some study time in my planner, and even though assignments aren't due, I want to be able to start working on them before their due date."

Theme 4: Positive Impacts of the Mentoring Program. Seven out of eight participants reported that they experienced positive outcomes from the mentoring program. Participants said that after the mentoring program, they had better grades, had increased confidence in pursuing education, and were more likely to ask for help.

Category 4.1: Better Grades. Seven participants reported that the mentoring program helped them earn better grades. For example, Anna explained "It's [mentoring program] really helped me work harder towards getting the better grades, because obviously what I was doing wasn't helping me." Cheyenne stated "I'm a lot more conscious [after the mentoring program] about making sure that I'm keeping my grades

up . . . ," and Mark, who also improved in his classes, reported "I manage time better and pretty much overall doing better in all my classes because of the mentoring program."

Category 4.2: Increased Confidence in Pursuing Education. Five out of eight participants reported that the mentoring program gave them the confidence to pursue education. For example, Breanna stated that her most important takeaway from the mentoring program was that " . . . you can be a mom, a wife, a daughter, whatever it is, and you can also be a student at the same time." Breanna went onto say " . . . you shouldn't lose yourself and other things, or forget about what it is that you want to do . . . you should never forget about you, your future, and your dreams and your goals." When asked about her ability to complete academic goals after the mentoring program, Justine expressed that she had set the goal of earning a Bachelor's degree. She said " . . . so now I just feel like, I know I can get this Bachelor's. I'm even thinking about going for my Doctorate."

Category 4.3: More Likely to Ask for Help. Half of the participants reported that after the mentoring program, they were more likely to ask for help. For example, Emma expressed that she did not ask questions before the mentoring program or ask for help. When asked if that had changed after the mentoring program, Emma stated "Oh yes, definitely . . . now everybody wants me to be quiet because I ask too many questions." Cheyenne shared that after the mentoring program, she started asking for more assistance from her teachers. Cheyenne stated "You don't have to necessarily be best friends with your teacher . . . but if anything in that class is not working . . . speak up and say something about it because you know everybody's there at the school to help you."

In addition to the four themes, two ideas that were not directly related to the research question emerged. First, three participants mentioned their initial resistance to the program when they first started the mentoring program. For example, Emma was annoyed by being assigned to the mentoring program, and she explained "I was like, really annoyed and I was just like rolling my eyes, like what [laughing]? What? Have somebody babysit me?" Breanna also expressed her resistance to the program and how she thought it would be a waste of time. Breanna stated " . . . at first when I heard of me being put into the mentoring program; I didn't really like the idea. I thought it was just a waste of time."

Second, six participants reported positive experiences with their mentors for various reasons, which may partially explain the program's observed positive impacts. For example, Haley stated "She's just super encouraging throughout the whole thing." Anna shared a similar feeling, "I kind of felt like it really, it encouraged me to do better and just having somebody [mentor] there to cheer me on and push me to do better." Emma felt motivated, and she stated "She [mentor] gave me, she definitely gave me the motivation that I needed in tough times." Emma also found the mentor to be helpful, and she stated " . . . she was really helpful and she was a nice friendly face."

Participants also expressed that their mentors were available to them and provided them resources. For example, Sophia stated "Whenever we needed something [the mentor] was really open to . . . seeing me, even when we didn't have a scheduled meeting . . . she [mentor] was quite open to seeing me . . . even outside of our scheduled meetings . . ." Haley explained that her mentor would ask how she was doing in her classes and " . . . always offered . . . math help, like math resources." Sophia also received resources

from her mentor. She stated " . . . she [mentor] gave me resources that were helpful also, like for tutoring programs . . . if I needed them . . . which I did use last semester."

Convergence of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative results were consistent. For example, first, the quantitative data showed a positive change in students' cumulative GPA after the mentoring program, which is consistent with a category of better grades that emerged from the qualitative data. This finding is also in line with the qualitative emerged themes that students became better at meeting their academic goals and developed productive study skills after the mentoring program. Second, the quantitative data showed a positive change in students' perceived study skills after the mentoring program. This finding is consistent with the qualitative theme two, that students developed productive study skills after the mentoring program.

