Examining the Experiences of Adult Learners in a First-Year Seminar Course at a Tennessee Community College

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Seminar Course at a Tennessee Community College

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Adult and Lifelong Learning

by

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May 2023
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of adult learners in a first-year seminar course at Columbia State Community College, located in middle Tennessee, to determine if the content of the course has an impact on the learners' adjustment to college. With the statewide initiative to reach a goal of 55% of the state's population having a postsecondary credential, a push has been made to focus on adult learners to help the reach this goal. Understanding and addressing the adjustment needs of adult learners is necessary to aid retaining adult learners through completion. The first-year seminar course can serve as an extension of orientation or in place of orientation to help introduce students to the institution and collegiate life. Most often, the content of these courses is designed for first-year students entering college directly following high school and may not address the unique needs of adults re-entering college after an extended time away from formal education. This study will examine if the content of the course currently in place at Columbia State is addressing the needs of their adult learners. Using a case study methodology, a small group of participants will be selected for interviews following course completion. The transcripts gathered from the interviews will be reviewed to identify relevant themes related to course content and student adjustment using the dimensions of adjustment posited by Baker and Siryk (1989).

Acknowledgements

First of all, I want to acknowledge the amazing folx in the ADLL 2020 cohort. Without their continued love and support, I would not have survived this program. A special shout out to Niki and Gray for being my twin towers of support, you fed me, housed me, loved me, pushed me, advised me and made me laugh more times than I can count. You are my sisters for life! Dr. Roessger, Dr. Kacirek, and Dr. Grover, thank you for believing in me and pushing me to be better. Thank you to my colleagues at Columbia State, my friends, my Bushwhackers family and my kickball team for the love, support and encouragement. Also, thank you to everyone who helped me out during my final semester when I thought the financial challenge would be too much. So many people stepped up to help me out and I am forever grateful for your kindness and generosity.

Dedication

I want to dedicate this work to my family, especially my mother Josanna. She is not here today to celebrate this journey with me but I know how proud she would be to see me walk across that stage and become a Dr. and a Razorback for life!

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Chapter One

Introduction

In the fall of 2021, 33% of undergraduate college students enrolled at 2-year degree-granting institutions across the United States were aged 25 or older; that number drops to 27% for the state of Tennessee and further drops to 19% for Columbia State Community College (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2022; United States Department of Education, 2022). With numbers this low, it will be difficult for Tennessee to achieve its current Drive to 55 goal of 55% of the state's population holding a post-secondary degree or certificate by 2025. Former Tennessee governor Bill Haslam launched the "Drive to 55" initiative in 2013 to help meet the demands of the current and future workforce and economic needs (UT Advocacy, 2013). As a state institution, Columbia State Community College (CSCC) plays an active role in this initiative and is well-positioned to contribute to the overall degree attainment in the state. CSCC should assess services and curriculum to ensure it provides a quality experience for adult learners that encourages retention and completion and serve as recruiting tools to increase enrollment. One such initiative at Columbia State is the College Success 101 course, a required course for all first-year students designed to introduce them to college and help prepare first year students for their collegiate experience. As such, this course should contribute to retention efforts of all first-year students, both traditional aged and adult. This study will explore adult learners' perceptions of College Success 101, the first-year seminar course at Columbia State.

College success is a first-year seminar course, which is defined as a 10 week introductory course intended for first-year students to introduce them to the college experience and provide them with skills and resources to help with their adjustment to college (Guarneri & Connolly, 2019; Jaijairam, 2016; Miller & Lesik, 2014; Permzadian & Crede, 2016; Young, 2020). The

Columbia State Community College course was designed for traditional students entering college at 18 years of age following high school completion. However, regardless of age, every student must take the college success course during their first year. Therefore, even students classified as adult learners who have been out of academia for one or more years are required to take a course designed for younger students with a potentially different academic path. Using a case study methodology, I will interview adult learners after course completion to learn more about their needs as new students, and their perceptions of how well they feel the course met those needs regarding adjustment to college. Participants will be selected from a group of adult learners at CSCC who are participating in the Tennessee Reconnect grant program and enrolled in the first-year seminar. Tennessee Reconnect is a grant program for adult learners who have not completed a post-secondary credential. The state will pay the student's tuition and fees to complete an associate's degree or technical certificate.

This study will be informed by Baker and Siryk's (1984) framework of adjustment, which infers that first-year seminars positively impact academic adjustment. Baker and Siryk (1984) developed a survey instrument based on Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994), in which academic and social integration are both believed to be necessary for students to persist through higher education (Ozen & Yilmaz, 2019; Sarmiento et al., 2019). Expanding on the Interactionalist Theory, Baker and Siryk (1984) classified adjustment into four types: academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional, which served as the dimensions for their instrument for measuring college students' adjustment, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ).

This chapter will provide the context for the research, identify the problem to be explored, and identify the questions guiding the research. I will address my qualitative approach,

my perspectives and assumptions, my rationale for the study, and the possible significance of any findings. Key terms and definitions will be identified.

Background and Context

By 2025, the Lumina Foundation (2021) forecasts that 60% of U.S. citizens will need a post-secondary degree to be competitive in the labor market (Lanford, 2020). As of 2021, non-traditional students comprise about 33% of overall students enrolled in post-secondary education (US Department of Education, n.d.). This percentage has remained consistent over the past 15 years even as the total number of students has fluctuated. Because adult learners make up more than one-third of enrolled students, colleges must provide comprehensive services to address their adjustment needs. Ignoring adult learners as a population could negatively impact a school's overall retention. Interventions designed to facilitate the adjustment to college should have a positive effect on both grades and retention and include services such as specialized advising, first-year seminar courses tailored to a specific population or targeted services such as an office designed for the population (veterans, adults, commuters, etc.) and a designated space with amenities for the students (lockers in a commuter lounge) (Barry & Egan, 2017; Brunton & Buckley, 2020; Chen, 2017; Kachur, 2020; Kallison, 2017; Permzadian & Credé, 2016).

In 2013, Tennessee Governor Haslam introduced an educational initiative called "Drive to 55." According to the University of Tennessee (UT) Advocacy Network (2013), the initiative's goal was to increase the number of Tennesseans with higher education degrees or certificates from 32% to 55% by 2025. The state developed two programs to support this initiative to provide funding assistance to Tennessee citizens, the Tennessee (TN) Promise and Tennessee (TN) Reconnect. The TN Promise was implemented in 2015 to provide tuition assistance for traditional-aged college students and their families. While the TN Promise did result in some

increase in enrollment, the state realized that focusing efforts solely on high school graduates would not propel the state to its goal of 55% degree attainment by 2025. This realization led to the development of the TN Reconnect grant program. Established in 2018, the TN Reconnect grant targeted non-traditional-aged students, identified as independent adults by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), seeking an associate's degree or technical certificate (Tennessee State Government, 2022). Data maintained by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) (n.d. a) shows that enrollment of adult learners at Tennessee community colleges has declined since 2011 but has shown some gains since the program was implemented in 2018.

The Tennessee Board of Regents is the governing body that oversees all community colleges and technical schools in Tennessee. The academic programs and general education course curricula are set by TBR using a common course rubric. This ensures a seamless transfer process for a student from any of the thirteen community colleges in the state to one of the state-supported 4-year colleges or universities (Tennessee Board of Regents, n.d. b). In addition to the general education core curriculum, TBR has established guidelines for implementing a course intended for first-year students (Tennessee Board of Regents, n.d. c). The first-year seminar course at Columbia State Community College will be used for this research.

Columbia State Community College (CSCC) is one of thirteen community colleges in Tennessee and is part of the Tennessee Board of Regents system. Founded in 1966, CSCC is the first community college established in Tennessee. CSCC has five campuses serving nine counties in middle Tennessee and enrolls around 6,000 students each year. Around 30% of CSCC students were Pell-eligible in the fall of 2021. Columbia State is also predominantly female (63%) and white (77%). The college enrolls predominantly traditional-aged students, while around 20% are over 25. As a state, around 27% of the students enrolled in TBR

community colleges are over age 25 (Tennessee Board of Regents, n.d. a). In the Fall of 2020, adult students made up 28.3% of the enrollment in Tennessee community colleges which is the largest percentage of adult students among state-supported institutions (2-year and 4-year colleges and technical colleges). In their 2015-2025 Master Plan, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) emphasized the necessity for institutions to engage adult learners in higher education in order for the state to meet its Drive to 55 goal (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2020a). Institutions were directed to enhance the quality of adult student services to improve adult learners' retention and success (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2020b). This becomes especially important as enrollment of high school graduates has begun to decline in recent years, down 9% from 2017 to 2021 (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2022).

