

**Student Perceptions About the Impact of Guided Pathways, Faculty Mentors, and  
the Early Alert System on Academic Success and Degree Completion at a  
Midwestern Community College**

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## Abstract

Higher education institutions have been trying to solve the issue of student retention and completion dating back to the 1960's (Aljohani, 2016). Sixty percent of community college students nation-wide struggle to earn a degree within three years (Smith, 2019). In Kansas, 75% of community college students do not complete their degree with their home institution within three years (Kansas Board of Regents [KBOR], 2020a). This study was designed to investigate the perceptions of degree completers at a Midwestern community college about the impact of the guided pathways model, faculty mentors, and an early alert system on academic success and degree completion. There were 10 participants in this study, six females and four males. Four students graduated from the liberal arts pathway, four from the education pathway, and two from the health science pathway. The majority of respondents were not familiar with the term 'guided pathways'. However, when the term 'degree plan' was used, all study participants understood the interview questions. Five major themes emerged through the data analysis. In response to questions related to the first theme, perceptions about the guided pathways model on academic success and degree completion, respondents cited the support of academic advisors and knowledgeable faculty. The second theme was classroom and non-classroom factors that contributed to academic success and degree completion. Participants indicated academic advisors, faculty, family and friends, peer interactions, and involvement in a cohort group contributed to their academic success. COVID-19 and finding a balance between work and school were the two most common responses within the third theme, barriers to academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model. The impact of faculty mentors on academic success and degree

completion was the fourth theme. The majority of respondents indicated they did not know they had an assigned faculty mentor, although all participants indicated they received support from faculty, coaches, and academic advisors. The fifth theme was the impact of the early alert system on academic success and degree completion. Study respondents were not aware of the early alert system. However, the majority of respondents indicated they received regular input about attendance and class performance from advisors and academic advisors. Clear communication with community college students about the guided pathways model, identification of the faculty mentor assigned to each student, and description of how an early alert system can be used to promote persistence, retention, academic success, and degree completion could promote increased student understanding about these interventions. Additional research focusing on the effectiveness of the guided pathways model, faculty mentoring, and early alert systems is warranted.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my friends, colleagues, and family. My friends have provided unwavering support and encouragement to stay the course. My colleagues have helped provide experiences from my course work through dissertation completion that have shaped me into the leader I am today. My friend and mentor, Dr. Kim Krull, talked to me every week after class and encouraged me to pursue this path. My dear friends, Jaime, Jessica, Brandi, Maddie, Tiffany, and Ashlie supported me and celebrated each milestone of the process with me.

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I could not have achieved this goal without the support and guidance of my mentors and colleagues who helped me in my course work or dissertation. Their leadership has inspired me and encouraged me to push through when things were difficult, and the end seemed impossible.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my “Pops”, Gordon Cannady. Though he passed before I reached this point, he has been one of my biggest cheerleaders and supporters in my life. This is for you, “Pops”. I told you I would be a doctor one day.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Higher education institutions have been plagued with the problem of student retention and completion dating back to the 1960s (Aljohani, 2016). Community college student retention refers to the continuous enrollment from the fall semester of year one to the fall semester of year two (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021). Community college student completion refers to the continuous enrollment and degree completion with the student's home institution (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021). Despite an increasing number of high school graduates who have matriculated to an institution of higher education over the last half century, the academic success and degree completion of these students continues to diminish (Hanson, 2021). According to Hanson (2021), half of the students who attend four-year institutions complete a degree within six years. Smith (2019) cited a National Student Clearinghouse report that indicated fewer than 40% of students earn an associate degree within three years at a community college. There are varying reasons for the lack of degree completion among community college students. Aljohani (2016) found student behavior and factors like socioeconomic status and academic preparedness weigh heavily on a student's ability to persist to completion. According to Chan and Wang (2017), the pattern by which a student progresses through the first year of college has an impact on persistence and completion. In their study, Chan and Wang (2017) identified various patterns by which two-year college students navigated the curriculum. These patterns included vocational students focusing on training and skills to enter the workforce, transfer students preparing to transfer to a four-year institution, and exploring students who were unsure of their career path. The momentum through the first

year of college and connection of the coursework to a career path increased persistence through active academic engagement and learning (Chan & Wang, 2017). Through administering a student survey to 6,000 community college students in nine different states in 2017 and 2018, Smith (2019) identified the top 10 challenges related to degree completion. Work, expenses, and family and friends were identified as the top three factors that inhibited student success (Smith, 2019). Student demographics, program cost, and clear curriculum paths to completion have also been found to contribute to student dropout rates (Jenkins, Brown, Fink, Lahr, & Yanagiura, 2018).

Community colleges have implemented various systems and supports to assist in student completion. Community college students vary in a variety of ways, requiring a multitude of supports to aide in academic success (Ogden, 2020). Schak, Metzger, Bass, McCann, and English (2017) cited a report from the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Services National Center for Education Statistics (2014) that indicated approximately 40% of first-year college students require remediation to be successful at the community college level. Northern Virginia Community College implemented a requirement for students to maintain continuous relationships with counselors to assist in building rapport and implementing support services quickly (Schak et al., 2017). According to Schak et al., colleges have also turned to technology to assist in identifying students who are veering off course. Early alert systems provide faculty and staff with information to implement early intervention strategies more proactively (Schak et al., 2017).

Another strategy community colleges have implemented to support degree completion is guided pathways. Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015a)

published *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*. This publication presented the concept of guided pathways. Bailey et al. (2015a) defined the guided pathways model as, "...creating more clearly structured, educationally coherent program pathways that lead to students' end goals, and in rethinking instruction and student support services in ways that facilitate students' learning and success as they progress along these paths" (p. 3). The Education Advisory Board (EAB, n.d.) summarized guided pathways as "a movement that seeks to streamline a student's journey through college by providing structured choice, revamped support, and clear learning outcomes – ultimately helping more students achieve their college completion goals" (para. 5). According to the EAB, the guided pathways model is composed of four pillars:

1. Clarify pathways to end goals
2. Help students choose and enter pathways
3. Help students stay on path
4. Ensure students are learning. (para. 5)

There are varied ways institutions can implement a guided pathways model. Regardless of the way it is implemented, the holistic approach has gained traction among community colleges across the country. Lorain County Community College in Ohio began implementing guided pathways in 2012, creating program maps and redesigning advising services. Jenkins, Lahr, and Fink (2017) described several early indicators of student success that were observed after implementation of the guided pathways model. From the 2010-2011 and 2014-2015 academic years, the number of students who completed nine credit hours toward degree completion increased from 19 % to 30 %. Additionally, the number of first-time, full-time students who completed their degree within three years

increased from 8 % in 2008 to 23 % in 2014 (Jenkins et al., 2017). With a focus on English and mathematics gateway course completion in the first year, Cleveland State Community College in Tennessee implemented corequisite support courses and allowed all students to declare a career community. Bailey et al. (2015a) used the term *career community* as a replacement term for meta-major, which refers to the broader set of classes that apply to a variety of program pathways. These meta-major courses provide students a path while they narrow their program pathway choice. According to Jenkins et al. (2017) and Jenkins et al. (2018), implementing these systems resulted in a significant increase in the number of students who completed English and math gateway courses in the first year, increasing to 35% in 2016 from 17% in 2014.

Indian River State College in Florida also reported increases in graduation rates after implementing a guided pathways approach (Jenkins et al., 2018). Identified by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) as a national leader in guided pathways implementation, Indian River State College implemented individual education plans for students, made enhancements to advising services, ramped up support for gateway courses in a variety of subjects, and improved processes for student career exploration and declaration of a major (Jenkins et al., 2017). Additionally, the institution created yearlong course schedules to facilitate student course access needed for completion. These changes boosted two-year graduation rates for all first-time, full-time students in a variety of demographics from 2011 to 2015. White student degree completion increased from 26% to 36%, Hispanic student degree completion increased from 21% to 34%, and Black student degree completion increased from 13% to 23% (Jenkins et al., 2018).

To keep students on the path toward completion some institutions focus on the development of the student. According to McKinsey (2016), faculty mentoring relationships with students provides that opportunity. Delbanco (2012) stated, “At its core, a college should be a place where young people find help navigating the territory between adolescence and adulthood” (p. 3). McKinsey (2016) studied the nature, development, and benefits of mentoring relationships, and suggested the rewards far outweigh the risks for both the faculty member and the student. The mentoring process requires additional time and energy from the faculty member but encourages the student to focus inward and reflect throughout the learning process. Through McKinsey’s (2016) research, faculty interview responses expressed the depth mentoring relationships brought to their teaching as they were able to better understand the perspectives and experiences of their students. Likewise, students felt supported beyond the classroom, seeking personal advice and growth opportunities from their faculty (McKinsey, 2016). A student survey conducted by College Pulse (2021) indicated 64% of students who have mentors feel more confident about their post-graduation goals and plans. According to Ezarik (2021), the mentoring relationship assists in building student confidence, helping them navigate the college experience and launch a career.

Early alert systems for at-risk students needing intervention have become widely popular among higher education institutions (Hanover Research, 2014). Alerts are initiated for a variety of reasons, including academic performance, attendance, and varying life circumstances (Hanover Research, 2014). A range of systems are available that prompt intervention from campus faculty and staff encouraging a response from students to change the course of their academic progress. While these systems successfully help identify at-

risk students, supporting services and interventions must be in place for the alert system to be effective (Hanover Research, 2014). In 2009, Noel-Levitz (2013) conducted a survey with higher education administrators and found 90% of institutions not only use an early alert system but consider it one of the highest priorities in connecting student success and retention. For many, the goal of an early alert system is to assist students during academic difficulty and direct them to support services. Barefoot, Griffin, and Koch (2012) reported 89% of higher education institutions have implemented an early alert system to assist in the retention and graduation of students.

### **Background**

In Kansas, there are 19 community colleges. Between 2015 and 2020, these institutions have successfully graduated just over half of their total degree-seeking students within three years. Of that student population, 25% completed a degree at the institution where they began their college career (Kansas Board of Regents [KBOR], 2020a). Community College A, the institution where the current study was completed, has been implementing varied strategies to increase student completion rates for the past four decades. In 2010, the KBOR released *Foresight 2020*, a 10-year strategic agenda to increase degree completion at Kansas institutions of higher education. The KBOR (2020b) agenda identified three main goals: to increase higher education attainment for Kansans; to better align the higher education system to the needs of the economy; and to ensure state university excellence. A 10 % increase in degree completion among all state public sector higher education institutions was one of the embedded goals of *Foresight 2020* (KBOR, 2020b). In 2011, the community college system was graduating 20% of students at their home institution within three years. In 2017, only a slight improvement was observed, with



community colleges graduating 25.9% of students within three years (KBOR, 2020b). In 2016, 16.5% of students completed their degree within three years at Community College A. In 2017, 18.8% of students completed their degree at Community College A, falling short of the 10% gain desired by KBOR (KBOR, 2020b).

Community College A has implemented a variety of strategies to assist in academic retention and degree completion. In 2019, Community College A implemented guided pathways, which resulted in providing clear program maps to completion, corequisite course completion in math and English, and establishment of a professional development course to assist first-time, full-time students in navigating college. Early alert systems, creation of a retention specialist position, development of a retention team, and academic success coaches were among the strategies implemented. In 2020, Community College A implemented AVISO Retention (2021), a retention tool which allowed faculty and staff to monitor student progress, send alerts regarding students at risk, and ensure follow up on student needs. Additionally, Community College A identified a pathway mentor for each student based on their degree pathway. The establishment of a faculty to student mentor relationship assisted students in building confidence, navigating the college experience, and helping launch a career (Ezarik, 2021). Community College A has not measured the outcomes of guided pathways directly. Research is needed to assess the impact of guided pathways, faculty mentors, and the early alert process.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Degree completion rates have plagued institutions of higher education dating back to the 1960's (Aljohani, 2016). Sixty percent of community college students nation-wide struggle to earn a degree within three years (Smith, 2019). In Kansas, 75% of community

college students do not complete their degree with their home institution within three years of matriculation (KBOR, 2020a).