However, there were two areas in which the quantitative and qualitative analyses diverged. For example, the quantitative data indicated no changes in students' frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program; however, a theme that emerged from the qualitative data suggested that students became better at meeting their academic goals. Second, the quantitative data indicated no changes in students' perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program; however, a theme that emerged from the qualitative data suggested that students' time management skills improved.

Summary

Chapter four addressed the results of the quantitative hypothesis testing and the qualitative content analysis. The quantitative results indicated positive changes in

students' GPA and study skills but no changes in completion of academic goals and time management skills. Four themes emerged from the qualitative analysis, including better meeting academic goals, development of productive study skills, improved time management skills, and positive impacts of the mentoring program. Chapter five provides a summary of the study, including an overview of the problem, the purpose statement and research questions, a review of the methodology, the major findings, and the findings related to the literature. The conclusions will also be summarized, including the implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

Chapter five summarizes the study by focusing on an overview of the problem, the purpose statement and research questions, the review of methodology, and the major findings. The findings are then related to the literature referenced in the current study. The chapter concludes by explaining the implications for actions, the recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Study Summary

This section provides a summary of the study and begins with an overview of the problem. The purpose statement and research questions are summarized, and a review of the methodology is provided. Finally, the major findings of the study are discussed.

Overview of the Problem. Academic or financial aid suspension can be a significant factor in a student's decision to drop out of higher education (Denovchek, 1992; Houle, 2013). Some of the most common factors contributing to suspension include challenges with transitioning to college and lack of integration into the institution (Lowe & Cook, 2003; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 2012). Lack of college readiness and poor academic self-management behaviors, including deficiencies in meeting academic goals, underdeveloped study skills, and lack of time management skills, also contribute to suspension (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Conley, 2008; Holland, 2005; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Macan et al., 1990; Nagda et al., 1998; Tinto, 2012). Suspended students must deal with the consequences of suspension, including humiliation, shame, loss of confidence, and lack of self-efficacy (Houle, 2013). When a suspended student is allowed to return to the institution, they will still face the same barriers to success. They

will need assistance to regain and further develop their self-efficacy (McGrath & Burd, 2012). Mentoring is one option to help suspended students re-enter the college environment (Davidson & Holbrook, 2014). The existing research on mentoring tends to focus on how mentoring contributes to students' overall academic and personal success. However, the impact of structured mentoring programs on suspended students' cumulative GPA, completion of academic goals, perceived study and time management skills, and students' perceptions of a mentoring program's impact on their academic performance have not been extensively studied.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions. The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of structured mentoring on students who had been on academic and/or financial aid suspension at a Midwestern technical college located in Kansas. Five research questions were developed to guide the researcher in the gathering and analysis of data for this mixed methods study. The first research question examined the differences in students' cumulative GPA before and after their participation in the mentoring program. The second research question examined the difference in the frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program, while the third research question examined the difference in students' perceived study skills before and after the mentoring program. The fourth research question examined the difference in students' perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program. The fifth research question examined students' perceptions of the impact of the mentoring program on their academic progress.

Review of the Methodology. The current study utilized a mixed methods research design. Archival data of 68 students' GPAs before and after the mentoring

program were analyzed for the quantitative section of this study. Archival data from survey questions were also used for the quantitative area of this study. These survey questions analyzed the participants' changes in the frequency of completion of academic goals, perceived study skills, and perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program. The number of student responses to each question varied, with 68 responses for academic goals, 48 responses for study skills, and 51 responses for time management.

Eight students who had completed the mentoring program were interviewed for the qualitative section of the current study. The semi-structured individual interviews were conducted through teleconference, were recorded, and lasted approximately 30 - 40 minutes. The interviewer took notes during the interviews to enhance understanding of respondents' comments. Once the interviews had taken place, they were transcribed, and participants were assigned an identifying number to ensure students' confidentiality. The consent forms, audio recordings, and transcription documents were stored on a secure database. Transcripts were then emailed to participants to review and make any corrections or add final comments. The researcher coded the data by first reviewing the data line-by-line, marking the transcriptions with notes, and highlighting recurring words, phrases, and ideas. Categories were then formed based on the coded data, and the coded data were grouped into the categories. Themes then emerged based on the analysis of the categories.