In response to this call to action, Columbia State drafted a proposal to enhance adult services on campus, including developing a program, Confident Completion, creating an adult services office, and hiring a part-time adult success coach for the 2015-2016 academic year. During the fall of 2016, a report was written by Dr. Kelly Pujol, Coordinator of Cohort Programs and Evening Services and Program Director at that time, detailing the program results and feedback gathered from students regarding adult services provided by Columbia State. Included in the narrative was feedback gathered from the Adult Advisory Committee (no longer in existence at Columbia State) to investigate the idea of designing an online adult learner-focused college success course (Pujol, 2016). As of this writing, I am unaware of any such course at Columbia State. Adult students at Columbia State are required to complete the college success course designed for and primarily populated with traditional-aged first-year students.

The course catalog for Columbia State describes the first-year seminar, college success, as follows:

This is a one-credit hour course designed to assist new college students in transitioning to the Columbia State Campus environment. Learning modules include Success Strategies, Campus Resources/Technology, Career Development, and Campus Involvement. The purpose of the course is to provide information that will maximize students' chances for success while minimizing the time required to achieve their educational goals. It is strongly recommended that students complete this course during their first semester at college. The course is required for all degree-seeking students who enroll at Columbia State fall 2016 or later. (Columbia State Community College, 2021a)

The current 10 week course curriculum was developed in 2016 and implemented in the fall of 2016. The course was developed when the average age of students was 22 years old, with a median age of 19 (Columbia State Community College, 2021b). While those numbers have remained consistent over the past five years (2017-2021), the focus on degree attainment by the state, with an emphasis on adult learners through the TN Reconnect program, highlights a need for the institution to determine if the introductory course curriculum is effective for adult learners. The current curriculum covers the following topics: time management, institutional knowledge, campus technology, personal safety, support resources, cultural sensitivity, the transition from high school to college in the classroom, study habits, the library, career exploration, campus activities, and healthy behaviors. Little information in the curriculum addresses the experiences of an adult going to college for the first time after years away from academia. A copy of the course syllabus is available in Appendix A.

Because the course focuses on helping students successfully transition to the collegiate environment, I feel the adjustment scale, as developed by Baker and Siryk (1984), provides a helpful lens to investigate students' experiences with the course. Baker and Siryk (1984) identified four types of adjustment: academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional, and used these types to develop an assessment tool, the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ). Academic adjustment is defined as a student's degree of adaptation to their new academic demands. Social adjustment reflects the degree to which the student has integrated themselves into the social structure of the institution. Personal-emotional adjustment reflects how a student experiences the demands of the college environment. Institutional adjustment refers to the degree to which a student has become attached to the university community. In a meta-analysis of the literature on student adjustment to college, Crede and Niehorster (2011) found that institutional adjustment has the most robust relationship with retention status, and academic adjustment has the most substantial relationship with GPA. Institutional and academic adjustment are the main components of the college success curriculum, as outlined in the description above.

Interventions, such as first-year seminar courses, designed to hasten the adjustment to college can impact institutional and academic adjustment. Research on adjustment has shown a strong positive relationship to GPA and retention (Crede & Niehorster, 2011). First-year seminars that foster students' adjustment by providing practical information and expanding students' coping resources should positively affect grades and retention (Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Understanding how these interventions impact adjustment can provide the institution with invaluable information on how to serve adult learners. By examining the perceptions of adult learners taking the first-year course, I hope to provide Columbia State with data that may help to

develop and implement a first-year seminar course targeted at adult learners and their unique needs.

Problem Statement

Research indicates the importance of the first-year experience in successful matriculation, and many institutions utilize a first-year course to guide students through their adjustment to college. Adult learners entering college for the first time are often required to complete a first-year course as part of their course requirements. The majority of existing literature appears only to address the impacts of the first-year seminar from a student success and institutional outcomes perspective (Guarneri & Connolly, 2019; Hendel, 2007; Miller & Lesik, 2015; Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Little research has been done to address the course content and its potential impact on students and their adjustment to collegiate life, with even less literature focusing on adult learners completing the first-year seminar course.

In 2019, Guaraneri and Connolly addressed the content gap by researching the first-year course curriculum at a small private institution and how it may play a role in the adjustment of traditional-aged first-year students at that institution. Their research found that first-year seminars can have a transformative impact on students engaged in the course. With a focus on traditional-aged students, Guarneri and Connolly (2019) found that the course components can guide students toward transforming their perspectives and behaviors. Because of the likelihood of the average age of the participants being in the traditional age range, their study may not address how a first-year course can impact non-traditional-aged students. Much of the literature on adult learners, detailed in Chapter 2, has identified that adults entering higher education following a time gap in their formal educational experience often have needs that vary from traditional-aged learners. Among those needs can be difficulty adjusting to a student mindset and

practicing successful study habits. I plan to address how the content of the first-year course at Columbia State may impact the adjustment of adult learners during their first year of college.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study will be to examine the perceptions of adult learners in College Success 101, the first-year seminar course at Columbia State. I will interview adult learners following their completion of the 10 week college success course, but before the end of their first semester. Following completion of the course, students will be interviewed to gauge their perceptions of how well the course prepared them for their transition to college and any suggestions for course changes that could provide a more helpful experience. Through my research, I hope to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of adult learners transitioning into Columbia State Community College?

2. How do adult learners perceive the content of the College Success 101 course prepared them to succeed academically, socially, personally and emotionally?

Addressing these questions may provide Columbia State with a better understanding of the perceived needs of adult learners as they transition into the college environment and provide suggestions for developing a course curriculum with a focus on those needs. By addressing the needs of adult learners, the college success course could positively impact an adult's adjustment to college, which may impact their decision to continue and complete their education at Columbia State.

Overview of Research Design

This qualitative case study of a bounded system (students enrolled in the college success course at one community college) will utilize interviews to create a narrative analysis of the

participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Cresswell and Poth (2018) define a case study as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection. The case study methodology allows for an in-depth study of a particular case to provide the research with meaningful data to identify recurring themes to characterize the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Collecting narrative data through interviews with selected participants will allow me to identify recurring patterns regarding the students' perceptions of how the college success course aided their adjustment to college.

To select the participants, I will use purposeful sampling, which is defined as a method of selection that focuses on particular characteristics of a population that will best answer the research questions (Laerd, 2012). The sample will be selected from Columbia State Community College students identified as adult learners, TN Reconnect recipients, and enrolled in College Success 101 course for the upcoming fall semester. An attempt will be made to identify a minimum of five and a maximum of ten participants who meet the criteria identified above. The number of participants may be adjusted as a point of saturation is reached. Saturation occurs when the responses to the questions begin to become repetitive and therefore offer no new information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Interviews are the most commonly used method of data collection in qualitative studies because they allow the researcher to collect more in-depth descriptions, clarify responses, and probe for additional information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interview questions used in this study will address adult learners' perceptions of the course and how they feel the content may aid their adjustment to college. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview upon course

Conceptual Framework

The adjustment to college can have an impact on a student's retention and completion rates. Failure to adjust to the academic rigors of college courses, lacking a social support network, or feeling disconnected from the collegiate experience and specifically with their institution may lead a student to abandon their academic pursuits (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Ozen & Yilmaz, 2019; Sarmiento et al., 2019, Tinto, 1994). Tinto's (1994) work on student departure focused on the student's adjustment intellectually (academically) and socially. Baker and Siryk (1984) furthered this through their Student Adjustment scale and added additional dimensions. In a six-year longitudinal study on retention, Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) found a strong interplay between the various dimensions of adjustment and contend that personal and social adjustment can be as important as academic factors in adjustment and retention.