Community colleges across the country have attempted to implement strategies to improve degree completion. Early alert programs, eliminating barriers like finances and course availability, and increasing transferability ease are among strategies that are in process or have already been implemented (Mintz, 2019). Various higher education institutions have utilized mentoring as a supporting resource to assist students in degree completion. Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) found the use of mentoring provided a supportive environment that helped student motivation and learning and boosted their confidence. Chelberg and Bosman (2019) reported mentoring provides support to students in navigating the challenges of college life, sorting through competing priorities and stress, and setting goals and creating paths to reach them. Despite these strategies and efforts, degree completion remains a challenge at community colleges nationwide (Jenkins et al., 2018). The CCRC (2015) recognized the continued concern with degree completion and worked to find solutions for community colleges to redesign themselves and create clear paths to degree completion with the guided pathways model. Utilizing four main areas of practice, guided pathways sought to map clear paths to degree completion, assist students who are undecided in a career path or program pathway, ensure students remain on track to finish their program, and assure students are learning (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Community College A completed a curriculum redesign in 2018 to establish clearer pathways to academic degree completion and then implemented guided pathways in the fall of 2019. Additionally, the institution added a professional development course for all incoming full-time students that introduces guided pathways and assigns a faculty mentor

for their program of study. Students who are undeclared are placed in a similar course to assist in declaring a pathway. Along with the implementation of guided pathways, Community College A implemented AVISO Retention (2021), an early alert, system to assist in early intervention for at-risk students. To date, no formal research has been conducted on the effectiveness of the guided pathways model at Community College A. As the institution continues to modify and enhance the components of guided pathways, additional research is needed to assess the effectiveness of guided pathways on community college degree completion. Faculty mentoring was implemented in the fall of 2019 at Community College A to connect students to a faculty mentor teaching in their pathway program who could provide guidance and support in completing the pathway. The faculty mentor provides support for students as they navigate their pathway and campus life. They serve as the student's first academic point of contact, provide individualized attention to the student, help connect the student to other resources on campus, monitor the student's academic progress, and assist in notifying others to intervene when students display at-risk behaviors. No formal research has been conducted on the effectiveness of the mentoring program. In the fall of 2020, Community College A implemented AVISO Retention (2021), a tool that provides detailed academic information about students and serves as an early alert system. AVISO Retention (2021) monitors multiple variables including attendance, academic progress, and activity in the learning management system. This information is collected and shared with faculty, academic advisors, and administration. While the tool provides reports on the number of alerts entered and responded to, no formal research has been conducted on the tool's effectiveness. Guided pathways, faculty mentoring, and the AVISO Retention (2021) tool were implemented to support students

and assist them in completing their degree pathway. Research is needed to examine the effectiveness of guided pathways, faculty mentoring, and the early alert process at Community College A.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Five purposes guided the current study. The first purpose was to determine the perceptions of Community College A students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about the components of a guided pathways model that contributed to their academic success and degree completion. The second purpose was to explore the perceptions of students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about the components of a guided pathways model that inhibited academic success and degree completion. The third purpose was to investigate the perceptions of students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about supports from faculty mentors that contributed to their academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model. The fourth purpose was to probe the perceptions of students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about the supports that faculty mentors provided that could have contributed to academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model. The fifth purpose was to gauge the perceptions of students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about the benefits of advisors and faculty being alerted that a student may need extra academic assistance and support in a guided pathways program.

## **Significance of the Study**

Use of guided pathways as a strategy to increase degree completion in community colleges has gained in popularity across the country. This study contributed to the literature researching the effectiveness of guided pathways for community college students. While research has focused on the initial impact of guided pathways, no studies were found during the review of the literature that focused on faculty mentoring of students or early alert procedures. The results of this study may be of interest to the CCRC at the institution where the study was conducted. The current research study could provide Community College A and the Kansas community college system with impactful data for future decisions related to support initiatives assisting guided pathway students, faculty mentoring, and an early alert system. As guided pathways is implemented across the country, the initiatives that surround and support this model vary. The results of this study could help student affairs faculty and staff when making decisions on supporting guided pathways initiatives. Additionally, the results could be valuable to students and parents as they look for higher education institutions that provide support systems that increase academic success and degree completion rates.

## **Delimitations**

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined delimitations as, “self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study” (p. 134). The delimitations for this study included the following:

- The study was conducted at a single community college.
- The study was conducted in the early stages of implementation of guided pathways when modifications were still in progress.

- Participants were limited to recent graduates in the health science, liberal arts, and education pathways.

### **Assumptions**

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined assumptions as, “postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research” (p. 135). This study was based on four assumptions:

- All participants answered the interview questions with full understanding and honesty.
- All participants engaged in the faculty mentoring process through their guided pathways program.
- The student demographic information submitted at the time of enrollment was accurate and current.
- Each student’s declared major in Community College A’s student database was accurate and current.

### **Research Questions**

“Research questions shape and specifically focus on the purpose of the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 132). Five research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways, perceive as factors related to their chosen pathway that contributed to their academic success and degree completion?

**RQ2.** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways, perceive as factors related to their chosen pathway that inhibited their academic success and degree completion?

**RQ3.** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways perceive as support provided by faculty mentors that contributed to their academic success and degree completion?

**RQ4.** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways perceive as support faculty mentors could have provided that would have contributed to their academic success and degree completion?

**RQ5.** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways perceive are the benefits of having advisors and/or faculty alerted that a student may need extra academic assistance and support?

### **Definition of Terms**

The purpose of this section is to provide definitions of terms used throughout the study to enhance the reader's understanding of the research.

**AVISO Retention.** Varying software platforms provide alerts and key data on student progress. The goal is to alert faculty and staff when intervention is needed (AVISO Retention, 2021). The AVISO Retention platform partners with institutional data systems to capture information including enrollment status, student involvement activities, grades, attendance, and academic major. These data are used to create risk factors and alerts for students in need. This system allows targeted intervention and was used by Community College A in the faculty mentorship initiative in this study.

**Guided pathways.** The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2012) defined guided pathways as,

an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her/his point of entry through to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market. (p. 1)

**Student completion.** Community College A defined student completion as a student completing an associate degree (E. Mohammed, personal communication, November 5, 2020).

**Student success.** Community College A defined student success as a full-time student's persistence from semester to semester, completing an associate degree (E. Mohammed, personal communication, November 5, 2020).

### **Organization of the Study**

This study includes five chapters. The first chapter included the introduction, background, statement of the problem, significance of the study, delimitations, assumptions, research questions, and definition of terms. The second chapter provides a summary of factors related to academic success and degree completion in community colleges, an overview of the guided pathways model, a description of higher education institutions that have implemented the guided pathways model, research related to the implementation of the guided pathways model, next steps in guided pathways, faculty mentoring, and early alert systems and their role in assisting students to reach degree completion. Chapter 3 explains the methodology for the study, including the research design, setting, sampling procedures, instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis and synthesis, reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher's role, and limitations



of the study. Chapter 4 provides the results of the study. The final chapter includes a study summary, findings related to the literature, and conclusions.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

Academic retention and degree completion have long been a focus for higher education institutions (Zeidenberg, 2008). Funding models have been tied to program completion rates in many states and the global pandemic has left higher education institutions fighting to regain enrollment and retention (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021). Guided pathways first surfaced at the community college level in 2012 when the AACC created a commission referred to as the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Initiative* (n.d.). To reinvent and redesign America's community colleges, this commission created the AACC Pathways Project (AACC, n.d.). The AACC Pathways Project was meant to address the completion rate challenges among community colleges across the country, recognizing fewer than 40% of students complete a degree within six years (Zeidenberg, 2008). Because guided pathways is a relatively new model there is not yet extensive or even sufficient research data related to its effectiveness. The AACC and CCRC have dedicated research to early results of the impact of the model and the implementation of guided pathways. A summary of factors related to academic success and degree completion in community colleges, an overview of the guided pathways model, a description of higher education institutions that have implemented the guided pathways model, research related to the implementation of the guided pathways model, next steps in guided pathways, faculty mentoring, and early alert systems and their role in assisting students to reach degree completion are summarized in Chapter 2.

## **Academic Success and Degree Completion in Community Colleges**

According to Aljohani (2016), institutions of higher education began focusing on improving degree completion rates as early as the 1960's. Aljohani's (2016) research reviewed major models in student retention over four decades. While early research focused solely on sociological, social anthropology, and human resources fields, research has expanded to include physiological, psychological, cultural, organizational, environmental, interactional, and economic views as well. Initial research on student retention focused on why students left college, but Aljohani's (2016) research also focused on the factors that cause withdrawal from college.

College graduation statistics are at the forefront of college strategic planning, curriculum development, and local and federal funding. While annual graduation rates increased in 2021 by 2%, only one in four college freshmen attained a degree within four years (Hanson, 2021). There are 41,000 students who graduate from colleges in Kansas each year, and in 2021, 27% of those students attained an associate degree (Hanson, 2021). Only half of the students who attend a four-year institution successfully complete a degree within six years (Ogden, 2020). Varying factors impact student success and degree completion rates. Balancing work and school, handling the expenses of college and daily life, and lack of support are among the top factors contributing to inhibited degree completion (Smith, 2019). Smith (2019) administered the Revealing Institutional Strengths and Challenges survey to 6,000 two-year students from 10 different community colleges across the country located in California, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming during the 2017 and 2018 fall semesters. Students reported varying factors hinder academic progress. Sixty-one percent

of the respondents indicated the number of hours they have to work did not leave enough time to study, 50% said their income did not cover their expenses, and 30% indicated they were supporting family or friends with health issues or had difficulty finding childcare (Smith, 2019). The identification of these factors prompted community college leaders to implement support services and resources for their students. However, these services and resources were provided at significant expense to the institutions. Most states spent less on funding community colleges compared to four-year colleges, yet the community colleges enrolled the largest number of students in need of support services and resources (Smith, 2019).

Student support services and personal commitment to learning are key elements related to students' success in curriculum progression particularly in the first year of college (Chan & Wang, 2017). In a study focused on community college students enrolled in programs from the science, engineering, technology, and math (STEM) area, Chan and Wang (2017) studied the learning experience as well as the environmental influences at play in course completion. Students who had to meet the necessary requirements for federal financial aid and those who had additional support from family members had a higher rate of course completion (Chan & Wang, 2017). Factors such as student grade point average and number of attempted credits play a part in the momentum of a student through the curriculum in the first year (Chan & Wang, 2017). While student self-efficacy is critical, the engagement of faculty with students creates an opportunity for increased engagement, improved study skills, and institutional commitment for the student (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016; Wang, 2017). Faculty engagement combined with the recognition of important risk factors like class attendance, academic progress, and mental health have

created opportunities for higher education institutions to implement early intervention strategies to help improve academic success and degree completion (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003).

Community colleges have been recognized for their commitment to equity and access for students (Leone, 2016). As the competition for state funds shifts to academic performance, institutions must shift focus and leadership to create opportunities for college access and success (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011; AACC, 2012). Increasing student success and degree completion requires institution administrators to actively pursue shared leadership with faculty and staff (Amey, 2005). The issue of degree completion is complex and requires leadership from multiple perspectives starting with executive leadership and flowing down through the organizational chart (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Eddy, 2010).

### **An Overview of the Guided Pathways Model**

Higher education has embraced the concept of more choice for decades, giving students a variety of options in the courses they take to complete their program requirements (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Bailey et al. (2015a) referred to this as the *cafeteria model*. However, as Scott-Clayton (2011) stated, “more choice is not always better” (p. 9). Higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, have been tasked with serving a diverse student population in relation to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, academic preparedness, and first-generation students. Operating under the cafeteria model has often left inexperienced students to make critical decisions in isolation (Bailey et al., 2015a). Additionally, the policies, processes, and support services meant to assist and guide students are often barriers to their successful navigation of postsecondary education (Jenkins & Cho, 2013). Implementation of a guided pathways model must include the

redevelopment of these processes, policies, and support systems to enhance student success (Barnett & Bragg, 2006). The traditional one-size-fits-all approach to which community colleges have grown accustomed required a shift to focus on the individual student (Bailey et al., 2015a).

Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins (2015b) published *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*. Within this publication a new approach to higher education curriculum called guided pathways was introduced. The guided pathways model was created to provide a clear path to completion, assist students in exploring and deciding on a program pathway, and ensure students stay the course to degree completion through frequent and early interaction and intervention (AACC, n.d.). These goals are accomplished through the four pillars of the guided pathways model:

1. Clarify pathways to end goals
2. Help students choose and enter pathways
3. Help students stay on path
4. Ensure students are learning (pp. 1-2).

Clarifying pathways to end goals is meant to provide the student with a prescriptive guide to their degree program, outlining every course to be taken and the length of time to degree completion. Pillar two provides the student with tools and resources to help identify the best degree pathway based on their interests and skillset and notes the pathway starting point. Pillar three surrounds the student with resources and support to stay on track to degree completion, intervening when necessary. Support resources like tutoring, early alert systems, and mentoring play a critical role in pillar three. The components of intervention involve regular monitoring of student progress both in individual courses and along the

pathway. Included in this monitoring is the effective communication of critical information across the institution to assist in early intervention when a student displays clearly identified characteristics that place them at risk such as poor attendance, missing assignments, and life circumstances that can impact a student's ability to successfully complete coursework (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003). The final pillar ensures that students are learning. This is best met by establishing clear and intentional learning outcomes and a system to evaluate those outcomes and learning (Bailey et al., 2015a).

### **Community Colleges That Have Implemented Guided Pathways**

In 2011, Miami Dade College examined all eight of its campuses to discern the cause of student completion issues (CCRC, 2015). After careful examination, Miami Dade College leadership determined students failed to complete their programs due to a variety of problems. Students didn't fully understand how to navigate their programs of study or program requirements. The number of courses and program choices overwhelmed students and they needed additional support in establishing academic and professional goals. The academic support in place was too far removed from the academic programs, and the information provided to students from academic advisors lacked clarity and consistency (CCRC, 2015). After attempting multiple initiatives to improve retention on a small scale, Miami Dade College launched a systemic change through the implementation of guided pathways in August of 2011 (CCRC, 2015). The vision behind the systemic change centered around three main goals: cultivating a collective understanding of the problems students encounter when navigating college, creating a comprehensive plan to address those problems, and developing support and buy-in for the initiative among faculty, staff, and administration (CCRC, 2015). After developing guided pathways for their programs

and building a new student intake system, Miami Dade College saw an increase in developmental education placement and an increase in the retention of students who met with an academic advisor to develop an academic plan (CCRC, 2015). The critical component in their movement forward has been to channel the increased revenue from retained students toward student support services. After seeing an 8% increase in the retention of students who met with an academic advisor, Miami Dade College invested additional dollars in hiring 25 new academic advisors to continue supporting students in their academic and career planning (CCRC, 2015).

Other institutions of higher education have launched similar initiatives as part of the guided pathways implementation. In 2017, Laramie County Community College in Wyoming implemented guided pathways and included improvements to their student orientation and new student advising processes (CCRC, 2020a). Additionally, Laramie County Community College began advising students differently through dual-enrollment and engaged students with the institution's academic programs from the time they stepped foot on campus (CCRC, 2020a). At Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland, students were required to take an orientation course, any required placement testing, and meet with an academic advisor before enrolling in classes. Advisors trained as career counselors through the National Career Development Association began advising students more intensely with their career goals in mind. Additionally, all students were required to check in with their advisor once they completed 15, 30, and 45 credit hours (CCRC, 2020b). Institutions that are implementing guided pathways may not all use the same intervention tools and support tactics, but when reviewed by the CCRC, all institutions were implementing changes in the areas of program organization, improving



student orientation, advising, increased engagement with programs, and connecting dual-enrollment as an on-ramp to college (CCRC, 2020b).

### **Research Related to the Implementation of Guided Pathways**

In April of 2017, the CCRC conducted research on 30 community colleges involved in the AACC Pathways Project. All the institutions had successfully designed clearer paths to completion by creating pathways within the first year of implementation (Jenkins et al., 2017). Within these programs of study, institutions redesigned curriculum to expose students to their career field in the first semester rather than the required previous curriculum design where all general education courses needed to be completed prior to taking specific career field courses. All 30 institutions also revised their academic advising and student support roles in some way (Jenkins et al., 2017). The development of a course schedule to allow better planning was less prominent among institutions. Revising the schedule ensured students could complete their program within their timeframe goal. All 30 institutions experienced the challenges of engaging and empowering the entire organization in the redesign process. The fear of change and lack of awareness of the urgency to change created roadblocks for some institutions in need of systemic change (Jenkins et al., 2017).

There are a variety of community colleges that have implemented guided pathways with a multi-faceted approach. Roane State Community College implemented a program map for its pathways model to assist students in understanding their path to degree completion. Additionally, the institution added a success coach model that assigns a coach to incoming degree-seeking students. At Roane State Community College there are 16 success coaches with a caseload of 200 students (Jenkins et al., 2018). Nashville State

Community College also created a program map but included enhanced web content with information related to skills required and jobs associated with the various program pathways (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Cleveland State Community College implemented guided pathways with the addition of program communities to assist students in virtual career exploration.

Chattanooga State Community College implemented an orientation course specific to each degree pathway to provide an in-depth introduction to the students' program of choice.

Jackson State Community College increased the progression through developmental education through corequisite courses in math, and modified placement testing and progress requirements for courses (Jenkins et al., 2018).

### **Next Steps in Guided Pathways**

Among community colleges, students arrive underprepared for college-level coursework and rely on developmental education to get caught up. The AACC has initiated reform to assist in connecting developmental education curriculum to guided pathways to ensure students are able to successfully complete their programs of study even if developmental courses are needed prior to enrollment in the required program courses (Jenkins et al., 2017). Traditionally, institutions have separated the prepared students from underprepared students. As part of the AACC reform, students are co-mingled to expose underprepared students to the skills and habits needed to be successful in college. This is being accomplished at institutions through co-requisite course design during which students are enrolled in developmental pre-requisites at the same time as the course required for the degree and peer-to-peer learning which involves partnering students together in the learning process (Jenkins et al., 2017).

Focusing on assisting students in selecting a degree and mapping out their academic plan makes them more likely to complete the degree in a streamlined fashion. The guided pathways approach is meant to provide an approach that is easy for students to understand and navigate (Bailey et al., 2015b). While there is not yet rigorous research available on guided pathways, there is research in support of principles of guided pathways. Jenkins and Cho's (2012) research on student acceleration and completion in academic programs indicated more than half of students who were able to decide on an academic program in their first year earned a credential or transferred within five years. This was not true of students who waited to select an academic program. Students who did not choose a program until their third year only had a 20% success rate. Jenkins and Weiss (2011) focused on low-income students and how charting their path to academic program completion impacted their acceleration to completion. Students who completed eight or more credit hours in a degree program in the first year were 20% more likely to earn a credential or transfer within seven years compared to those who did not complete the credits in the first year. According to Bailey et al. (2015b), while more extensive research is needed on the impact of guided pathways on academic program completion and student success, the authors have suggested there is a strong correlation between clear pathways and academic plans and accelerated credential and degree completion.

### **Faculty Mentoring: A Support System for Student Success**

Research on faculty mentoring varies due to the complexity of the mentoring relationship and the definition of a mentor. McKinsey (2016) struggled to define mentorship when studying the components and phases of mentoring. Definitions like advisor, role model, friendly critic, and supporter surfaced in McKinsey's (2016) research.

Of the 9,200 students and 182 faculty who completed questionnaires in McKinsey's research, the rewards outweighed the risks perceived. Most students didn't identify their faculty member by the term mentor, but identified more with terms such as coach, academic parent, or simply someone who took them under their wing (McKinsey, 2016).

In a survey conducted by College Pulse (2021), students identified mentors beyond their faculty, including their peers and academic advisors. In this survey, 2,003 college students from 105 universities provided feedback on their experiences with mentors. One in five students reported they did not have access to a mentor while more than half of the students sought career advice from a mentor (Ezarik, 2021). Of the students surveyed, those who were legacy students (e.g. individuals who are children of alumni) had a mentor more often than other students (Ezarik, 2021). Regardless of the mentor's role at the institution, students reported benefits from having a support system through a mentoring relationship with a college faculty member, staff member, or a peer student (Ezarik, 2021).

Research surrounding the use of mentoring surfaces primarily in educational and business settings (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). In higher education, there has been an increased focus on academic advising, specifically centralizing advising offices and employing individuals who specialize in advising services (Anft, 2018). This shift in higher education has removed advising duties from faculty members. In Campbell and Campbell's (1997) research, students who were mentored by faculty members not only took more classes each semester, but also withdrew at a lower rate and earned higher grades. More recent research by Satterfield, Dasco, and Patel (2016) supported the results of Campbell and Campbell's (1997) research, and suggested successful mentoring relationships are composed of a series of attributes and characteristics such as clear

expectations, frequent communication, and nudging and pushing from the mentor to assist in the completion of academic goals. The behaviors and attitudes of the mentee are critical as well. Mentees can best benefit from the mentor relationship by being prepared for regular meetings and completing tasks or recommendations from the mentor in a timely manner (Satterfield et al., 2016).

In 2019, Birkeland, Davies, and Heard surveyed students from a medium-sized Midwestern university. This university had moved to a centralized advising model and decided to pilot a program to make faculty who previously served as academic advisors student mentors. In a survey of students about the development of a mentoring program, students reported the top five topics they sought advice on included what classes to take, what professors to take, the potential for internships, full and part-time work options, and what major to choose (Birkeland et al., 2019). Based on student feedback from the survey, faculty were not considered a primary contact for help with the top five topics before the mentoring program was established. Students did, however, seek advice from their peers, friends, and academic advisors more frequently (Birkeland et al., 2019). Implementing a mentoring program gave faculty the opportunity to provide support and guidance for students making critical decisions for their academic progress and completion.

Researchers focused on the academic success of students in a mentoring program suggested the participation and engagement of the mentee is most important (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003). In their research of first-year students, the impact of the mentoring program was not significant. Rodger and Tremblay (2003) discovered in their initial results that not all the students who were part of the mentoring program were necessarily

more successful than those who did not participate. They did, however, find students who were more engaged in their mentoring relationship did achieve better grades.

At a university in Windsor, Canada, Salinitri (2005) explored the impact of a formal mentoring program on the retention of first-year students. Salinitri (2005) found formal mentoring was especially impactful for students with low proficiency. As a result of the formal mentoring, 88.5% of students were in good academic standing after a year of mentoring compared to 57.1% the year prior. These students increased their grade point average, failed fewer courses, and ended the year in better academic standing than students who did not participate in the mentoring program.

### **Early Alert Systems: Early Intervention to Assist in Degree Completion**

As technology continues to grow, there are dozens of companies providing tools and services to higher education institutions that identify at-risk students needing early intervention. Early alert systems are available from a variety of vendors like EAB, Starfish, Civitas Learning, and AVISO Retention (2021). All these platforms provide warning triggers for faculty and staff to intervene with students who are at-risk academically. Navigate by EAB is a student success management system that, “unites students, administrators, advisors, faculty, and other staff in a collaborative network to improve student support” (EAB, 2022, para. 2). EAB promoted statistics of “graduation rate increases of 3% to 15% after using the Navigate platform” (EAB, 2022, para. 2). According to Naviance (2022), Starfish “empowers students with access to resources and people to help them success and achieve their goals” (para. 3). The Civitas Learning platform provides college staff and faculty with, “real-time insights and workflow solutions to support the entire student lifecycle, achieve equitable outcomes and build sustainable

institutions” (Civitas Learning, 2022, para. 2). AVISO Retention (2021) is “an artificial intelligence equity and student success solution that helps colleges and universities keep underserved students engaged, increases retention, and optimizes the chances of degree and certificate completion” (Watermark, 2022, para. 1). This system connects with the student information database and the learning management system to provide real-time insights. These insights provide faculty, staff, and administrators with data on students who need immediate intervention. Through a series of reports and alerts, faculty can communicate about students with other departments and faculty to provide quick intervention.