Major Findings. A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to assess the quantitative data. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between the before and after GPA data, showing that the average GPA increased from beginning to

end of the mentoring program. The results also indicated a statistically significant difference in perceived study skills before and after the mentoring program. The results, however, showed no statistically significant difference in the frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program. Furthermore, the results indicated no statistically significant difference in perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program.

Through the analysis of the qualitative interview data, four major themes emerged. Theme 1, better meeting academic goals, included three categories: increased confidence in meeting academic goals, intentional focus on academic goals, and organized focus on academic goals. Theme 2, development of productive study skills, included four categories: improved study skills, better prioritization of studying, designated study space, and more structured and organized notes. Theme 3, improved time management skills, included four categories: improved management of workload with a calendar, better balance with school, job, and family obligations, decreased time spent cramming for schoolwork, and better management of course workload. Theme 4, positive impacts of the mentoring program, included three categories: better grades, increased confidence in pursuing education, and more likely to ask for help.

Findings Related to the Literature

The findings of the current study align with numerous studies summarized in Chapter 2. The current study supports the findings of Abelman & Molina (2001) and Coleman & Freedman (1996), who found that intrusive interventions, such as structured mentoring programs, positively impact students' GPA. The current study also found that mentoring might have a positive impact on students' study skills. This finding further

supports Arcand & LeBlanc (2011), who studied the effects of an academic companion program for students who had been required to withdraw from college due to unsatisfactory grades. The study found that the assigned academic companions helped students better understand how to study for and adjust to college's academic rigors (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2011). Likewise, participants in the current study's interviews communicated that the mentoring program helped them develop productive study skills. Participants reported positive changes, including improved study skills, better prioritization of studying, designated study spaces, and more structured and organized notes.

Through interviews, the current study found that participants perceived that their academic self-management skills, including completion of academic goals, study skills, and time management skills, improved after the mentoring program. Furthermore, positive impacts of students learning these skills resulted in some of the participants passing their courses and continuing to take classes. These findings of the current study further substantiate other studies that have concluded that an intrusive intervention for students in academic jeopardy should take a holistic approach and focus on stress management, time management, goal setting, study skills, financial literacy, social capital acquisition, and self-management techniques (Isaak et al., 2006; Struthers et al., 2000; Trombley, 2000). The current study also supports MacKinnon-Slaney (1994), who concluded that adult learners must relearn how to learn. Focusing on academic skills such as time management and study skills can make them more competent students.

Some of the participants in the current study’s interviews also voiced that they had struggled with balancing school, job, and family obligations before the mentoring

program but had developed a better balance after the program. This finding aligns with Trombley (2000), who found that students who had performed poorly often cited personal problems as the main factor and that interventions need to teach students how to balance their education and personal obligations. The current study also corroborates the research of Krumrei et al. (2013), who concluded that students need guidance in learning how to manage stress and their time so they can have increased life satisfaction.

Theme 4, positive impacts of the mentoring program, which emerged from the interviews, produced three categories that pointed to participants' increased student success. Some participants shared that they made better grades due to the mentoring program, and some stated that they had increased confidence in pursuing education due to the mentoring program. Some participants also shared that they were more likely to ask for help due to the mentoring program. These findings from the current study support Pascarella & Terenzini (2005), who found that student persistence increases when students feel that faculty are accessible and care about them. Furthermore, the findings from the current study support Morrow & Ackerman (2012), who found that faculty and peer support, which creates a sense of belonging, can motivate a student to persevere beyond the first year of college. The current study additionally supports Komorraju et al. (2010). They concluded that student-faculty interactions outside the classroom increase students' confidence in their academic skills, which increases their motivation and enhances the educational experience for them.

The current study also found that some participants appreciated the encouragement, helpfulness, guidance, availability to meet, and resources that they received from their mentor. This finding of the current study supports the research of

Evans (2016), whose study of first-generation students found that "Students felt that when faculty went above and beyond their normal role they did so because they wanted students to succeed" (p. 55). Likewise, the current study supports McNair et al. (2016), who concluded that one of the critical elements of a college is " . . . a caring educator-an element of student success that cannot be quantified or measured by an efficiency scale" (p. 80).