First-year seminars are identified as an intervention that contributes to adjustment and positively influences college success; generally defined as grade point average (GPA), retention, and graduation rates (Crede & Nierhorster, 2012). The first-year seminar course, College Success 101, at Columbia State will serve as the bounded system for this case study. As mentioned in the course description above, this course is designed to influence a student's adjustment to college using topics associated with the four dimensions, academic, social, personal-emotional and institutional. The research questions will seek to answer and shed light on how the course aided in the adjustment of adult learners by seeking their input on the content of the course. The interview protocol will be crafted using the dimensions of adjustment as identified by Baker and Siryk (1989); academic, social, personal-emotional and institutional.

Rationale and Significance

A literature review regarding adult learners and first-year seminar courses yielded very few results, and only a few focused on the course content. There is very little literature regarding the content of First-Year Seminar courses, and Guaraneri and Connolly (2019) sought to address this gap with their study of the experiences of first-year students in a first-year seminar course at a four-year private institution. However, their study reviewed the course content from the perspective of a first-year student at a four-year private institution in the northeastern United States. Assuming their study focused on first-year students in the traditional student age range, I plan to expand on their study by focusing on adult learners at a community college in the southeastern United States. Adult learners make up nearly one-third of Tennessee college students, and their needs as students can often differ from those of traditional-aged students. Schools must identify those differences and how to serve adult students best to help attract and retain them. There is a need to address how student services support adult learners in college. For this study, I will focus on one element of student services, the first-year seminar course known as college success at Columbia State Community College.

By understanding adult learners' perceptions in relation to the first-year seminar course, Columbia State will have information that may assist in developing a course targeted at adult students. A targeted first-year seminar course that specifically addresses the unique needs of adult learners could increase retention and completion for this crucial population.

Researcher Perspective

My professional background in higher education includes serving as an advisor for adult learners and an instructor for the first-year seminar at the institution in this research and other institutions where I have been employed. While my role at the selected institution may provide additional insight and analysis, it can also serve as a conflict of interest. Any potential participant

who has a relationship with the primary researcher will be excluded to address this potential conflict. Additionally, the last time I served as an instructor for the course was Fall of 2019, and I have no vested interest in the outcome of this research.

Researcher Assumptions

Many assumptions have been made regarding the topic and subjects of this research. It was assumed that the TN Reconnect grant would increase adult student enrollment at community colleges in Tennessee. This increase in adult enrollment requires institutions to address the needs of those adult learners. The needs of adult learners can vary significantly from the needs of a traditional first-year student. Many adult learners have been away from formal education for five or more years, and a first-year seminar course should bear that in mind when developing course content. With the state moving closer to the target date of 2025 and only a 1% increase from 32 to 33 percent by 2019, additional emphasis could be placed on TBR schools to recruit adult learners using the TN Reconnect program (UT Advocacy Network, 2013; US Department of Education, n.d.).

As the researcher and a former course instructor, I have assumed that the College Success Course will be less beneficial to adult learners because the content was developed with a focus on traditional first-year students.

Definition of Terms

The following concepts will figure prominently in this study. Their definitions follow.

Traditional Aged student - students aged 18-24 attending college or university immediately after completing secondary education.

Adult Learner - student 25 years or older attending a college or university for the first time or returning to complete an associate's or bachelor's degree.

First-Year seminar - a course offered to students during their first year at a college or university; the course is often compulsory.

TN Promise - scholarship offered by the state of Tennessee to traditional-aged students attending a community college or technical school in the state, covers the cost of tuition and fees for up to 5 semesters, requires 8 hours of community service, full-time enrollment, and a 2.0 GPA to maintain.

TN Reconnect - grant program offered by the state of Tennessee to adult students attending a community college or technical school in the state, covers the cost of tuition and fees until completion of a degree or certificate, requires half-time (6 hours) enrollment, and a cumulative GPA of 2.0 to maintain.

Drive to 55 - an initiative in Tennessee introduced by Governor Haslam in 2014 to increase educational attainment in the state to 55%.

First-Year experience - the whole of a student's experience during their first year at a college or university, including orientation, residential living, course work, out-of-class activities and events, and student services, emphasizing helping students with the adjustment to collegiate life.

Adjustment Framework - Developed by Baker and Siryk in 1984, it classified adjustment into four types: academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional; adjustment to college is an interplay between the four types (Permzadian & Crede, 2015). It is measured using the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ).

Chapter Summary

Tennessee has adopted a bold initiative to increase the number of post-secondary credentials in the state to 55% by 2025. As discussed in this chapter, this goal is only attainable with the inclusion of adult learners across the state. In order to ensure adult learners are not only

enrolling but completing their post-secondary education, schools should examine how their services impact the adjustment of adults into the collegiate environment. This study will address this problem by focusing on the first-year seminar course content at Columbia State Community College. Adult learners will share their experiences with the course through post-course interviews. The purpose of this study is to provide a narrative analysis of the course content to help Columbia State adjust this course to provide adult learners with access to a course designed to aid in their connection to the institution and academic adjustment to collegiate life.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In 2014, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam announced the "Drive to 55" statewide initiative (Collom et al., 2021; Meehan & Kent, 2020; Roper et al., 2021). The initiative aims to increase degree attainment in Tennessee to 55% by 2025. At the time of the announcement, degree attainment was at 32% statewide (Roper et al., 2021). The initiative was tied closely to the Tennessee Promise scholarship program, which provided coverage of tuition and fees for all graduating seniors in Tennessee who chose to attend a college, university, or technical school in the state offering associate degrees or technical certificates (Meehan & Kent, 2020). During the first few years of the program, legislators and education experts across the state recognized that they could not rely solely on recent high school graduates to help Tennessee reach its goal. This forced them to widen their net and create the Tennessee (T.N.) Reconnect program in 2017. The Tennessee Reconnect program targeted adult learners in the state who did not have a post-secondary education degree. As the program was introduced in 2018, schools across the state saw an uptick in their adult learner enrollment. In that same year, the T.N. Reconnect program had over 30,000 applicants, exceeding their expectations.

The influx of adult learners brought their experiences and unique needs to campuses across the state. Institutions adapted programs to support these students, and the state developed a support program with mentors for Reconnect students. For example, Columbia State Community College developed an office for adult learners and hired a T.N. Reconnect advisor for their Reconnect students. However, not all programs and services were adapted for adult learners. This study will be centered on one such program, the College Success Course. I will be examining the experiences of adult students and their perceptions of the College Success Course.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of relevant literature to support and clarify the statement of purpose, frame the research questions, and guide the rest of the study. The review will be organized by topics and explore their relationship to my research (State of Tennessee, 2022; Tennessee Board of Regents, 2022).

Search Strategy

The search strategy for this literature review included the use of several databases, which included ERIC, Google Scholar, and SAGE. Additionally, I used the library resources available through the University of Arkansas library distance learning databases. I used the following terms individually and in combination for the search of literature: *adult learners, adult students, non-traditional students, first-year seminar, adjustment, transition to college, community college, and adult learner/student needs*. I also used the reference lists from selected articles to search for additional literature. Google was utilized to search for information regarding educational statistics and the educational funding initiatives in Tennessee. The sources utilized for this review were mostly limited to publications from 2018 to 2023 to ensure their temporal relevance. However, some seminal sources were also included for their valuable information and evidence. In total, 76 sources were included in this review, 68 (89.47%) of which are recently published, two (2.63%) of which were not dated, and six (7.89%) of which are seminal publications.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the present study is the adjustment framework based on Baker and Siryk's (1984) model. Baker and Siryk purported that students' adjustment or adaptation to college occurred across different dimensions. This idea was based on Tinto's Interactionalist Theory, in which academic and social integration were both believed to be

necessary for students to persist through higher education (Ozen & Yilmaz, 2019; Sarmiento et al., 2019). Expanding this theory, Baker and Siryk (1984) classified adjustment into four types: academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional, which served as the dimensions for their instrument for measuring college students' adjustment, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). With these dimensions, Baker and Siryk's adjustment framework can be used to provide a holistic framework for college students' adjustment (Sarmiento et al., 2019).