In a survey conducted by Hanover Research (2014), 93% of the 400 higher education institutions surveyed indicated they were using an early alert system. These systems monitor key factors related to student success including attendance and academic progress. Some of these systems also provide faculty and staff with critical information about students such as identifying first generation students, single parents, and student athletes (Hanover Research, 2014). When combined with intervention strategies, the early alert system provides higher education institutions with a quick way to identify students who are at risk and begin intervention as quickly as possible. Nearly half of the institutions surveyed deemed the early alert system an effective resource by itself (Hanover Research, 2014).

At the University of South Pacific, Jokhan, Sharma, and Singh (2019) conducted a study to evaluate a home-grown early warning system (EWS) for students who were enrolled in online and blended courses. The EWS was implemented in week four of the course and resulted in significant change in the actions and behaviors of students. The average amount of student logins into the learning management software (LMS) increased

by 7%. The EWS provided students with a progress status in comparison to other students in the class, which resulted in increased completion of assignments (Jokhan, et al., 2019).

Institutional research offices collect data on students that is reported to the appropriate funding and or state organizations on a regular basis. These data entail much of the information used to provide alerts to faculty, staff, and administrators with EWS platforms. In Sung-Po's (2015) research on student drop out and student suspension at North American University, data captured from an EWS revealed the varying reasons students withdrew or were suspended from their academic programs. Factors such as financial need, academic struggle, family or personal health issues, and military duty contributed to the withdrawal and suspension rates. Sung-Po (2015) determined the EWS provided sufficient data for intervention but a partnership with a mentoring program was necessary to ensure early intervention to keep students on track academically.

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 provided a review of factors related to academic success and degree completion in community colleges, an overview of the guided pathways model, a description of higher education institutions that have implemented the guided pathways model. In addition, research related to the implementation of the guided pathways model, next steps in guided pathways, faculty mentoring, and early alert systems and their role in assisting students toward degree completion was presented. Chapter 3 explains the methods used to conduct the current study.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

This qualitative study at Community College A examined perceptions of degree completers about the institution's guided pathways model, faculty mentors, and the early alert system. Five purposes guided the study. The first purpose was to determine the perceptions of Community College A students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about the components of a guided pathways model that contributed to their academic success and degree completion. The second purpose explored the perceptions of students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about the components of a guided pathways model that inhibited academic success and degree completion. The third purpose investigated the perceptions of supports from faculty mentors that contributed to their academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model. The fourth purpose probed the perceptions of students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about the supports faculty mentors could have contributed to their academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model. The fifth purpose was to gauge the perceptions of students who recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways about the benefits of advisors and faculty being alerted a student may need extra academic assistance and support in a guided pathways program. Chapter 3 explains the methods used to conduct the current study. This chapter includes the research design, setting, sampling procedures, instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis, reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher's role, and limitations of the study.

## **Research Design**

A qualitative phenomenological research design was chosen for this study. According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study, “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). Taking a phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to gain insight from the interpretation of the personal experiences of each participant interviewed. Qualitative research design relies on the experiences of the participants and requires the researcher to interpret these described experiences without bias or the interference of the researcher’s personal experiences. In a phenomenological study, the researcher seeks to understand the perceptions of participants’ experiences. For the purpose of this study, the phenomenon of interest was the experience and perceptions of community college students about how a guided pathways program contributed to or detracted from academic success and degree completion, faculty mentoring, and the impact of an early alert system on academic performance.

Qualitative research involves the exploration and understanding of an individual or group’s experiences through use of interactions and questions. These interactions often take place in or near the participant’s setting in which they have experienced the topic of research (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the researcher was a key instrument, and interviews were conducted in a neutral setting. As the interviewer, the researcher was the main source of data collection for the study. The researcher sought to collect data in a productive and objective way. Using Creswell’s (2014) concept of reflexivity, the researcher focused on integrity and objectivity to ensure that personal experiences and cultural influences did not affect the interpretation and analysis of the data.

**Setting**

The setting for this study was Community College A, a large rural community college in Kansas. Community College A is one of 19 community colleges in Kansas. During the spring 2022 semester, there were 3,162 full-time students pursuing an associate degree at Community College A through a guided pathway program initiated in the fall of 2019.

**Sampling Procedures**

Criterion sampling was used to select the participants in the current study. Patton (2001) defined criterion sampling as “the process of participant selection that utilizes predetermined criteria that are purposeful to the research” (p. 238). Participants met four criteria. They matriculated to Community College A the fall of 2019; were continuously enrolled full-time throughout the time they attended Community College A; participated in a health science, liberal arts, or education pathway; and completed an associate degree in three years or less.

**Instrument**

Proper protocol for interviews is critical to accurately and adequately document participant answers in a qualitative study. Creswell (2014) highlighted specific criteria for an effective interview protocol including instructions for the interviewer, initial questions to establish comfort and rapport with the participant, and proper probes to ensure enough detail is captured in the participant’s response to questions. The interview protocol for this study was designed to foster an environment for open dialogue about components related to guided pathways, a faculty mentor, and an early alert system. An interview protocol that included one descriptive and demographic question and 14 semi-structured questions was

designed for the current study. Interview questions were aligned with the research questions. The descriptive and demographic question included the following:

***IQ1.*** What is your program pathway?

The research questions and corresponding open-ended interview questions included the following:

***RQ1.*** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways perceive as factors related to their health science, liberal arts, or education pathway

***IQ2.*** What factors related to your pathway contributed to your academic success and degree completion?

***IQ3.*** Which factors inside the classroom were most impactful in your academic success and degree completion?

***IQ4.*** Which factors outside the classroom were most impactful in your academic success and degree completion?

***RQ2.*** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways perceive as factors related to their chosen pathway that inhibited their academic success and degree completion?

***IQ5.*** What factors related to your pathway inhibited your academic success and degree completion?

***IQ6.*** What factors inside the classroom inhibited your academic success and degree completion?

***IQ7.*** What factors outside the classroom inhibited your academic success and degree completion?

**RQ3.** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways, perceive as support from faculty mentors that contributed to their academic success and degree completion?

**IQ8.** How often did you interact with your faculty mentor?

**IQ9.** How did your faculty mentor contribute to your academic success and degree completion?

**IQ10.** In what ways, if any, did your faculty mentor assist you with matters outside of your coursework?

**RQ4.** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways, perceive as supports faculty mentors could have provided that would have contributed to their academic success and degree completion?

**IQ11.** In what ways could your faculty mentor have supported you in completing your academic coursework?

**IQ12.** In what ways could your faculty mentor have supported you in completing your degree?

**IQ13.** If you could add to or change elements of the faculty mentor role, what would you add or change?

**RQ5.** What do Community College A students who have recently completed a degree in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways, perceive are the benefits of having advisors and/or faculty alerted that a student may need extra academic assistance and support?

*IQ14.* How often did your faculty members reach out to you about your attendance and academic progress?

*IQ15.* In what ways, if any, did AVISO assist you and/or your faculty in staying on track to complete your course and/or program?

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In preparation for data collection, a request was submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board (IRB) on August 24, 2022. The Baker University IRB approved the request to conduct the study on August 29, 2022 (see Appendix A). Once the Baker University IRB approved the study, a request to conduct the study was submitted to the Community College A Institutional Review Board on August 30, 2022. Approval was received from Community College A on September 7, 2022 (see Appendix B). Once IRB approval was received from Baker University and Community College A, the Institutional Research Office at Community College A was contacted via email requesting names of participants who met the criteria for inclusion in the study: full-time students who had been enrolled in an associate degree completion program in health science, liberal arts, and education pathways and who had graduated in the spring of 2022 or earlier.

Using the contact information provided by the Community College A Institutional Research Office, 20 students were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study (see Appendix C). The email provided an overview of the research topic, stated the amount of time participation would require and indicated participation was voluntary. The invitation to participate also indicated the participants could withdraw from the study at any time or choose not to respond to any question during the study. In addition, a description of how anonymity and confidentiality would be preserved was provided. Invited

participants were informed the study would be free of any risk or discomfort and that there was no compensation offered for participation in the study. Participants were informed the interview would be audio recorded and a transcript would be prepared and sent to them upon completion of the interview process for their review of accuracy, omissions, or additions. Individuals who indicated an interest in participating in the study received a follow-up email to schedule a mutual time for an interview.

Prior to conducting interviews, two external examiners were selected from Community College A to review the interview protocol for clarity and alignment with the research questions. These examiners had qualitative research experience, had completed dissertations using qualitative research methods, and were currently employed by a public community college in the Midwest. Two pilot interviews were conducted prior to contacting participants to ensure the interview process was cohesive and had proper structure. The pilot interview participants were current students at Community College A who were in year two of their guided pathways program.

A consent form (see Appendix D) that included the same information contained in the Invitation to Participate (see Appendix C) plus a notification the interview would be audio recorded and the interviewer would be taking notes throughout the interview was signed by each participant prior to participation in the interview. Zoom interviews were conducted with each participant at a time that was mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. To ensure anonymity, each participant was assigned a unique identifying letter ranging from 1 to 10. The unique identifier was used in data analysis and reporting of the results.

Noting Creswell's (2014) caution that the research process and presence of the researcher can elicit nervousness or hesitation during the interview, the researcher worked to create a welcoming and relaxed environment through open casual dialogue prior to starting the interview. This dialogue assisted in creating a strong researcher to participant relationship critical to the success of qualitative research. Each interview began with the demographic question, followed by the 14 semi-structured questions. Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) suggested the use of semi-structured interviews created more elaboration on interview topics, resulting in deeper discovery of information. Utilizing open-ended interviews allowed the participants to share openly and gave the researcher the opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on responses to capture the information needed for the research study. The researcher took notes during each interview and asked follow-up questions when necessary to clarify research question responses. The use of note taking by the researcher as well as audio recording provided additional information used in analysis of each interview. After each participant completed the interview, the researcher thanked each respondent for participation. All interviews took place from December 1, 2022 to December 18, 2022. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

### **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), a common procedure for the analysis of qualitative research includes identifying key categories, concepts, and themes. Creswell (2014) suggested the analysis of qualitative research data was a linear and hierarchical process incorporating five steps: (1) the organization and preparation of data, (2) reading or looking at all data, (3) coding all the data, (4) identifying themes, and (5) developing a



narrative to convey the findings of the analysis. Creswell (2014) recommended the development of a codebook by which to analyze interview data, suggesting it could evolve throughout the study as data were analyzed. After identification of common themes within the interviews, the final step of data analysis allows for interpretation of the findings and helps answer the question - "What were the lessons learned?" (Creswell, 2009, p. 189).

All interviews were audio recorded on a recording device. Upon the conclusion of each interview, the researcher re-titled each voice memo with the unique number identifier (1 through 10) to both organize the recordings and maintain the anonymity of each participant. The recording device automatically organized each recording by date and time recorded. Using Otter.ai transcribing software, a transcript for each interview was created.

To apply Creswell's (2014) first step, organize and prepare the data, the researcher checked the transcript for accuracy by reading each transcript several times and compared it to the audio recording. Once a final draft transcript was prepared, it was emailed to the participant who was asked to review the transcript for accuracy, additions, or omissions. Creswell (2014) referred to this process as member checking. Once each transcription was returned after member checking and any changes were made, observation notes collected by the researcher during the interviews were manually transcribed and added to the appropriate transcription in a separate section titled, 'researcher notes'. These notes contained information about the interaction with the participant and noted behaviors and demeanor to be considered with their responses to interview questions.