Conclusions

Structured mentoring for students on academic and/or financial aid suspension may positively affect participants' persistence as demonstrated through cumulative GPA before and after the mentoring program. Quantitative data also showed that structured mentoring may have a positive impact on perceived study skills. However, quantitative data showed no changes of structured mentoring on the perceived frequency of completion of academic goals and perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program. Qualitative interviews indicated that structured mentoring may positively affect participants' perceptions of mentoring and their academic progress.

Implications for Action. The results of this study could assist higher education administrators with building and implementing mentoring interventions for students who have been on academic and/or financial aid suspension and have been granted permission to return to college. Such mentoring interventions may help students develop more vital academic self-management skills such as meeting academic goals, study skills, and time management skills. The study could also be beneficial to similar colleges seeking administrative and financial support to develop structured mentoring programs.

The institution where the study occurred may use the data from the current study to improve the existing mentoring program for academic and/or financial aid suspended students. Since the current study only provided a preliminary evaluation of the mentoring program, further formal assessment of the effectiveness of the methods and tools used to complete academic goals, study skills, and time management skills is needed for a more comprehensive understanding. A formal assessment of the mentoring program could unearth deficiencies not revealed in the current study and help the mentors develop new student learning outcomes that should be integrated into the program. Further integration of mentoring into other areas of the institution should also be considered. For instance, students who have entered academic and/or financial aid probation and students who have been referred by faculty due to low grades or other difficulties could be integrated into mentoring. Additionally, program-specific mentoring programs could be developed at the institution to help students in rigorous programs such as nursing, robotics, and police science. Lastly, the institution may consider implementing mentoring for students who seek guidance and voluntarily ask for a mentor.

The findings may also assist other areas of the institution that have program-specific orientations. Further integration of academic self-management skills into new student orientations for programs such as nursing could help new students develop the academic skills that will enable them to succeed in their program of study and graduate on time. Additionally, the institution's tutoring department could use this study's results to build a holistic tutoring approach that focuses on the students' deficient academic self-management skills in addition to the necessary process of tutoring. Lastly, faculty and advisors at the institution who often confer about at-risk students may also consider this

study to be beneficial. The data could help them identify which academic self-management skills at-risk students lack and give guidance on improving or steering them to the appropriate support service, such as tutoring.

Recommendations for Future Research. Various recommendations for future research emerged from this study. The participants chosen for the interviews were attending college at the same institution located in the same Midwest area, and the sample size was relatively small. Further studies from different geographic regions and institutions could provide a broader picture and increase the generalizability of the effects of mentoring on academic and/or financial aid suspended students' success. The first recommendation is that additional studies should be conducted but with larger sample sizes and at different types of institutions.

The participants chosen for the interviews were limited to students who had completed the majority of the mentoring program requirements, had enrolled for a subsequent semester at the college, and had volunteered to be interviewed. The second recommendation is for future research to be focused on students who do not persist in mentoring programs to assess why they did not persist and their perceptions of mentoring. Their narratives could lend insight into barriers that they faced and alternative interventions that may have helped them persist.

Mentors' different availability, communication style and frequency, and persistence with tracking mentees could have affected students' experiences with the mentoring program. Rose, Rukstalis, and Schuckit (2005) studied mentoring for medical students and found that mentors need to be available for and focused on the mentee. They also discovered that mentors need to be available to answer questions, give

feedback, and track mentees' progress. The third recommendation is for future studies to focus on mentors and how their availability, communication style and frequency, and persistence in tracking mentees' progress affect students' experiences with mentoring.

Previous research shows that faculty play a crucial role in student satisfaction and retention (Baker & Griffin, 2010; Florence, 2017; Melzer & Grant, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In fact, access to faculty helps students feel a sense of belonging, which increases retention (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). The current study focused on faculty/student mentoring and did not explore staff members, such as advisors, and their effect on student outcomes. The fourth recommendation is for future studies to focus on different types of mentors, the difference in student outcomes, and if a certain type of mentor makes a difference, or if the outcome is based solely on having formed an institutional connection for the mentee.

The impact of structured mentoring programs on suspended students' cumulative GPA, completion of academic goals, perceived study and time management skills, and students' perceptions of a mentoring program's impact on their academic performance has not been extensively studied. Furthermore, institutions need to continue to find ways to help at-risk students deal effectively with the consequences of suspension and their personal and academic barriers to success (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Houle, 2013; Suchan, 2016). While the current study helps fill the void in research regarding mentoring, more can still be done to help higher education professionals address attrition. The fifth recommendation is for future research to focus on the impact of mentoring and other intrusive interventions on suspended students' academic journeys.