Dimensions of Student Adjustment

The most obvious dimension of student adjustment to higher education is academic adjustment, which involves the student's ability to cope with the demands of education, as well as the motivation, satisfaction, and effort necessary to fulfill academic requirements and boost student performance (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). Some example items for the academic dimension in the SACQ include "I am enjoying my academic work at…" and "I have been keeping up to date on my academic work" (Baker & Siryk, 1984, p. 181). Prior academic achievements, such as high school grades or scores in Standard Assessment Tests (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT), are some of the predictors of academic adjustment (Crede & Niehorster, 2012). This does not necessarily mean that students who did poorly in high school are set to fail in higher education; rather, such students may require a greater focus on their academic adjustment.

Students who have difficulty adjusting to academic demands in college or being motivated to pursue their academic work are more likely to display poorer performance in their examinations and other requirements, thereby reducing their chances of retention or graduation (Crede & Niehorster, 2012). The importance of academic adjustment is evident in Brunton and Buckley's (2021) qualitative study of adult learners' discourse regarding identity formation

during their first year at university. Based on interview data from 34 full time freshmen adult learners in Ireland, academic milestones served as turning points for students in their freshman experience. Performing well during examinations, completing assignments, and receiving positive feedback regarding their academic work allowed students to perceive that they had the ability to continue their education. On the contrary, a participant whose academic results did not meet their own expectations considered it as a sign to discontinue their education. These studies suggest that for college students, particularly adult learners who have already foregone higher education once, poor academic adjustment may lead to the perception that they do not have what it takes to persist and graduate.

The other dimension of the adjustment framework that was drawn from the Interactionalist Theory is social adjustment, which involves the ability to cope with interpersonal and societal demands within the institution (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). Some example items for the social dimension of the SACQ include "I am very involved with social activities in college" and "lonesomeness for home is a source of difficulty for me now" (Baker & Siryk, 1984, p. 181). Crede and Niehorster (2012) purported that certain personality traits, including extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and emotional stability may positively influence social adjustment. In a mixed methods study regarding the factors impacting health professions students' transition during their first year, older age (26 years and above) was a significant and positive predictor of social adjustment (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). This finding suggests older students may have more difficulty finding same-aged peers in college. However, their increased social experiences may contribute to their ability to socialize better in the college environment, while their independence may contribute to reduced feelings of loneliness.

Evidence supporting the importance of social adjustment has been revealed in previous studies (Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Brunton & Buckley, 2021). In a seminal work conducted to confirm the validity of the SACQ and its generalizability to European first year students, Beyers and Goossens (2002) surveyed 368 freshmen university students in Belgium. They found that social adjustment was significantly related not only to reduced loneliness but also to student attrition. For adult learners, building a social support network was an important factor for their adjustment into higher education (Brunton & Buckley, 2021). Adult learners have shared that their social groups have been helpful for obtaining study advice, reducing their anxiety, and persisting through college. Although they may represent the minority of a college population, adult learners also appear to benefit from social adjustment in the same way as traditional students.

One of the additional dimensions added by Baker and Siryk (1984) to their adjustment framework is the personal-emotional adjustment dimension, which represents both physical and psychological feelings of the student (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). Some example items for the personal-emotional adjustment dimension of the SACQ include "I have been feeling tense and nervous lately" and "I haven't been sleeping very well" (Baker & Siryk, 1984, p. 181). Crede and Niehorster (2012) identified depression as a significant and negative predictor of personal-emotional adjustment. Students who struggle with depression or related mental health problems may thus be at risk for poor personal-emotional adjustment, which may subsequently lead to poor performance or dropout. Evidence for the importance of personal-emotional adjustment in adult learners was observed in some of Brunton and Buckley's (2021) participants who faced struggles when trying to take on the student identity. Participants expressed feeling intimidated or afraid during their first year in college with the numerous demands and expectations. Gerdes

and Mallinckrodt (1994) likewise supported this expansion from Tinto's theory, noting that personal-emotional adjustment items in the SACQ were among the topmost significant predictors of student attrition. The demands of higher education may be significantly different from work demands, which may then be taxing for the adult learner.

The final dimension in the adjustment framework is institutional adjustment, which involves the student's satisfaction with higher education in general and with their specific institution (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). Some example items for the institutional adjustment dimension of the SACQ include "I feel that I fit in well as part of the … environment" and "I expect to stay at... for a bache'or's degree" (Baker & Siryk, 1984, p. 181). Stress was found to be a significant and negative predictor of institutional adjustment (Crede & Niehorster, 2012). In Beyers and Goossens (2002) study, institutional adjustment was significantly and negatively related to student attrition. College belongingness, which is equivalent to institutional adjustment, was also found to moderate the negative influence of loneliness on subjective vitality or well-being in Turkish students (Arslan, 2021). Adult learners who were able to adjust to their institution learned to segregate their student identity from their work and family identities, which helped them manage their day-to-day identities and the respective tasks involved (Brunton & Buckley, 2021). Institutional adjustment may be particularly valuable for such adult learners who may have been away from educational institutions for much longer than traditional students.

Evidence for the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire

Baker and Siryk's (1984) adjustment framework has been relatively underexplored as a framework for research. Many seminal works on student retention and attrition have been mainly focused on the original dimensions from Tinto's theory, the academic and social dimensions

(Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). However, some previous researchers have examined the validity of the SACQ as an instrument and supported this extension of Tinto's theory. For instance, a meta-analysis of the literature on the SACQ indicated that adjustment to college and student success had a significant and positive relationship (Crede & Niehorster, 2012). Furthermore, interventions that contribute to adjustment, such as a first-year seminar course, positively influenced college success, often defined using GPA, retention, and graduation rates. In a mixed methods study on an outdoor orientation program (OOP) for university freshmen, Pickard et al. (2020) utilized the SACQ to measure the outcomes of the program. The specific program involves a three-day residential experience at a hostel during the first week of the academic year, in which students participated in various group activities. Based on the SACQ results obtained within a month after the OOP, OOP attendees had better academic adjustment (+ 25.08), social adjustment (+ 19), personal-emotional adjustment (+ 8.17), and institutional adjustment (+ 16.92) than non-attendees. These findings support not only the SACQ but also the possible interventions and strategies to improve student adjustment based on the adjustment framework. The evidence also supports the present study's research question pertaining to the effectiveness of the first year seminar, College Success 101, on fulfilling adult learners' needs.

There has also been evidence that supports the dimensionality of student adjustment (Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Crede & Niehorster, 2012). While overall adjustment based on the SACQ was found to be significantly related to greater academic motivation, less loneliness, fewer depressive symptoms, and greater general adjustment, the specific subscales also correlated with their respective alternates from different measures used to test concurrent validity (Beyers & Goossens, 2002). The academic adjustment subscale was positively related to its alternate, academic motivation. Social adjustment subscale was negatively related to loneliness.

Personal-emotional adjustment subscale was negatively related to depression. Institutional adjustment subscale was positively related to general adjustment. These findings suggest that each subscale measured specific dimensions of adjustment that differed from each other but were all related to overall adjustment. Crede and Niehorster (2012) provided further evidence for the validity of each dimension and how they interacted with each other. For instance, students who have not adjusted in the personal-emotional domain may not seek help for their academic struggles. Institutional attachment, in particular, is a key indicator of positive overall adjustment and can spill over to academic adjustment and retention. The adjustment framework may thus serve as a useful framework examining the experiences of first year adult learners across the four dimensions of adjustment. It also sets up the present study's research question regarding the perceived needs of adult learners, which may fall into the four dimensions of adjustment.

Background Literature Review

Adult Learners – Motivations, Challenges, Needs

Adult learners are generally known as students aged 25 years or older (Sutton, 2019). Over the years, however, researchers have begun to recognize factors beyond age that could define adult learning (Karmelita, 2020). In some cases, delaying college entry by at least one year after high school, being a single parent, having dependents, being a full-time employee, financial independence, being a part-time student, or without a high school diploma are considered grounds for adult learning. For the present study, however, the age-based definition of adult learners is utilized.