To apply Creswell's (2014) second step of data analysis, read or look at all of the data, the researcher read each transcript multiple times to determine the overall meaning of

the interview responses. The third step in data analysis, coding (Creswell, 2014), was accomplished through identification of common words and phrases for each interview question. All common words and phrases were highlighted in green for easy identification. Organization of the common words and phrases were segmented by interview question, compiling all common words and phrases from every participant in a spreadsheet. This structure allowed the researcher to view the common words and phrases for each interview question collectively, making the review and establishment of themes, Creswell's (2014) fourth step of data analysis, easier. Upon review of the spreadsheet, key themes were identified by the researcher for each research question. Creswell's (2014) fifth step of data analysis, develop a narrative to convey the findings of the analysis, was completed by developing a statement for conveying the data analysis and findings.

To ensure validity, all documentation, analysis of the data, and identified themes, were validated by the same peer reviewers who examined the interview protocol. Upon the conclusion of the interviews, the peer reviewers received copies of the interview transcripts for review of the themes identified by the researcher during data analysis. Both reviewers agreed with the themes identified from the data analysis. Data were kept for five years in a location accessible only to the researcher and then destroyed.

### **Reliability and Trustworthiness**

Brod, Tesler, and Christensen (2009) described content validity as, “the measurement property that assesses whether items are comprehensive and adequately reflect the participant's perception of the topic of interest” (p. 1). To ensure reliability and trustworthiness of the research, the researcher took four actions: peer review of interview questions, pilot interviews, member checking, and peer review of the data analysis and

theme identification. To ensure accuracy, the research and interview questions were provided to two peer reviewers before the interviews were conducted. The peer reviewers were asked to provide feedback on the relevance of the interview questions and whether they would result in responses for adequate analysis. Peer review of the interview questions provided validation of the questions by individuals who were familiar with and had conducted qualitative research. This process helped ensure validity and trustworthiness. Pilot interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to test the interview process and questions before beginning the research. Member checking provided an additional layer of reliability and trustworthiness by allowing participants to review and revise their documented responses to the interview questions. Additional peer review of the data analysis and theme identification added a final layer of reliability and trustworthiness at the conclusion of the study. Brod et al. (2009) suggested flexibility was a critical skill for the researcher. According to Brod et al. (2009), having the ability to redirect and focus an interview while capturing the information needed for the interview helps ensure reliability.

### **Researcher's Role**

The role of the researcher involved connecting with each participant as he or she shared thoughts and perceptions during the interviews. Along with this deep connection comes potential ethical issues related to qualitative research processes (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010). Awareness of potential ethical issues requires the researcher to carefully consider the factors that shape the analysis and interpretation of qualitative research data (Creswell, 2014). To maintain the integrity and accuracy of the research, the researcher must constantly be aware of personal biases. At the time of the

study, the researcher had been employed at Community College A for 10 years. The researcher had taught professional development courses for two years and was familiar with a small section of the student population. The researcher was not a faculty member for any courses within the pathways selected for the study and had no influence on the interactions among students and their faculty mentors. The researcher's background and connection to Community College A also contributed to a strong rapport with the student participants.

### **Limitations**

Creswell (2012) defined limitations as potential weaknesses or problems in the study beyond the researcher's control. The following limitations were noted in the current study:

1. The student participants were all part of the guided pathways program, but their level of involvement in athletics and student activities varied. These areas of student involvement are often accompanied by additional support systems and could contribute to the perception of support. In addition, involvement in athletics and student activities may also be linked to student success.
2. While all students were participants in the guided pathways program, the programs of study varied in subject areas and rigor. These variations could have impacted the perceptions of study participants about academic success and degree attainment, the role of faculty mentors, and the early alert system.
3. Community College A is an open access institution. Study participants had varying levels of academic preparedness. Academic preparedness could have affected participants' perceptions about adequate support for student success.

4. The perception of student support and success is dependent on the student and faculty mentor engagement. The frequency and level of faculty mentoring was beyond the control of the researcher.

### **Summary**

The methods used to conduct the current study were explained in Chapter 3. A qualitative research design using semi-structured interview questions was used to examine the perceptions of 10 recent graduates of Community College A about how the guided pathways program, faculty mentors, and an early alert program contributed to or inhibited academic success and degree completion. A description of the research design, setting, sampling procedures, instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis and synthesis, reliability and trustworthiness, researcher's role, and limitations of the study were provided in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 provides the results of the study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to gain first-hand perceptions from students who graduated between 2020 and 2022 from Community College A in the liberal arts, health science, and education pathways about their perceptions of the guided pathways model, faculty mentoring, and the AVISO Retention early alert system on their academic success and degree completion. Ten students who graduated between 2020 and 2022 from Community College A participated in the study. Each participant engaged in a virtual interview using Zoom video conferencing and the respondents' responses were analyzed for this study. Chapter 4 explains the themes that emerged from the coding and analysis of interviews with the 10 participants.

#### **Demographics and Participant Background**

Six women and four men participated in the study. One demographic question was included in the study, asking participants which program pathway they completed. Four of the participants were liberal arts majors, four were education majors, and two were health science majors. Participants graduated from Community College A at the same time as graduating from high school through the institution's early college program and were between the ages of 17 and 18 at the time of degree completion. The remaining eight participants were traditional college-age students between the ages of 19 and 20 at the time of degree completion. The following sections provide an explanation of key themes identified from the responses to interview questions. Five major themes were identified through the data analysis: perceptions about the impact of the guided pathways model on academic success and degree completion, classroom and non-classroom factors that

contributed to academic success and degree completion, barriers to academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model, the impact of faculty mentors on academic success and degree completion, and the impact of the early alert system on academic success and degree completion. Direct quotations are included to highlight the participants' perceptions about their academic success and degree completion.

### **Perceptions About the Impact of the Guided Pathways Model on Academic Success and Degree Completion**

Guided pathways was implemented at Community College A to provide students a clearer path to degree completion and to support them along the way with support initiatives like an introductory course where guided pathways is presented, faculty mentors, and an early alert system. In this study, participants were asked about the factors directly related to their pathway that contributed to their academic success and degree completion. Three subthemes were identified within this theme: the support of academic advisors, knowledgeable faculty, and lack of awareness of the guided pathways model.

**Support of academic advisors.** Community College A has a centralized advising and enrollment process that requires all full-time students to meet with an academic advisor when enrolling. As part of the guided pathways model, Community College A utilizes the academic advisor to assist the student in identifying a program pathway, outline the classes needed to complete that program pathway, and a timeline by which to complete the program within two years. In this study, five participants emphasized the value their academic advisor brought to their academic success and degree completion. Participant 3 said, "Advising helped me divide up the more challenging classes. As an athlete that helped me balance my schedule." Participant 8 said, "My advisors helped align classes that

transferred best since I wasn't sure what I wanted to do." Participant 5 was also unsure of what she wanted to do. She stated, "My advisor helped me select the liberal arts program so that everything would transfer when I narrowed down my career choices." Advising helped participant 10 in guided pathways by outlining the classes needed to complete the program. Participant 10 said, "Advising helped me know exactly what I needed to take to get my degree."

**Knowledgeable faculty.** Faculty are content experts in their field, requiring 18 graduate hours in their discipline in compliance with credentialing guidelines of the Higher Learning Commission. As part of guided pathways, faculty serve as mentors and maintain notes and records within the AVISO Retention early alert system to provide early and frequent intervention and interaction with students. While only one of the 10 participants was familiar with the AVISO Retention platform, seven of 10 participants in the study emphasized the great faculty as part of their success at Community College A. Participant 8 shared, "I really enjoyed the faculty I had. They were all very helpful with moving along in the program. They made sure I had things set up." Participant 8 also shared that the Introduction to Teaching instructor was engaging and has remained in communication even after graduation, serving as a reference on job applications and providing professional advice. Participant 9 expressed the passion faculty members had for her content and stated, "I really liked how engaging the professors were. Coming to class and absorbing the material was easier because they were passionate about it."

**Lack of awareness of the guided pathways model.** Guided pathways was implemented at Community College A to assist in supporting students in their academic success and degree completion. None of the 10 participants in this study were familiar



with the term ‘guided pathways’ until the researcher explained it. Students were more familiar with the terms program of study and degree program and were able to communicate responses once the researcher provided clarification of the term guided pathways. The supporting initiatives of guided pathways at Community College A are the faculty mentoring program and AVISO Retention early alert system. In this study, only two of the participants were aware they had a faculty mentor, and only one was familiar with the AVISO Retention early alert system. Participant 6 said, “I wasn’t aware of having a mentor, but my Introduction to Teaching instructor was awesome.” Participant 3 said, “I didn’t know I had a mentor assigned to me, but I think my mentor was my athletic academic advisor.” Participant 10 also expressed not knowing about an assigned mentor and expressed the value this could bring saying, “If I knew I had a mentor, they could help by taking a more active approach with me as an individual student.” Regarding the AVISO Retention system, participant 3 noted, “AVISO was new so not all teachers used it. As a communication guide, it was nice when teachers needed to send out quick notes. My coaches loved AVISO.” Participant 9, another athlete, said, “My coach stayed up on my attendance and progress with grade checks that were required for my scholarship, so I never used AVISO.”

### **Classroom and Non-Classroom Factors that Contributed to Academic Success and Degree Completion**

Participants were asked to describe factors inside and outside of the classroom that contributed to their academic success and degree completion. Three subthemes were identified within this theme. The first subtheme included the support of academic advisors who aided in the enrollment process, including how many credit hours to take and what

courses to take each semester. Faculty engagement with students was identified as a second subtheme. Study participants reported feeling comfortable asking questions and felt faculty were approachable. Support from family and friends was identified as a third subtheme. Participants described how family and friends made a positive impact on academic success and degree completion. Peer-to-peer interaction was an emerging subtheme. Participants described how students connected with their classmates to assist in course work and outside of class study groups. For nearly half of the participants, this interaction was made available through a cohort model. Participant responses supporting these subthemes are provided in the following subsections.

**Support of academic advisors.** Guided pathways sequences curriculum to provide students a clear path to completion. Meeting with academic advisors, students are shown their progress toward degree completion as they enroll for the next term. In this study, none of the participants were familiar with the term guided pathways, requiring the researcher to explain and correlate guided pathways to the term degree or program of study. Five respondents indicated that their academic advisor played a key part in their academic success and degree completion. Once the researcher provided a description of the guided pathways program, participants shared information about factors that contributed to their academic success and degree completion that are initiatives and components of the guided pathways model. Participant 10 spoke highly of the pathways program and academic advising staff, and specifically mentioned the interaction was personal and the pathway to completion was explained very clearly. This participant stated, “Everything was laid out for me. At the four-year level there is a lot more guess work in choosing courses.” Half of the participants in this study were part of a cohort program, experiencing extra support

through regular required grade checks, study halls, and one-on-one meetings with their academic advisors. One was part of the institution's early college program, one was part of the institution's elementary education partnership with a local four-year institution, and two were athletes. One of the athletes who participated in the study described the challenges of the schedule and the rigor of coursework in the health sciences pathway. Participant 3 said, "As an athlete, advising knew my workload and helped me divide up the more challenging classes. That helped me balance my schedule." While cohort groups are not specifically identified as an initiative in the Community College A guided pathways model, one of the key goals is providing support and guidance to keep students on track to degree completion. All four of the participants who were part of a cohort group mentioned their cohort membership was a contributor to their academic success and degree completion.

**Faculty.** Seven of the 10 participants spoke about how great their faculty were and how these individual contributed to their success. Being able to approach faculty with questions and get help in and out of the classroom made academic success feel more achievable. Participant 8 shared that she, "really enjoyed the faculty at Community College A. They were all very helpful in moving me along in my program." Participant 6 shared the same thoughts and said, "I ask a lot of questions and my teachers were never annoyed by that." Several participants indicated some instructors went above and beyond and have remained in contact with them beyond graduation. Participant 8, an education major, described the frequency of engagement and communication provided by the Introduction to Teaching faculty member. This participant said, "My teacher is someone I can go back to for information and add as a reference for jobs in the future." Participant 9

spoke about his instructor for the introduction class he went back to later in the semester to get help editing a paper.