The current study focused on a mentoring program for students who had been on academic or financial aid suspension, and their appeal to return to the institution had been granted. However, the impact of the mentoring program on the different suspensions was not explored. The sixth recommendation is for future studies to address if mentoring has more impact on students on academic suspension or financial aid suspension or if there is no difference in the outcomes.

Participants on academic suspension had a GPA below 2.0. Those on financial aid suspension had a GPA below 2.0 or had a GPA above 2.0 but had not met the college's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy standards for financial aid. The beginning GPA for students in the current study ranged from zero to 3.85. The current study did not examine the impact of the mentoring program on the lower GPA range versus the higher GPA range. The seventh recommendation is for future research to focus on the possible impact of mentoring on specific GPA levels.

Concluding Remarks. The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of structured mentoring on students who had been on academic and/or financial aid suspension. Five research questions were utilized to guide the researcher in the gathering and analysis of data for this mixed methods study. Previous research substantiated intrusive interventions for suspended students that focus on helping the student holistically and focusing on further developing academic self-management skills such as time management, study skills, stress management, and goal completion skills. Research has also shown the positive impacts of informal faculty/student mentoring. While there is research on these topics, there is not extensive research on the effects of structured mentoring programs on suspended students. Specifically, the impact on students'

cumulative GPA, completion of academic goals, perceived study and time management skills, and students' perceptions of a mentoring program's impact on their academic performance have not been extensively studied.

Administrators must assist suspended students with reentry into an institution if a student's suspension appeal is granted. One effective intervention for suspended students is structured faculty/student mentoring programs that help students focus on their academic self-management skills, such as completing academic goals and improving study and time management skills. The current study's quantitative findings demonstrated a statistically significant difference between students' GPAs before and after the mentoring program. This study also indicated a statistically significant difference in students' perceived study skills before and after the mentoring program. The study found no statistically significant difference in the frequency of completion of academic goals before and after the mentoring program. Furthermore, the results indicated no statistically significant difference in perceived time management skills before and after the mentoring program. Four themes emerged from the qualitative portion of this study. These themes included better meeting academic goals, development of productive study skills, improved time management skills, and positive impacts of the mentoring program.

As higher education institutions face the challenge of retaining students, suspended students pose a unique challenge to retention efforts. The current study results may help higher education administrators, faculty, and staff create interventions for suspended students that lead them to academic success.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What were the impacts of the mentoring program that you experienced?
2. What did you think about your ability to complete academic goals, such as earning an A in a certain class, getting accepted into one of the college's programs, or completing your program, before the mentoring program?
3. What do you think about your ability to complete academic goals after the mentoring program?
4. How well did you manage your time, such as using a calendar to prioritize work, home, and school responsibilities and sticking to that schedule, before the mentoring program?
5. How well did you manage your time after the mentoring program?
6. What did you think about your study skills, such as scheduling time specifically for homework, organizing notes, setting goals for study sessions, finding a calm space for studying before the mentoring program?
7. What do you think about your study skills after the mentoring program?
8. What was your most important takeaway from the mentoring program?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about the mentoring program?

Appendix B: IRB Form for Baker University

BAKER UNIVERSITY

IRB Request

Date 6/8/2020

IRB Protocol Number _____
(IRB use only)

I. Research Investigator(s) (students must list faculty sponsor)

Department(s) EdD Higher Education

	Name	Signature	
1.	Tara Canfield	Tara Canfield Digitally signed by Tara Canfield Date: 2020.06.19 09:24:48 -05'00'	Principal Investigator
2.	Dr. Sue Darby	Suzanna Darby Digitally signed by Suzanna Darby Date: 2020.06.18 17:02:13 -05'00'	☑ Check if faculty sponsor
3.	Dr. Li Chen-Bouck	Li Chen-Bouck 2020.06.18 14:56:14 -05'00'	☐ Check if faculty sponsor
4.			☐ Check if faculty sponsor

Principal investigator contact information

Phone 316.796.2305

Email taralcanfield@stu.bakeru.edu

Address 931 N Brook Forest RD
Derby, KS 67037

Note: When submitting your finalized, signed form to the IRB, please ensure that you cc all investigators and faculty sponsors using their official Baker University (or respective organization's) email addresses.