The upswing of adult student enrollment can be attributed to various societal and global changes. The development of the *new economy*, which reduced manufacturing-based jobs, accelerated technological advancements, and promoted globalization, has resulted in inequity

among workers and forced several working individuals to pursue higher education (Lanford, 2020). This inequity has also been observed in college completion despite government initiatives, with adult learners among those who continue to struggle in obtaining postsecondary degrees (Meehan & Kent, 2020; Spires et al., 2022). The Lumina Foundation (2021) states that by 2025 nearly two-thirds of United States (U.S.) residents aged 25-64 will require a degree, certificate, or other credential for employment. While Tennessee has increased degree attainment at a faster rate than the national average, 7.5% compared to 6.6% nationally, it still lags behind the national average in total degree attainment, 46.8% versus 51.9% nationally (Spires et al., 2022).

Aside from the changes brought by the new economy, adult learners may have their own personal reasons for pursuing higher education. Although these individual reasons may vary, many adult learners consider the opportunity to enroll in college or university as a fresh start or a new path (Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Collom et al., 2021; Higgins & Misawa, 2022; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). For some, adult learning represents a chance to accomplish lifelong dreams that were halted due to life circumstances in the past (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). Adults whose children have become self-sufficient and those who have less social and professional responsibilities may have more time and resources available for themselves (Collom et al., 2021; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). Additionally, financial aid programs, such as the T.N. Reconnect, may help alleviate the financial burdens of higher education for adult learners (Collom et al., 2021). The chance for a fresh start was especially pronounced in refugee adult learners who wish to live a life without violence or poverty (Higgins & Misawa, 2022). Such self-improvement quests comprised a major theme in Higgins and Misawa's qualitative study on refugee adult learners in the United States. All three participants emphasized the importance of higher education for them

to establish their lives in a new country. However, as adult learners of different backgrounds take on this new path, they may encounter several obstacles or challenges.

Challenges of Adult Learning

Adult learners face multiple challenges in higher education that may be unique to their population. As adult learners have most likely been away from education for a longer period, some may find it challenging to adopt a student's mindset and study habits (Agi et al., 2019; Bok, 2021; Danganan et al., 2022; Kara et al., 2019; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; Xavier et al., 2022). Younger students who transitioned straight from high school to college may retain their study habits, which cannot be said for some adult learners (Bok, 2021; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; Xavier et al., 2022). Based on Kara et al.'s (2019) systematic review regarding the challenges of adult learners in online education, middle-aged adult learners in particular are likely to find it difficult to focus on their studies and balance their multiple responsibilities.

Adult learners across several studies and from different countries have also indicated that adjusting to study habits to meet academic requirements and deadlines was among the most difficult parts of their college experience (Bok, 2021; Danganan et al., 2022; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; Xavier et al., 2022). Examination anxiety may also affect adult learners because they are not used to such situations anymore (Agi et al., 2019). In a study of 540 adult learners enrolled in continuing education programs in tertiary institutions within Nigeria, participants displayed symptoms of examination anxiety including tension, excessive perspiration, cold hands, negative thoughts, and poor concentration. The consequences of such anxiety reported by participants included academic failure, academic underachievement, psychological distress, depression, and suicide. Such severe consequences highlight the problem of adjusting to the academic requirements for adult learners. Only Lin (2019) reported the advantage of adult learners in terms

of self-regulation, which allows them to take control of their own learning. In general, adjustment in student mindset and study habits appear to be a major challenge for adult learners.

In line with the challenge of adjusting to the student mindset, adult learners may also face the challenge of forming their learner or student identity as non-traditional students (Bok, 2021; Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Kachur, 2020; Kudak, 2016; Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; Zart, 2019). Adult learners who have been employed or had family responsibilities before or while enrolling in higher education have taken on various identities and roles in their lives as worker, parent, caregiver or others (Brunton & Buckley, 2021). For many adult learners, managing these identities on a daily basis can be taxing. For instance, an adult learner in Ireland shared that it was extremely difficult to prepare for leaving the house every day, ensuring that all home responsibilities were taken care of before proceeding to their student responsibilities. Identity management strategies may thus be necessary for adult learners to successfully adjust to their student identity.

Several adult learners across different studies have expressed their difficulties in balancing educational and family responsibilities (Bok, 2021; Brown et al., 2021; Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Buckwalter & Togila, 2019; Collom et al., 2021; Kara et al., 2019; Kudak, 2015; Roper et al., 2021; Zart, 2019). While juggling their varying priorities, adult learners are often seeking an education to help improve their family and work circumstances (Kudak, 2015). Many adult learners felt the pressure of prioritizing their studies because of the major sacrifices they have made to attend college or university (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). However, their role as students may not be as critical to their lives, which means that they would often prioritize their roles as parents or employees (Bok, 2021).

Female adult learners with children and middle aged adult learners, in particular, felt the added pressure of prioritizing their families due to societal roles and expectations (Kara et al., 2019; Zart, 2019). Some adult learners who had children expressed their guilt over placing their role as student above their role as mother (Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Zart, 2019). As such, adult learner needs may include flexible scheduling, flexible learning methods, credit for their life and work experience, and a feeling of respect for those experiences and connections with their fellow students and institution (Kachur, 2020; Kudak, 2015; Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019). Adult learners in Lewis and Bailey-Webb's (2019) phenomenological study emphasized this issue as they noted how childcare arrangements and time management were pivotal factors in their college persistence. Some institutions do not allow the entry of children in study areas or libraries, which translated to adult learners with children's limited use of such resources (Roper et al., 2021).

Adult learners with children may have additional financial challenges because of childcare costs (Brown et al., 2021). To add to this problem, some financial aid programs are only available for a minimum number of credits, which means adult learners would have to take on a higher load in school if they wished to receive financial aid (Buckwalter & Togila, 2019). However, having children is not necessarily a barrier in itself for adult learners. Some adult learners have indicated that their children served as their main motivators to persist in their education (Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019). It appears that the main challenge for adult learners with children is the lack of childcare resources.

For other adult learners, changes in family circumstances, such as a death or injury in their family, led them to stop their studies (Bok, 2021; Collom et al., 2021). For instance, an adult learner in Collom et al.'s (2021) study, who had dropped out after just one semester, shared

that her daughter had sustained an ankle injury while playing soccer, and that she had to stop her studies because her daughter required several medical appointments. Another adult learner in Bok's (2021) study also had to take a break from their studies because of the death of their in-law. Adult learners without children may also face challenges of balancing family and education, as some are breadwinners who are caring for their younger siblings or elderly grandparents. Family responsibilities thus serve as challenges for many adult learners, not just those with children.

Aside from family responsibilities, working adult learners also face the challenge of balancing educational and work responsibilities (Bok, 2021; Kara et al., 2019; Xavier et al., 2022; Zart, 2019). In Bok's (2021) qualitative study, work commitments served as the biggest challenge for adult learners. Adult learners who worked in unpredictable fields, such as Bok's participant who served as a police officer, had to keep a flexible schedule as they did not know when they would be needed at work. This issue was also observed in Kara et al.'s (2019) systematic review wherein adult learners who did not have a steady work schedule experienced higher rates of dropouts, especially in highly populated countries such as the United States, Canada, China, and India. Based on the systematic review, adult learners perceived the lack of organizational support as a major hurdle for their education.

The combination of both work and family responsibilities is a real challenge for some adult learners (Xavier et al., 2022; Zart, 2019). In Zart's (2019) phenomenological study, all five participants indicated that they juggled responsibilities across more than three roles, and that it was particularly difficult to insert their schoolwork into their schedules when they also had to work and care for their children. These sentiments were echoed by a participant in Xavier et al.'s (2022) qualitative study of first year students who decided to withdraw from an online open

university in Spain. The participant indicated that they did not have enough time to study, and that they had limited sleep because of their tight schedule. These challenges can be emotionally and psychologically taxing on the adult learner. In the words of the participant, "I was very stressed out. I felt I only lived for working and studying under stress" (p. 14). At the same time, adult learners who are single and without children still feel the added pressure from work (Bok, 2021). A participant in Bok's (2021) study shared that they often had to cover for co-workers with children when they could not come in to work. These findings show that work responsibilities can be as equally challenging as family responsibilities for adult learners, especially when organizational support is not provided.