**Support from family and friends.** Half of the participants mentioned family and friend support was a key part of their academic success and degree completion. Four participants noted the ability to live at home helped them focus on their coursework and their family provided financial stability to achieve their educational goals. One participant was pursuing the same career as his parents' and said, "My parents are both in the medical field so they could help me with things I didn't understand." Athletes reported having extra support from their friends and teammates, including extra study time in team study halls, and discussion at practices. The early college program at Community College A was in a building that had white boards in the hallways. One participant shared that students, faculty, and staff would fill the whiteboards with encouraging notes and notes from class that helped encourage academic success and degree completion.

**Peer interaction and cohort groups.** Four of the 10 participants were part of a cohort group on campus at Community College A. Being a part of a cohort group ensured students were with the same peers throughout their program and time at Community College A. This grouping allowed students to get to know one another and rely on each other for help in classes. Participant 8 said, "Being grouped with other education majors was helpful. They were the same age as me and it was helpful to know other people wanting to do the same thing as me." Other cohort groups included athletes who shared that their coaches checked in with them on a regular basis, requiring grade checks and attendance updates. Knowing their coaches were monitoring their progress provided an extra layer of accountability and support.

### **Barriers to Academic Success and Degree Completion in a Guided Pathway Model**

Study participants shared a variety of factors that inhibited their academic success and degree completion. All 10 participants were unfamiliar with the term guided pathways. The researcher elaborated on guided pathways during the interview to clarify the questions being asked in relation to the model. Participants were more familiar with the term degree plan or program of study and were able to provide answers to the interview questions with that clarification. The first subtheme identified within this theme was the global pandemic. As new college students, every participant was forced to learn remotely when the global pandemic hit. Achieving a work and school balance was a second subtheme that delineated factors that inhibited academic success and degree completion. As the cost of college rises, participants noted the need to balance work and school and the challenges that came with those competing interests. A description for these subthemes is documented in the following subsections.

**COVID-19.** Six of the 10 participants specifically noted COVID as a factor that inhibited their academic success and degree completion. Some students had never attempted an online course and were forced into online learning as a freshmen in college. Participant 8 said, “COVID hit and I had never taken an online class.” As an athlete, Participant 3 was impacted both on the court and in the classroom. This participant stated that, “COVID hit and eliminated my ability to get face-to-face teaching and help and that is how I learn best.” Another scholarship student was taking a lot of music classes for his scholarship requirements and COVID created more work. Participant 10 said, “COVID was a challenge. I was taking a lot of music classes and moving those online created a

heavier workload for me.” Participant 8 expressed fear in choosing education as a major, fearing the remote operation of education would be a permanent shift.

**Work and school balance.** Students must often work to make ends meet while they finish school. Sixty percent of the participants reported working full time and struggling to find a balance between work and scholarship commitments with their class and study commitments. One participant was on a spirit squad scholarship and said, “I worked full time and took a full course load, so I didn’t have a lot of time outside of class to study.” A student athlete also seeking a career in nursing said, “As an athlete it was really difficult to balance my schedule at first.” As part of the guided pathways model, students meet with academic advisors to discuss their progress to degree completion and that discussion includes scheduling and balancing time while taking classes. Students are given tools and resources to assist in time management, but ultimately the choices in how students prioritize work, study time, and other activities is up to them.

### **The Impact of Faculty Mentors on Academic Success and Degree Completion**

The structure at Community College A requires first-time, full-time students to take an introductory class where they are assigned a faculty mentor. Students are introduced to the guided pathways model, the requirements, and their faculty mentor during this introductory course. This mentor serves for the student’s duration in that specific program pathway and the AVISO Retention alert system lists their name as the student’s mentor in the student profile. Some students are not required to take this course if they’ve completed coursework through dual-credit programs or transferred course work in from another institution. Half of the participants in this study did not take the introductory course or their major’s introductory course. Students at Community College A were allowed to

bypass the introductory course if they had completed several college classes prior to coming to Butler. To gain perspective on the impact of faculty mentoring on the participants' academic success and degree completion, students were asked to explain the factors of the mentoring relationship that helped them and provided ways a mentoring relationship could be improved. Three subthemes emerged that helped identify the impact of a faculty mentor on academic success and degree completion. The first subtheme was an absence of an established faculty mentor relationship. Five out of 10 participants did not take the introductory course where their mentor would introduce themselves and provide resources and support for academic success and degree completion. Despite that half of the participants took the introductory course, eight of the 10 participants were unaware they had a mentor and therefore couldn't speak to the impact the person in that role played in their academic success and degree completion. Four participants identified a faculty member, coach, or advisor who served as a mentor in an informal capacity. This interaction provided an additional layer of support and emerged as the second subtheme in this section. When asked about improvements that should be made for the faculty mentoring relationship, a third subtheme, one-on-one interaction, was identified. Participants expressed the importance of being known and having someone to go to that was familiar with their situation who could guide them in the right direction. These subthemes are outlined with participant responses in the following subsections.

**Absence of an established faculty mentor relationship.** The guided pathway model identifies a faculty mentor for every student based on their program pathway. While half of the students in the study were enrolled in either the introductory class or the Introduction to Teaching class, eight out of the 10 participants were unaware they had an

assigned faculty mentor. In the case of the education majors, the Introduction to Teaching instructor served as the student mentor. The education major participants were unaware this faculty member was their mentor. Participant 8 said, “My Intro to Teaching class was the only intro class I took, so I didn’t know my mentor. My Intro to Teaching instructor did stay in touch with me though.” Participant 5, a liberal arts major, and Participant 1, a health science major, expressed the absence of a faculty mentor through the guided pathways program. Participant 5 took classes primarily online and said, “I never really had faculty reach out about my progress”. Participant 1 was part of a cohort program and said, “I didn’t have a faculty mentor, but I had weekly grade checks that helped me stay on track”.

**Informal mentors.** Nearly half of the participants in the study identified being part of a cohort group through an activity, athletic scholarship, or a cohort academic program. These activities and programs group students together. Through their time at Community College A they were required to practice and compete together and enroll in coursework together. Additionally, these students were required to submit regular updates on their grades, attendance, and academic progress. These extra layers of support were initiated by program leads, coaches, and advisors that became informal mentors to the participants. One athlete participant specifically noted this informal relationship by stating, “I didn’t know I had a mentor from my intro class, but I think my mentor was my athletic academic advisor.” Participant 9 said, “My coach stayed up on my attendance and progress with grade checks. I didn’t miss class. I was afraid to.” One student who participated in the Community College A early college program noted the directors of the program were, ‘on it’ when it came to academic progress and attendance. Participant 8 was an education



major and said, “My Intro to Teaching instructor is someone I can go back to for information even now and someone I can add as a reference for jobs in the future.”

**One-on-one interaction.** Nearly every factor that contributed to academic success and degree completion in this study resulted from one-on-one interaction with others. When asked what factors would improve the faculty mentoring relationship, one-on-one interaction emerged as a key factor. Participant 6 said, “I wasn’t aware of having a mentor, but my Intro to Teaching instructor was awesome. If I had to choose one thing that would have helped me it would have been more one-on-one interaction with that instructor.” One participant who knew who his mentor was indicated the instructor didn’t interact beyond the introductory course but told students he was there to support them. This participant noted while he didn’t go to his mentor frequently, he knew his mentor was an English teacher and had him provide feedback on a research paper before turning it in. Participant 10 was an education major and said, “If I knew I had a mentor, they could help by taking a more active approach to each individual student.”

### **The Impact of the Early Alert System on Academic Success and Degree Completion**

Early alert systems have been designed to provide faculty and staff with information to intervene with at-risk students before they are unable to continue in their coursework. Community College A implemented an early alert system, AVISO Retention, which allows faculty and staff to notify one another about common students in their caseload. Additionally, activity and athletic sponsors and coaches are allowed to use this platform to keep track of students and intervene when necessary. The participants in this study indicated that the AVISO Retention system was new, and most of the participants had never heard of it. The subthemes that emerged regarding early alert systems were lack

of awareness of the system and factors that provided intervention outside of the early alert system. Those subthemes are explained in the following subsections.

**Lack of awareness of an early alert system.** Nine of the 10 participants in this study indicated that they were unaware of the AVISO Retention early alert system. One participant recalled the platform and specifically noted that, “AVISO was new so not all teachers used it. As a common guide, it was nice when teachers needed to send out quick notes. My coaches loved AVISO.” During the pandemic, AVISO Retention was used as a way to alert faculty and staff of positive COVID cases. Faculty began using the platform more often post-COVID. It is likely there were interventions with students as a result of the AVISO Retention platform, but the participants were not aware faculty or coaches had reported the need for additional support. Several participants noted their faculty provided regular updates to them, sometimes on a weekly basis about their academic progress. This information is recorded in the AVISO Retention system.

**Intervention outside of an early alert system.** While only one participant knew about the AVISO Retention platform, every participant spoke about communication that came from their instructors through the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). One participant said weekly messages were sent out through the LMS about work that was due and ways they could improve their grade in the class. Regular updating of grades and academic progress are required of all faculty in the LMS. All the participants that were part of a cohort group expressed the ways their sponsors, coaches, and staff intervened to assist in their success. Through the early college program at Community College A, one participant expressed the way the director in the program tracked daily attendance and met one-on-one on a regular basis to track grades and progress in the program. That

information was also shared with the participant's high school counselor as part of the dual-credit agreement. Athletes who participated in the study spoke about the tutoring lab and study halls that were required through their sport. The Athletic Academic Advisor and Academic Success Coach met with them regularly and provided intervention in the form of additional help outside of class.

### **Summary**

This chapter included the results of the analysis of the participant interviews conducted with 10 students from Community College A who graduated between 2020 and 2022 with degrees in liberal arts, health science, and education. Interview questions focused on participant perceptions about how the guided pathways model, in- and out- of classroom variables, faculty mentoring, and the early alert system impacted academic success and degree completion. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, findings related to the literature, and conclusions.

## Chapter 5

### Interpretation and Recommendations

The participants in this study were graduates of Community College A between 2020 and 2022, majoring in liberal arts, health science, and education. The study investigated respondent perceptions about how the guided pathways model, faculty mentors and an early alert system contributed to or inhibited academic success and degree completion. Chapter 5 is organized in three major sections. The first section outlines the research problem, purpose statement, research questions, methodology, and major findings. The second section identifies how the findings of the current study align with the literature. The third and final section identifies the implications for actions, recommendations for future research, and closing remarks.

#### Study Summary

This section provides an overview of the problem, identifies the purpose of the study and research questions, and concludes with a review of the methodology and the major findings of the study.

**Overview of the problem.** Degree completion rates have been declining since the 1960's (Aljohani, 2016). Smith (2019) indicated 60% of community college students nation-wide struggle to earn a degree within three years. In Kansas, that number increases to 75% (KBOR, 2020a). To improve degree completion for community college students, institutions have implemented early alert systems, mentoring from faculty and staff to students, and eliminated barriers like finances and course availability (Mintz, 2019). However, degree completion remains a challenge nationwide (Jenkins, et al., 2018). The CCRC (2015) recognized this concern and worked to find solutions for community

colleges to redesign themselves and create clear paths to degree completion through the guided pathways model. The guided pathways model is a framework that establishes clear pathways for students to complete their degree while providing support mechanisms to keep them on track to graduate. Community College A implemented a guided pathways model that included faculty mentoring in 2019 and the AVISO Retention early alert system in 2020 to increase academic success and degree completion. While researchers have conducted limited research on the impact of guided pathways and faculty mentors, additional research is needed to assess the effectiveness of guided pathways and faculty mentors on community college degree completion. There is also limited research on the perceptions of students about how early alert systems impact academic success and degree completion. As institutions implement varying initiatives and programs to coincide with guided pathways, there is a need for research on student perceptions about their impact on academic success and degree completion.