Faculty sponsor contact information

Phone

Email suzanna.darby@bakeru.edu

Expected Category of Review: ☐ Exempt ☑ Expedited ☐ Full ☐ Renewal

II. Protocol Title

Formal Faculty/Student Mentoring: An Examination of Effects on Persistence, Academic Skills, and Perceptions of Mentoring

III. Summary:

The following questions must be answered. Be specific about exactly what participants will experience and about the protections that have been included to safeguard participants from harm.

A. In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.

Higher education students who have been placed on academic or financial aid suspension face barriers to their success if they are allowed to return to school. Support can be provided through structured faculty/student mentoring programs. The purpose of this mixed methods study is to assess the effects of structured faculty/student mentoring on students who have been on one or both types of suspension and allowed to return to college.

B. Briefly describe each condition, manipulation, or archival data set to be included within the study.

No conditions or manipulations will be included in this study. Archival data includes:
1. Quantitative data: Cumulative GPAs of participants, before and after the mentoring program, for spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, and fall 2019 semesters.
2. Quantitative questions data: Three quantitative questions were used in the study and focused on measuring the participants' changes in the frequency of completion of academic goals, perceived study skills, and perceived time management skills, before and after the mentoring program.
3. Qualitative data: Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data. These interview questions

IV. Protocol Details

A. What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

Participants will be asked during the interviews to describe their experiences with the mentoring program and any impact that the program may have had on their completion of academic goals, their study skills, and their perceived time management skills. See attached.

B. Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical, or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.

Participants' will not encounter any risk. Archived data will be presented to the researcher in a confidential manner, and names will not be included with data. Pseudonyms will also be assigned to the students who volunteer to participate in the interviews.

C. Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.

The researcher does not foresee the participants having to endure any form of stress during the data collection phase of the study. The participants in the study have volunteered and will their interview time will be set-up according to their schedule. Every attempt will be made to keep their stress to a minimum. If a participant chooses to withdraw from the study, that will not be a problem and no questions will be asked.

D. Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

The researcher will not deceive or mislead the subjects in any way.

E. Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

The researcher does not believe there will be a request for information in which the subjects may consider the information to be personal or sensitive. The interviewer will know the subjects' names, but they will not be asked for any sensitive information that would violate their privacy such as their address, family information, etc. They will be asked to only answer the attached interview questions.

F. Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

Subjects will not be presented with any materials in this study which may be offensive, threatening, or degrading.

G. Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?

Subjects will spend approximately 30-40 minutes for the phone interview.

H. Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

The subjects of the study are students who participated in the mentoring program at WSU Tech during spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, and fall 2019 semesters. To solicit volunteers for the interview portion of the study, a letter will be sent through mail and also emailed to the participants from the listed semesters. Students will be able to contact the researcher by email or phone to volunteer. Students will be asked to respond to the request within two weeks from receiving the letter and email.

I. What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

Prior to the interviews, each subject will be asked to sign a consent form acknowledging that they are participating in the study on a volunteer basis and that they agree to being included in the study. If a student volunteers and then withdraws from the study, no questions will be asked. A $10 gas card will be offered to volunteers as an inducement for their participation.

J. How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

A consent form will be included with the invitation letter, and students will be asked to sign and return it if they agree to participate.

K. Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

No aspects of the data will be made a part of any permanent record which could identify the subject.

L. Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher, or employer? If so, explain.

Participation status will not be made part of a permanent record which would be available to a supervisor, teacher, or employer.

M. What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data? Where will it be stored? How long will it be stored? What will be done with the data after the study is completed?

Archived data will be provided in Excel spreadsheet format, with names removed, and an identifying number assigned to each student to ensure confidentiality. Each consent form and interview transcript will be assigned an identification number corresponding to the subject it involves (e.g., Participant A) to ensure confidentiality. The data and documents associated with this study will be stored on a firewall and password protected computer. Data will be stored for a minimum of five years from the date it was collected. Once the five years have lapsed the data will be destroyed.