The challenges of adult learners may stem further into their past. Some adult learners have shared negative past experiences or poor environments that have hindered their educational persistence (Klempin & Lahr, 2021; Lanford, 2020; Sutton, 2019). Sutton (2019) noted that higher education institutions are typically designed for traditional students, which may cause traumatic experiences for non-traditional students such as adult learners. Such experiences may thus prevent them from returning to their studies. In Klempin and Lahr's (2021) report on Tennessee community colleges, they found that past negative educational experiences could lead adult learners to doubt whether they could succeed in such an environment.

Outside of the educational environment, poor or harmful home environments can also serve as a barrier for adult learners' education (Lanford, 2020). For instance, a participant in Lanford's qualitative study on adult learners in California community colleges shared that education was the least of their priorities as they grew up in an environment filled with drugs and violence. Being abandoned by their parents, the participant had to drop out of school and care for their younger siblings. Later on in life, they got into an abusive relationship, which served as

another barrier to their education. While these past negative experiences served as barriers, they also motivated the participant to pursue their education once given the opportunity so that they could lead a better life for themselves and for their children. These findings highlight the need for targeted support services and the establishment of a safe space for students who may have past traumatic experiences inside and outside of higher education.

In addition to past negative experiences, refugees or immigrants may encounter added issues of racism and language barriers in higher education, as well as the need for additional services such as high school equivalency programs or recredentialing (Brown et al., 2021; Higgins & Misawa, 2022). The negative outcomes of such experiences were demonstrated in Higgins and Misawa's (2022) qualitative study wherein a participant ceased their studies due to their language insecurities. They also experienced discrimination in their institution, which negatively affected their self-perception and sense of belongingness, and in turn, their studies. In their report of adult learners in Chicago, Brown et al. (2021) noted that around 27% of the Chicago adult population (aged 25 and older) are immigrants. The issues of racism and discrimination, as well as the growing population of foreign-born adult learners, call for culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in adult learning (Garrett et al., 2021). Unfortunately, Garrett et al. found that community college faculty may not be familiar with CRT, as these strategies are usually targeted at K-12 education. As immigrant or refugee adult learners comprise a substantial proportion of students, educational institutions must ensure that their various educational needs are being met (Brown et al., 2021; Garrett et al., 2021).

For some adult learners, age may serve as a barrier for higher education as they had less energy and physical or cognitive resources to deal with the demands of higher education (Danganan et al., 2022; Karmelita, 2020; Zikhali, 2019). For instance, a participant in

Karmelita's (2020) study expressed their concern that they could not absorb and retain information as much as their younger classmates, while another participant stated that they did not have the vitality to overcome the stresses of both work and education. Zikhali (2019) enumerated additional age-related concerns such as poorer vision or hearing, difficulty standing for long periods of time, and other physical impairments. Such concerns prevented adult learners from fully participating in class activities such as in-class presentations. Accessibility provisions may thus be necessary for adult learners to get the full experience of higher education.

A prominent age-related concern among adult learners is their lack of technological awareness (Kara et al., 2019; Karmelita, 2020; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). In particular, Kara et al. (2019) found that adult learners aged 50 years and above experienced the most difficulty participating in online education. In Karmelita's (2020) study regarding a transition program for adult learners before college entry, participants shared that one of the main reasons they enrolled in the program was to improve their technological skills in preparation for college. With the announcement that the program was to be converted into an online program, participants expressed that this would serve as a major barrier for adult learners. Likewise, adult learners in an Australian study conveyed their anxiety regarding new technologies used in education, such as quizzing software or applications (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). Preparation in technological skills may be a critical need of adult learners.

Some adult learners may also feel embarrassed regarding their age within a group of younger learners (Sutton, 2019). With most higher education institutions designed with traditional students in mind, adult learners may feel out of place because of their age. Evidence of the contrary was presented by Silverstein et al. (2019), who conducted a pilot study on an age-friendly university in Massachusetts. The age-friendly university was designed to foster an

inclusive environment for older adults through 10 key principles, including encouraging adult learners' participation in core activities, promoting professional development or second careers, recognizing the variety of adult learner's educational needs, promoting intergenerational learning, providing greater access to online education, ensuring that the institution's research agenda is informed by adult learners' needs, increasing students' understanding of longevity dividend or the economic and other benefits of extending the healthy lifespan of individuals, enhancing access to health and wellness programs, engaging with the retired community, and ensuring regular dialogue with organizations catering to the older population. Within the university of interest, 3.2% of students were aged 50 years and above. One of the older adult learners from the university shared that they never felt any bias or judgment towards them because of their age. Supporting this finding, Crede and Niehorster (2012) indicated in their meta-analysis that age was not significantly related to college adjustment. Although feeling embarrassed or out of place due to their older age may be a valid concern for adult learners, institutions can foster an age-friendly environment to alleviate such concerns.

Motivations of Adult Learners

As non-traditional students, most adult learners may require further motivation than students simply following the traditional path of education. Previous researchers have indicated that adult learners are often driven by intrinsic motivation and clear goals (Lanford, 2020; Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019; Lin, 2020; Thao et al., 2022; Xavier & Meneses, 2022). These motivations often involved personal or professional development, as well as being a role model for their children (Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019). In examining adult learners' characteristics based on their instructors' perceptions in Vietnam, Thao et al. (2022) found that the most salient characteristics of adult learners identified by the participants was having a good rationale for

learning. Taiwanese adult learners in Lin's (2020) study also had high scores in all dimensions of intrinsic motivation, particularly for desire for stimulation. Having a strong sense of purpose in their education may help adult learners persist to degree completion.

For some adult learners, the desire for education itself serves as a motivation (Lanford, 2020; Xavier & Meneses, 2022). A participant in Lanford's (2020) study of adult learners in a community college in California stated that they wanted to be perceived as educated and to earn the respect of their peers, family, and future employers. In Xavier and Meneses's (2022) Spanish study, some students indicated that despite their lack of time resources and management, they were able to persist in their education because they liked their studies. Czech adult learners in Urban and Jirsakova's (2022) study had higher scores in achievement motivation or investing energy for goal achievement, leadership motivation or motivating the self and others, and power motivation or the desire to enhance the working system, as compared to traditional students. Having an inherent desire or enjoyment for studying or doing academic work may be crucial for adult learners as they already hold various other responsibilities that can take up their time and energy.

Some adult learners, however, may not have a clear purpose for their pursuance of education (Collom et al., 2021; Klempin & Lahr, 2021). Community college staff members from Tennessee have shared their experiences of working with adult learners (Klempin & Lahr, 2021). They noted that while some adult learners are pragmatic and focused on their educational goals, others are still uncertain regarding their goals in college or in their careers ahead. Similarly, a participant in Collom et al.'s (2021) study indicated that they simply wanted to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the T.N. Reconnect program, but was unsure what they wanted to achieve with it. Eventually, the participant dropped out of their program. Students without a clear

purpose or goal for higher education may require additional guidance in exploring their interests and visions for the future so as to find an appropriate program that they would be passionate about and persist in (Klempin & Lahr, 2021). Other adult learners may also experience a shift in their goals along the way (Lanford, 2020). As adult learners go through higher education, they may experience various types of self-discovery or gain more confidence, which could affect their long-term goals. These students may equally need guidance in aligning their education with their shifting goals.

In line with the unclear or shifting goals of adult learners, academic advising has been cited as a critical need for this population (Karmelita, 2020; Olson & Rodriguez, 2020; Samuel et al., 2021; Xavier & Meneses, 2022). Even adult learners with clear goals may require academic advising to ensure that their program and credits are optimally aligned with their goals (Klempin & Lahr, 2021). Academic advising could also help students who may have an aptitude for certain fields but have not considered it, such as women of color in the white-dominated field of technology careers. Some adult learners may no longer be familiar with the latest courses and majors offered in higher education, which raises the importance of academic advising (Karmelita, 2020; Klempin & Lahr, 2021). Academic advisors could further help adult learners to ensure that previous credits they may have possibly earned are considered in their educational path (Klempin & Lahr, 2021). Several previous authors have emphasized the roles of academic advisors in adult learners' education, such as encouraging student engagement (Samuel et al., 2021), providing realistic explanations of what to expect in higher education (Xavier & Meneses, 2022), and mentoring (Olson & Rodriguez, 2020). Such academic advising was noted to be more effective when held during adult learners' transition and before their enrollment so that they could choose their programs and courses more optimally (Karmelita, 2020). As adult learners

may experience hurdles and challenges with their motivations and goals, they may require guidance to help them stay on track or find the most optimal path for their education.