**Purpose statement and research questions.** Five purposes and five research questions guided this study. The purposes and research questions for this study focused on investigating the perceptions of recent graduates about factors that contributed to or inhibited their academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model. Additionally, recent graduate perceptions about the impact of faculty mentors and an early alert system were examined.

**Review of the methodology.** A qualitative phenomenological research design was chosen for this study. As Creswell (2007) stated, phenomenological research, “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 57). This approach allowed the researcher to gain insight from the interpretation of

the personal experiences of each participant interviewed. Qualitative research design relies on the experiences of the participants and requires the researcher to interpret these described experiences without bias or the interference of the researcher's personal experiences. In a phenomenological study, the researcher seeks to understand the perceptions of participants' experiences. As the interviewer, the researcher was the main source of data collection for the study. The researcher sought to collect data in a productive and objective way. Using Creswell's (2014) concept of reflexivity, the researcher focused on integrity and objectivity to ensure that personal experiences and cultural influences did not affect the interpretation and analysis of the data. After receiving approvals to conduct the study from Baker University and Community College A, the head of Community College A's institutional research office was contacted for a list of potential participants who met the criteria needed for participation in the study. Emails were sent to 20 recent graduates to invite them to participate in the study. Ten students agreed to participate. An interview protocol that included one descriptive and demographic question and 14 semi-structured questions was conducted with each participant.

The interview was conducted using Zoom video conferencing technology. Interviews were scheduled in the final weeks of the fall 2022 semester. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The researcher took notes during each interview and asked follow-up questions when necessary to clarify research question responses. The use of note taking by the researcher as well as video recording provided additional information used in analysis of each interview. After each participant completed the interview, the researcher thanked him or her for participation. To ensure anonymity, each participant was assigned a unique identifying number ranging from 1 to 10. The interview transcript was

sent to each participant for member checking. Creswell's (2014) five steps of qualitative data analysis were followed to identify major themes and subthemes.

**Major findings.** Five themes were identified from the data analysis: perceptions about the impact of the guided pathway model on academic success and degree completion; classroom and non-classroom factors that contributed to academic success and degree completion; barriers to academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model; the impact of faculty mentors on academic success and degree completion; and the impact of the early alert system on academic success and degree completion. Participants were not familiar with the term guided pathways. During interviews, the researcher had to clarify the guided pathway was the student degree plan. Once that explanation was provided, participants had an increased understanding of the interview questions. Participants referenced their academic advisors as key to the guided pathways model, providing a well laid out plan for each semester that ultimately led to degree completion. Participant 10 said, "Everything was laid out for me. At the four-year level there is a lot more guesswork". Faculty mentors and the early alert system are key initiatives in the Community College A guided pathways program. Since most participants were unaware they had a faculty mentor and the early alert tool was new and not well utilized, the perceptions of the participants indicated that further defining of these tools and roles is needed. The faculty mentor role was defined during the implementation of guided pathways, but most participants were unaware they were assigned a faculty mentor. Participants indicated that academic advisors, faculty, engagement with peers, being part of a cohort, and support from family and friends all contributed to their academic success and degree completion. Academic advisors provided clear direction on courses to take and

when to take them. Students reported feeling confident in knowing what they needed to take, eliminating guess work. Participants gave faculty accolades, sharing that their presence in the classroom made them approachable and supportive of their educational goals. Nearly half of the participants were part of a cohort group and reported feeling support from their peers in their cohort. Fifty percent of the participants also reported feeling a strong sense of support from their family and friends, contributing to their ability to complete their degree. COVID-19 and finding a work and school balance were the major factors that inhibited academic success and degree completion. COVID-19 forced all students to shift to an all-online learning environment. Study participants reported never having taken an online class prior to COVID and indicated taking all classes online caused stress and panic. One student reported experiencing panic and considered changing majors for fear COVID had changed education and teaching indefinitely. Six of the 10 participants were working full-time while taking a full course load. All six of those participants indicated their work schedule combined with their class schedule created challenges with finding time to study and balance work, school, and free time. When asked about the impact of faculty mentors, eight of the 10 participants were unaware they had been assigned a mentor from the institution. Participant 9 recognized and recalled his Engaging in Meta Majors and Pathways course instructor explaining the mentorship but did not receive any communication from his mentor beyond the semester in which he took the introductory course. While only one student recognized the mentorship, other participants reported establishing an informal mentoring relationship with another faculty or staff member at the institution. Through cohort groups and programs, participants connected with advisors, coaches, and faculty who made an impact on their educational journey.



Whether formal or informal, all participants noted one-on-one interaction as the significant impact of mentorship. Regarding early alert systems, only one participant was aware of the institution's system and noted it was new and not used by every instructor. While there wasn't widespread knowledge of the early alert system, most participants reported they received regular communication from faculty regarding attendance, academic progress, and upcoming assignments in class.

### **Findings Related to the Literature**

Academic retention and degree completion have long been a focus for higher education institutions (Zeidenberg, 2008). There are varying factors that impact student success and degree completion. Smith (2019) indicated the top factors that inhibited degree completion included balancing work and school, handling the expenses of college and daily life, and lack of support. Sixty-one percent of the students in Smith's study reported not having enough time to study due to work schedules, with 51% sharing their income did not cover their expenses. Thirty percent of students in Smith's (2019) study indicated they were either caring for a family member or couldn't find childcare for their dependents. Balancing work and school and needing more one-on-one support and interaction were documented inhibitors of academic success and degree completion in this study. All of the participants in this study completed their degree and half of them documented the support of their family as critical to their academic success and degree completion.

Chan and Wang (2017) studied the learning experience and environmental influences that contributed to completion in STEM students at the community college level. In their research, students who had additional support from family and friends and those

who met requirements for federal financial aid were more successful. Chan and Wang also reported students experienced increased engagement in class and improved study skills when faculty were engaged with them. Participants in the current study all completed a degree pathway at Community College A. Nearly half of the participants in the current study identified additional layers of support and accountability through a cohort group or program. Additionally, half of the participants reported family support as a contributing factor to their success. Seventy percent of the participants also reported having interactions with engaging faculty as a key contributor to their academic success and degree completion.

Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2003) reported the benefits of faculty engagement combined with the identification of important risk factors like class attendance, academic progress, and mental health. According to Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum, faculty engagement is critical to being able to identify risk factors and assist in developing early intervention strategies. At Community College A, an early alert system was used to communicate risk factors college-wide. While 90% of the participants in the study did not know there was an early alert system, all participants reported faculty reached out to them if they were at risk in the areas of attendance and academic progress.

The guided pathways model was designed to assist students in degree completion by providing a clear path and support to keep them on track (Bailey et al., 2015b). Within the different pillars of the guided pathways model, pillar three identifies the importance of student support resources and services to stay on track. In this pillar, student support services like tutoring, early alert systems, and mentoring play a critical role. These support services assist in helping students choose a program pathway and stay on track with degree

completion. The role of academic advising in helping students stay on track and choosing the right program and classes was cited as a factor that contributed to academic success and degree completion in the current study. Campbell and Campbell's (1997) research identified the components of successful mentoring relationships as frequent communication, nudging and pushing from the mentor, and establishing clear expectations. In the current study, all participants were assigned a faculty mentor but only two participants knew they had an assigned faculty mentor. Some study participants identified other faculty and staff who established an informal mentoring relationship. All 10 participants identified increased one-on-one interaction and regular check in appointments with faculty and staff as components that supported academic success and degree completion.

The CCRC (2015) researched the implementation of guided pathways at Miami Dade College and saw an increase in retention of students who met with an academic advisor to develop an academic plan. In the current study, Community College A utilized academic advisors who met with full-time students to provide assistance with the program pathway selection and course scheduling processes. The CCRC (2020a) also researched implementation at Prince George's Community College where students were required to take an orientation course and meet with an academic advisor before enrolling. Community College A implemented a required introductory course and a meeting with academic advising before enrolling. Though some students were able to opt out of the introductory course, all students were required to meet with their advisor. Half of the study participants identified their academic advisor as a key factor in their academic success and degree completion.

Anft (2018) discovered the focus in higher education that was placed on academic advising services, noting an increase in the development of centralized advising processes. Community College A had a centralized advising process that allowed academic advisors to map career paths with students, highlighting the courses required for their program pathway, and discussing the balance of work and school with students. This centralized advising process removes advising roles from faculty and allowed for faculty mentoring and student engagement in other ways. Half of the participants in the current study cited their academic advisors as a key contributor to their success. Seven of the 10 participants indicated faculty were knowledgeable about their content and assisted in academic success and degree completion.

Birkeland et al. (2019) surveyed students from a medium-sized Midwestern university and found students sought advice on topics including what classes to take, what professors to take, the potential for internships, full and part-time work options, and what major to choose. In the guided pathways model, these are all elements identified as assisting students in selecting a path and keeping them on it to completion. In the current study, the function of academic advising and student services is to offer support for all of topics addressed in the Birkeland et al. (2019) study. The participants in this study cited those support services as a key contributor to their academic success and degree completion.

In Sung-Po's (2015) research on students who drop out, the early warning system captured data that correlated with the factors that lead students to drop out or go on academic suspension. These factors included financial need, academic struggle, family or personal health issues, and military affiliation. An early warning system was used at

Community College A as an initiative connected to guided pathways. Only one participant in the current study was familiar with the Community College A early warning system. Seven of the 10 participants attributed their success and degree completion to faculty engagement. While the early warning system was not recognized by students, faculty were alerted about similar factors identified in Sung-Po's (2015) study and could have used that information to engage the participants in the current study.

### **Conclusions**

This study examined the impact guided pathways, faculty mentoring, and the early alert system at Community College A had on academic success and degree completion. Ten respondents participated in qualitative interviews. This section provides implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

**Implications for action.** Participant responses to interview questions provided in-depth information about the impact of the guided pathway model, classroom and non-classroom factors, and the impact of Community College As early alert system on academic success and degree completion. Six implications for action are recommended.

1. Colleges across the United States would benefit from conducting student interviews to obtain information related to the initiatives and programs that support students in a guided pathways model. The information gathered from one-on-one interviews would provide a detailed, first-hand perspective of the experiences of students and the factors that contribute to or inhibit their academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model. While completion data are available through state level organizations and in annual reports, interview data would

provide additional information about the personal experiences of students in addition to completion data and survey results.

2. Respondents in the current study lacked awareness about an assigned faculty mentor. While study participants indicated interactions with faculty and staff were important, eight of 10 participants indicated they did not know they had a faculty mentor. Higher education institutions that have faculty mentoring programs should be encouraged to develop a structured plan to introduce students to their faculty mentor and provide training for faculty to identify expectations of the mentoring relationship while allowing for creative control in the dynamics of the interaction. Requiring regular check in meetings would establish a relationship between the students and their faculty mentors, making students aware of the presence of a mentor.
3. Participants in the current study expressed the importance of one-on-one interaction with faculty and staff to ensure they stayed on track personally and academically. Community College A should consider formalizing student awareness about their faculty mentor and the role of the mentor.
4. Perceptions shared by participants in the current study offered insight into the challenges college students face that may inhibit academic success and degree completion including balancing work and school, receiving early intervention and support when at risk, understanding what courses they need to take, and how to stay on track to complete a degree. Study participants who were part of a cohort program or group at Community College A reported they had support for these concerns. Study respondents reported that being connected to other students,

faculty, and staff provided accountability, support, and motivation in the journey toward degree completion. Community College A, like other community colleges across the country, has smaller class sizes and more support than most four-year institutions. Study participants were appreciative of the advising staff, faculty, and peers provided. Nearly every participant complimented the advising staff for preparing them for the next step in their educational journey both through their time at Community College A and as they transferred to a four-year higher education institution. One participant even reported feeling lost at his transfer institution due to more guess work in the enrollment process. For participants who were part of a cohort group or program, connection with faculty has carried on beyond graduation. Respondents reported some faculty have even provided references for job applications. Creating additional cohort groups or introducing academic success coaches who can provide additional interaction and support for students could assist in supporting more students in academic success and degree completion.