N. If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

There are no personal risks to participation in this study. However, the volunteers may benefit from the study by being given the chance to reflect on their mentoring experience and how that may have impacted their completion of academic goals, their time management skills, note-taking skills, and study skills.

O. Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.

1. Cumulative GPAs of participants, before and after the mentoring program, for spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, and fall 2019 semesters, will be utilized.
2. Quantitative questions data: Three quantitative questions were used in the study and focused on measuring the participants' changes in the frequency of completion of academic goals, perceived study skills, and perceived time management skills, before and after the mentoring program. These questions were asked of the students upon entering and exiting the mentoring program, and are archived on the college's survey service account.

Appendix C: IRB Approval from Baker University

BAKER UNIVERSITY
Own Confidence

Baker University Institutional Review Board

July 22nd, 2020

Dear Tara Canfield,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.
6. If this project is not completed within a year, you must renew IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan Poell, MLS
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Scott Crenshaw
Sara Crump, PhD
Jamin Perry, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD

Appendix D: IRB Approval from College A

[redacted]

June 11, 2020

Baker University
Graduate School ofEducation
7301 College Blvd., Suite 120
Overland Park, KS 66210

Subject: Site Approval Letter

To whom it may concern:

This letter acknowledges that I have received and reviewed a request by Tara Canfield-Weber to conduct a research project entitled "Formal Faculty/Student Mentoring: An Examination of Effects of Persistence, Academic Skills, and Perceptions of Mentoring" at [redacted], and I approve ofthis research to be conducted at our campus.

When the researcher receives approval for her research project from Baker University's Institutional Review Board, I agree to provide access for the approved research project. If we have any concerns or need additional information, we will contact Dr. Sue Darby at Suzanna.Darby@bakeru.edu.

Sincerely,

Pamela Doyle
Vice President, General Education & Health Sciences
[redacted]

Appendix E: Interview Consent Form

Consent Form

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

Purpose of the research: To better understand the effects of faculty/student mentoring programs on students and their achievement of academic goals, study skills, and time management skills.

What you will do in this research: If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview. You will be asked several questions and the interview will be recorded.

Time Required: 30-40 minutes.

Permission to audio record: I acknowledge and allow my interview to be audio recorded to ensure accuracy.

Risks: No risks are anticipated.

Benefits: This is a chance for you to tell your story about your experiences with the mentoring program and to reflect upon your completion of your academic goals, your study skills, and your time management skills. This information will help other researchers and mentoring practitioners to improve their own programs.

Confidentiality: A pseudonym will be assigned to you and at no time will your actual identity be revealed. The recording will be erased upon completion of the transcription and uploading of finished assignment.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw yourself from the study at any time, and no questions will be asked.

To contact the researcher: If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Tara Canfield-Weber at _____ or _____. You may also contact the faculty member at Baker University who is supervising this work: Dr. Sally Winship, Coordinator of Directed Field Experience, Baker University, sally.winship@bakeru.edu.

Agreement:

The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature:_____

Date:_____

Name (print):_____

Appendix F: Interview Solicitation Letter with Interview Protocol

[Date]

[Address]

Greetings XXXXXX,

As a student who was in the mentoring program at _____, you are invited to participate in a short interview for my doctoral dissertation, which I am completing at Baker University. I am conducting research on the impact of mentoring, good or bad, on students who have been in the program.

Here are a few details that may assist you in your decision to participate:

- The one-on-one interviews should not last longer than 30-40 minutes.
- The interviews will be conducted over the phone. This will ensure that the interview is conducted in a private setting.
- The interviews will be scheduled according to your schedule and what is convenient for you.
- The interviews will be recorded so the interviewer doesn't have to take so many notes.
- Your identity will be guaranteed by assigning you a pseudonym, and any information you share will be strictly confidential.
- If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time or choose not to answer any question with which you feel uncomfortable.

Volunteers who are chosen will also be given a $10 gas card upon completion of the interview process.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at _____ by _____. I will then have the interviewer for this project contact you to set up the interview time.

If you have any questions about this study please let me know. I hope that you will help me to gain more knowledge of mentoring and how it impacts students!

Sincerely,

Tara Canfield-Weber

Tara Canfield-Weber
Baker Doctoral Student