Support for Adult Learners

The numerous challenges faced by adult learners call for additional support from various parties to help them persist and succeed in higher education. The higher education institution itself is probably the first and most frequent entity that the adult learner interacts with in their educational experience. Furthermore, adult learners may embark upon their educational endeavor without any advocates or support systems (Buckwater & Togila, 2019). As such, institutional support is an important factor for their adjustment (Agi et al., 2019; Buckwalter & Togila, 2019; Karmelita, 2020; Lanford, 2020).

Evidence from qualitative studies highlights the appreciation of adult learners for helpful staff that aided their transition to college (Karmelita, 2020; Lanford, 2020). For instance, a participant in Lanford's (2020) study shared their experience wherein they had broken down in frustration over the difficulty in registering for classes when a counselor heard them and approached them. The counselor then helped them register and enroll in a support program and has since been guiding them through college. Agi et al. (2019) supported these findings with quantitative evidence, reporting survey results from Nigerian adult learners that guidance and counseling helped to reduce examination anxiety of students by developing their confidence, decision-making, coping mechanisms, and effective study habits. At the same time, lack of institutional support from staff and advisors led to feelings of frustration from adult learners (Collom et al., 2021; Zart, 2019). The negative experiences of adult learners with the staff and advisors led them to believe that the goal of the institution was to simply get them enrolled with

no follow up support to help them persist through their education. Based on these findings, institutional staff play a major role in helping adult learners adjust to the college experience.

Instructors may also promote or hinder the adjustment of adult learners depending on the support that they provide or withhold (Collom et al., 2021; Danganan et al., 2022; King-Spezzo et al., 2020; Lanford, 2020; Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019; Lin, 2020; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; McDougall, 2019; Walling et al., 200; Zart, 2019). There have been accounts of discrimination against adult learners reported within the literature (Lanford, 2020; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). For instance, Lanford's (2020) participants had shared multiple experiences wherein instructors disregarded their needs and made them feel unwelcome with statements such as "If you don't get it now, you shouldn't be here" and "if you don't have a computer and you don't know computers, don't take the class" (p. 42). A participant stated that they believed instructors were more dismissive towards adult learners because they asked more questions. International adult learners who were English language learners experienced even more discrimination from instructors, with some suggesting that they defer their degree and enroll in a language school first (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). These negative experiences with instructors have caused adult learners to drop some of their courses, thereby posing as a major barrier to their education (Lanford, 2020).

As much as negative experiences with instructors can be damaging to adult learners, positive experiences with instructors can help them persist and succeed in college. McDougall (2019), who conducted a mixed methods study on an adult learner transition program in Australia, found that instructor support was perceived as the best part of the program. Up to 95% of their 149 participants agreed that help from instructors was easily obtained, which the participants highly valued in the program. Based on interview data from a qualitative study of

adult learners in the Philippines, the respect and fair treatment of instructors towards adult learners allowed them to feel like they belonged in the class (Danganan et al., 2022). At the same time, adult learners also appreciated the consideration of some instructors for their situations, especially when they encountered unpredictable incidents at work or in their families. Similarly, participants in Zart's (2019) study perceived that instructors who were similar in age and parental status as adult learners showed more support for them as they understood their situation. Some instructors were lauded for showing genuine interest in students' learning, clearly explaining course requirements and expectations, responding to inquiries with timeliness, and promoting critical thinking (Walling et al., 2020). Other instructor characteristics that were valued by adult learners were compassion and patience, which was vital in allowing adult learners to explore the educational environment and make mistakes without severe repercussions (Lanford, 2020).

Particularly in the online education setting, adult learners appreciated instructors who constantly checked in on them through e-mail and provided ample support (Collom et al., 2021; McDougall, 2019; Walling et al., 2020). For instance, a participant in Collom et al.'s (2021) study shared that they had been frustrated and confused over a lesson and had sent an e-mail to their instructor at four o'clock in the morning. The participant was surprised and grateful that the instructor had immediately responded to the e-mail. Participants in Lewis and Bailey-Webb's (2019) study echoed this sentiment, noting that it was important for instructors to maintain an open line of communication. King-Spezzo et al. (2020) found that female adult learners in online education placed more value in instructor support than male adult learners, which they attributed to gender norms of feminine communality and masculine competitiveness. Comparing online and on-campus settings, McDougall (2019) further found that only 68% of online students,

compared to 98% of on-campus students, had agreed that their instructor was responsive. However, 30% of online students had responded with "non-applicable," which may indicate that they did not make any inquiries at all. As it may be much easier to communicate in face-to-face settings, online instructors may have to put in extra effort in initiating communication with students to ensure that everyone is on track.

Many adult learners have expressed their appreciation for the support they received from family members that allowed them to pursue higher education, either emotionally or through provision of services or finances (Collom et al., 2021; Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; Zart, 2019). In qualitative studies, participants reported receiving support from parents, in laws, spouses, romantic partners, and their own children. The types of support provided by family members varied from taking care of their children, helping with domestic responsibilities, to encouragement when they felt stressed (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; Zart, 2019). As not all adult learners may have this kind of family support available, some may require services to make up for it, such as childcare services or guidance and counseling for emotional support.

Peer support was also cited as a valuable factor for adult learners' adjustment to higher education (Collom et al., 2021; Lin, 2019). In their Czech study, Urban and Jirsakova (2022) found that adult learners did not differ from traditional students in their desire for sociability. Adult learners further scored significantly higher in openness to contact or the readiness to form and maintain relationships. A participant in Collom et al.'s (2021) study shared that they were glad to have found peers that were similar in age and background as them who shared the same experiences and concerns as they did. Results from Lin's (2019) quantitative study on graduate adult learners revealed that international English as a second language (ESL) adult learners

tended to rely more on peers and instructors for help with their studies compared to local adult learners. International ESL adult learners may have more difficulty understanding the lessons by themselves, which may influence their help-seeking behavior and greater need for peer support.

Unfortunately, finding same-aged peers is substantially more difficult for many adult learners (Karmelita, 2020; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; Olson & Rodriguez, 2020; Zart, 2019; Zikhali, 2019). In Karmelita's (2020) study, the transition program included a focus on building a support network. However, participants indicated that it was insufficient and suggested that there should be a space for adult learners to meet and talk amongst themselves even after the program. Adult learners in several qualitative studies have expressed feeling alone or excluded because a majority of their peers were much younger (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021; Olson & Rodriguez, 2020; Zart, 2019). Some negative comments from younger classmates regarding older adult learners' lack of skills or inability to perform certain tasks were reported in Malau-Aduli et al.'s (2021) study. On a similar note, a participant in Zart's (2019) study shared that they felt like their qualities and skills were out of date. Alternatively, in certain cultures, the intergenerational imbalance manifested as younger students not being able to correct or challenge older adult learners when debates occurred (Zikhali, 2019). Some adult learners in distance learning classes did not find the need for peer support as they believed that distance learning was meant to be for independent studies (McDougall, 2019). Adult learners may have different levels of need for peer support, but providing a space specifically for adult learners may be beneficial for some who feel alone or out of place.

The numerous challenges and needs of adult learners have been enumerated in this section. Of note are adult learners' needs for forming their learner identity (Brunton & Buckley, 2021), balancing their multiple responsibilities (Bok, 2021; Kara et al., 2019; Xavier et al., 2022;

Zart, 2019), aligning their interests and goals with their programs (Collom et al., 2021; Klempin & Lahr, 2021), and receiving various types of support (Agi et al., 2019; Buckwalter & Togila, 2019; Collom et al., 2021; Karmelita, 2020; Lanford, 2020). To begin meeting those needs, "Colleges need to assess what they have currently in place for incoming students to acquaint them to the college and college life. They need to ensure that they treat incoming adult learners with an adult friendly orientation or course to help them succeed" (Kudak, 2015, p. 124). With the diverse needs recorded in the literature, there is a need to examine which supports, services, and strategies are effective for specific contexts (Lanford, 2020; Sutton, 2019), such as for first year adult learners in community colleges. One of the proposed strategies for adult learners is the first-year seminar, which is discussed in the following section.