5. Early alert systems provide data to alert institutional personnel about students who may be at risk. At Community College A, most students were unaware the system existed despite the platform allowing for student and faculty interaction via email and text messages. In response to the interview questions related to the early alert system, one participant shared it was a new product and not all faculty were using it. Early alert systems provide data but are only as effective as the users gathering the information and using it to intervene. Participants reported engagement from their faculty, advisors, and coaches through other methods of communication like the learning management system, institutional email, and one-on-one interaction in

person. An early warning system is only as successful as the intervention strategies that accompany it. Encouraging enhanced use of the system and educating students about the platform and how it benefits them will assist in increased awareness and use of the platform.

6. The results of this study may be of interest to administrators, faculty, and staff at Community College A as well as other community colleges in the state and nation that have implemented a guided pathways model and early alert system. The researcher will prepare an Executive Summary document that provides major results of the study to share with these constituents.

**Recommendations for future research.** Guided pathways is a relatively new model that is in the early stages of implementation. Continued research is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the model and to determine the best initiatives and programs to compliment the model. Research focused on completion rate data and standard survey responses provides a foundation, but deeper conversation is necessary to understand how guided pathways impacts students in their academic progress and degree completion. Through one-on-one interaction with community college students and conducting research using both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, every community college could address concerns about academic progress and degree completion.

Every participant in the current study shared stories of one-on-one interactions that made their academic journey better. Every participant also agreed regular check in appointments through one-on-one interaction would contribute to their academic success and degree completion. One participant documented the benefit of academic advisors who walked them through the coursework and how much more guess work is involved in the



enrollment process at the four-year level. Tools and systems are built and purchased by higher education institutions to assist in retention and early intervention, but the systems are only as effective as the faculty and staff who utilize them. Ninety percent of the participants in the current study were unaware of the early alert system that allowed them to interact with their faculty, monitor their progress, and get connected to resources to help them be more successful. Community College As early alert system allowed students to connect and interact through the platform. Further research is needed on early alert systems that allow direct communication and interaction with students. Additionally, researching the intervention strategies that accompany these systems will contribute to increased understanding of the impact and effectiveness of implementing an early alert system.

Bailey et al. (2015) explained student retention and completion is best born out of collaboration among program and support services initiatives. The CCRC (2018) has continued research on retention and completion, focusing on the key practices implemented through guided pathways reform. In identifying the factors that hinder academic progress, Smith (2019) found 61% of students reported balancing a work and school load as a key inhibitor of success. Community colleges have been recognized for their commitment to equity and access for students (Leone, 2016). Reducing costs and allocating and raising money for scholarships can assist with students balancing a heavy work load, but helping students access those resources can be a challenge unless the student self-identifies. In Wang's (2017) research on community college STEM students, faculty engagement with students not only increased student engagement and study skills, but engagement combined with recognition of important risk factors like attendance, academic progress, and mental

health assist in the improvement of academic success and degree completion. Research focused on the identification of these important risk factors and the impact of formal faculty and student interaction is critical. Future research should investigate the faculty to student mentor relationship and its impact on sustained mentorship throughout the duration of a student's academic program. In the current study, students who were part of a cohort program or group experienced a greater sense of support and engagement from faculty and staff. Additional research focusing on faculty engagement with institutional technologies and other student support staff is needed to determine the impact of collaboration on student's academic success and degree completion.

This study was conducted with participants from three different pathway programs. Community College A has a variety of program pathways within their guided pathways program. Additional research with students from a larger group of pathways would provide deeper insight to the effectiveness of the guided pathways model. Additionally, some of the supporting initiatives of their guided pathways program were in their infancy stage and additional research would capture data after more faculty, staff, and students become more familiar with those initiatives and tools. Additional qualitative studies could be conducted to gain more student perceptions about the guided pathways model, faculty mentoring, and the AVISO early alert system.

Two participants in the current study were dual-credit students taking college classes while in high school. Further research about the perceptions of high school students taking college classes is needed to better understand the transition from high school to college and how dual-credit enrollment impacts student understanding of guided pathways and the tools and resources available in college. These students were allowed to bypass the

introductory course that outlined the guided pathways model and introduced them to their faculty mentor. Research related specifically to dual-credit students could provide additional information about how to best support these students in their academic success and degree completion in the community college setting.

Two participants in this study were student athletes who had access to an academic success coach and athletic academic advisor. These students were required to have regular meetings to gauge progress toward degree completion and ensure they remained eligible to participate in athletic activities. One of these participants cited the use of the early alert system by his coach. In addition to researching the intervention plans associated with early alert systems, Community College A could conduct qualitative and quantitative research studies to learn more about the use of early alert systems in cohort groups outside of the classroom. These athletes cited multiple layers of accountability with study groups, additional support from coaches, and regular grade checks that supported their academic success and degree completion. Additional research about the impact of those specific additional support initiatives could provide direction on the supporting initiatives of guided pathways for the entire institution.

This study was conducted at one community college in a Midwestern state. Qualitative studies similar to this study could be conducted at other Midwestern community colleges that use a guided pathways model and faculty mentoring in an effort to build a data base about the impact of guided pathways and its impact on academic success and degree completion. Quantitative and qualitative studies could be conducted at Midwestern community colleges that examine the impact of early alert systems.

**Concluding remarks.** Improved retention and completion rates among community colleges will impact the future of the workforce and the future of higher education. As institutions face the challenges of funding being tied to completion rates, it is critical for faculty, staff, and administration across institutions to collaborate and communicate to assist and support students (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021). Guided pathways first surfaced at the community college level in 2012 (AACC, n.d.). This initiative was put in place to address the concern that fewer than 40% of students complete a degree within six years (Zeidenberg, 2008). In 2021, annual graduation rates had improved by 2%, but only one in four college freshmen had attained a degree within four years (Hanson, 2021). Despite efforts, retention and completion challenges remain. Until institutions are able to collaborate to address the varying factors that inhibit academic progress and degree completion, the challenge of retention and completion will continue. Varying factors impact student success and degree completion rates. In the current study, balancing work and school, handling the expenses of college and daily life, and having one-on-one support were among the top challenges among students who had completed an associate degree within three years. Additional research and actions focused on consistently engaging students through their degree program and providing one-on-one interaction on a regular basis is needed to continue to address retention and degree completion of students. Additional research is also needed to further examine the impact of the guided pathways model on student success and degree completion of community college students.

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## Appendices

**Appendix A: Baker University IRB Approval**



*Baker University Institutional Review Board*

August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Dear Heather Rinkenbaugh and Tes Mehring,

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](mailto:npoell@bakeru.edu) or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

**Nathan Poell, MLS**  
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee  
Tim Buzzell, PhD  
Nick Harris, MS  
Scott Kimball, PhD  
Susan Rogers, PhD



**Appendix B: Community College A IRB Approval**



Community College IRB Response Form

This form signifies that County Community College IRB has reviewed the research proposal submitted for approval on 8/29/22 by Heather Rinkenbaugh for Student Perceptions About Guided Pathways, Faculty Mentors, and Early Alert System at a Midwestern Community College.

With regard to the research proposal application, the IRB has decided to:

- approve the proposed research as exempt.
- approve the proposed research contingent feedback requested in the Notes section below.
- request that you revise and resubmit your research proposal application (see notes).
- deny the request to conduct this research (see notes).

This decision was finalized on 09/07/2022.

NOTES:

You are good to go! We hope to hear how the results come out! Signed by: Dr.



9/7/22

## **Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in the Study**

Date  
Individual  
Community College A

Dear (individual),

My name is Heather Rinkenbaugh and I am doctoral candidate at the Baker University Graduate School of Education. For my dissertation I am conducting a qualitative study on the perceptions of students about guided pathways (your degree plan) and how this model contributed to or inhibited your academic success and degree completion. In addition, my research focuses on recent graduate perceptions about the importance of having an assigned faculty mentor and the early alert system. Your role as a recent graduate from this institution suggests that you could be interested in participating in the study.

Participation in the study is voluntary and will entail a 45 minute interview (which will be conducted via Zoom and will be audio recorded). Once the interview is completed, you will receive a copy of your interview transcript for your review. You will be given the opportunity to provide clarifications, additions, or omissions during the review. A summary of the research findings will be provided to you and you will have the opportunity to provide comments to the researcher. Recognizing that your participation in the study is completely voluntary, you may choose to withdraw your consent and stop participating in the study at any time.

Should you choose to participate, you will be given a unique participant code (e.g. Participant A, Participant B, etc.) to ensure that your interview responses and identity remain anonymous. During the interview you may withdraw from the study completely or

abstain from answering any question. There are no risks or discomfort involved in the study. You will not receive any compensation or benefits for your participation.

Your participation in this study will provide insight that is critical to the research on student success in a guided pathways model, the importance of a faculty mentor, and value of an early alert system. If you would like to participate in the study or if you have additional questions about the research, please contact me at 316-516-2566 or email me at [heathermrinkenbaugh@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:heathermrinkenbaugh@stu.bakeru.edu). Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Principal Investigator:**

Heather Rinkenbaugh, M.P.S

[heathermrinkenbaugh@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:heathermrinkenbaugh@stu.bakeru.edu)

316-516-2566

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**Major Advisor:** Dr. Tes Mehring [tmehring@bakeru.edu](mailto:tmehring@bakeru.edu) 913-485-9087

**Appendix D: Consent Form**

## Consent Form

**Purpose of the study:** Five purposes guided this qualitative study:

- 1) To determine the perceptions of Community College A students who recently completed a degree in Health Science, Liberal Arts, and Education pathways about the components of a guided pathways model that contributed to their academic success and degree completion.
- 2) To explore the perceptions of Butler Community College students who recently completed a degree in Health Science, Liberal Arts, and Education pathways about the components of a guided pathways model that inhibited academic success and degree completion.
- 3) To investigate the perceptions of Butler Community College students who recently completed a degree in Health Science, Liberal Arts, and Education pathways about supports from faculty mentors that contributed to their academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model.
- 4) To probe perceptions of Butler Community College students who recently completed a degree in Health Science, Liberal Arts, and Education pathways about the supports from faculty mentors that could have contributed to their academic success and degree completion in a guided pathways model.
- 5) To gauge the perceptions of Butler Community College students who recently completed a degree in Health Science, Liberal Arts, and Education pathways about the benefits of advisors and faculty being alerted that a student may need extra academic assistance and support in a guided pathways program.

**Potential Risks/Discomforts:** There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study.

**Benefits:** While there is no direct benefit to you as a participant, your feedback is critical to the continued research on student success. The information you provide as a participant may be of interest to community college leaders, faculty, staff, and other students. The

results of this study may assist in providing a deeper understanding by faculty, staff, students, and administration of the value of the guided pathways model, faculty mentors, and early alert systems.

**Confidentiality:** Participation in the study is completely anonymous. You will be given a unique participant identification (e.g. Participant A, Participant B, etc.) and all data will be linked to that code and handled confidentially.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

**Right to Not Respond to Any Interview Question:** If you prefer to not respond to any interview question, just indicate to the researcher that you prefer not to answer the question.

**Right to Withdraw from the Study:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may opt out of the study at any point and if you choose to do so and any audio recording will be destroyed.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** Should you choose to withdraw from the study before or after the interview, please contact the researcher at [heathermrinkenbaugh@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:heathermrinkenbaugh@stu.bakeru.edu). If you wish to withdraw during the interview process, you may do so by telling the researcher to stop the interview. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

**Compensation:** No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

**Consent Form Signature:** In signing below, you are indicating your intention to participate in the research study outlined above and consent to the audio recording of the interview.



**For Questions Regarding This Study. Contact:**

**Principle Investigator:**

Heather Rinkenbaugh, M.P.S.

heathermrinkenbaugh@stu.bakeru.edu

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**Academic Advisor:**

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**Agreement:** I agree to participate in the above-described study and consent to the audio recording of the interview. I understand the researcher will be taking notes throughout the interview.

**Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.