First-Year Seminars

First year seminars are programs that aid in the transition into higher education for both traditional and non-traditional students (Karmelita, 2020; Klempin & Lahr, 2021; Sobel, 2018; Valentine & Price, 2021). The goal of most first year seminars is to equip students with the necessary skills to succeed in higher education and to introduce a supportive institutional environment composed of staff, faculty, and peers (Sobel, 2018; Valentine & Price, 2021). First year seminars are not always required for all students. Because adult learners are presumed to have prior experience with higher education, they are sometimes exempted from such seminars (Klempin & Lahr, 2021). Valentine and Price (2021) noted that adult learners are less likely to participate in first year seminars and other high impact practices (HIP) designed for freshmen. However, this population may be more in need of first year seminars as they may have been away from school for long periods, have more anxiety over returning to education, or require more information regarding the validity of their existing credits (Klempin & Lahr, 2021).

One of the earliest first year seminars recorded in the literature was taught at the University of South Carolina (Ozen & Yilmaz, 2019; Waggener, 2018). The goal of this seminar is to establish trust, harmony, and open communication among students, administrators, faculty, and staff, as well as to introduce the institution itself to the students. The course *University 101* was introduced by the university president, Thomas Jones, which then served as a model for other higher education institutions in the United States. More than a decade later, a conference was held at the University of South Carolina regarding first year seminars and continues to be held at other universities (Ozen & Yilmaz, 2019; Waggener, 2018). Since then, several first-year seminars have been implemented around the world to provide students with practical information about the institution, enhance their academic and social skills, acquaint them with campus support and resources, and expand students' coping resources (Arslan, 2021; Baker & Siryk, 1986; Crede & Niehoster, 2012; Ozen & Yilmaz, 2019).

The main aims and benefits of first year seminars have been well-documented in the literature (Cassidy, 2020; Conefrey, 2021; Hatch et al., 2018; Maxon, 2022; Ozen & Yilmaz, 2019; Stebleton & Diamond, 2018; Walling et al., 2020). Ozen and Yilmaz (2019) categorized these aims into academic excellence, inclusion, integrity, empowerment, participation, and social responsibility. Furthermore, first year seminars are purported to aid in the alignment of students' pre-entry expectations with their post-entry experiences (Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Based on Cassidy's (2020) mixed methods study on community college first year seminars in Massachusetts, students learned various study skills during the seminars, such as how to write research papers or find sources in the library. Participants in Walling et al.'s (2020) study likewise indicated that the first year seminar helped them build competence and confidence in

their skills. As higher education may have difficult academic demands, the inclusion of building competence and effective study skills in first year seminars may be crucial.

First year seminars have also been found to enhance personal growth (Conefrey, 2021; Hatch et al., 2018; Maxon, 2022). They may serve as low risk environments in which students can experience the college environment (Hatch et al., 2018). A participant in Hatch et al.'s (2018) qualitative study on two-year community colleges in Nebraska shared that they learned to improve their speech during the first year seminar course, which they applied in their other courses. Similarly, participants in both Conefrey's (2021) and Maxon's (2022) studies indicated that the first year seminar served as a space for self-reflection and self-expression, allowing them to better understand themselves and what they can do. Another study by Krsmanovic (2022) involved a first year seminar that incorporated service learning in which students volunteered within the local community, and in the living community in which students lived in a single residence hall during their freshman year. These aspects of the first year seminar were found to contribute to students' personal growth as they learned to appreciate diversity and develop social skills such as empathy and conflict resolution.

Another main aim of first year seminars is goal setting (Cassidy, 2020; Krsmanovic, 2019; Stebleton & Diamond, 2018). Based on Krsmanovic's (2019) multi-site quantitative case study of first year seminars in Florida, the seminars positively influenced students' long-term goal setting and monitoring, as well as understanding the alignment between their goals, motivations, and self-regulated learning. Students in Cassidy's (2020) study further shared that the first year seminar was helpful in not only clarifying the path they needed to take to achieve their goals, but also in alleviating some of their anxiety over their career-related goals and decisions. Unfortunately, data from the National Survey of First Year Seminars (NSFYS) during

2012-2013 were indicative of the insufficiency of first year seminars (Stebleton & Diamond, 2018). In rating the top three important objectives of first year seminars, only 6.3% of participants indicated career exploration and only 17.1% of participants indicated career exploration or preparation as a top objective. While long-term career plans and goals may seem like a long way away from the freshman year, it may be vital to place more focus on it so that students' educational paths can be set.

A final primary aim of first year seminars is to promote relationship building among students, and with the faculty and staff (Conefrey, 2021; Maxon, 2022). In Maxon's (2022) mixed methods study involving community college students in the Midwestern United States, they found that building interdependence was the second highest area in which students experienced growth during the first-year seminar. Students found the seminar to be helpful in building social relations despite being conducted in an online setting due to the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID 19) pandemic. Students shared that they still felt the sense of community especially as they were part of a group, albeit online, that was enduring the difficulties brought by the pandemic. In Conefrey's (2021) case study of HIPs in a private college in California, a learning community was established as a part of the first-year experience. The learning community was found to be helpful for first-generation students to meet similar peers and obtain social support. Adult learners, who may be experiencing social difficulties in higher education, may benefit from the social aspects of the first-year seminar.

Types of First Year Seminars

Different types of first year seminars have been reported in the literature (Sobel, 2018). First year seminars can vary in content, length, or required participation. Furthermore, while some first-year seminars are standalone courses, others are embedded within themes classes such

as discipline-based courses. The two main categories of first year seminars are extended orientation seminars and academic seminars (Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Extended orientation seminars are centered around student adjustment to college life. These seminars often involve an introduction to institutional resources, policies and procedures, training on basic study skills, learning strategies, and time management. Academic seminars are centered around building academic skills such as communication, writing, and critical thinking. Based on data from the 2012 to 2013 NSFYS, Young (2020) found that first year seminar type class added a 2.3% variance to institutional characteristics as factors in predicting student retention. This finding highlights the importance of designing the first year seminar according to the characteristics and needs of institutions.

Some researchers have presented evidence supporting the use of extended orientation seminars for various benefits (Al-Sheeb et al., 2018; Hatch et al., 2018; Permzadian & Crede, 2016; Stevens et al., 2019). In comparison to academic seminars, extended orientations seminars were found to be more effective in promoting one-year retention rates (Permzadian & Crede, 2016). In a quasi-experimental study involving an extended orientation seminar in Qatar, Al-Sheeb et al. (2018) reported a significant impact of the seminar on students' awareness of various institutional services such as transportation, financial aid, support centers, student employment, and printing and photocopying services. Another study involving academically underprepared students within the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States had results pointing to improvements in students' life skills, family, social domain, self-concept, and attention (Stevens et al., 2019).

First year seminar instructors in Hatch et al.'s (2018) study also placed more value on the orientation aspect of the seminar over the academic aspect despite the syllabus being focused

mainly on academic skills. The instructors highlighted the importance of embedding within students the college culture, including the values, philosophies, behaviors, effective habits, languages, and outlook of the institution. This culture could then serve as a foundation for students to build upon in their own paths. Despite these advantages of extended orientation seminars, Jairam (2020) presented evidence suggesting that orienting students to basic study skills in college was ineffective as students still continued to utilize ineffective study habits that they used before college. Stevens et al. (2019) further noted that extended orientation seminars did not have a significant influence on student grades and enrollment status. They suggested booster sessions or individual coaching as possible additions to an extended orientation seminar to improve its effectiveness.

Although extended orientation seminars are more frequently utilized, researchers have found that academic seminars may be more helpful in promoting student performance and retention for both traditional and non-traditional students (Ahadi et al., 2019; Conefrey, 2021; Culver & Bowman, 2020; Krsmanovic et al., 2020; Lane & Miller, 2019; Young, 2020). Lane and Miller (2019) noted that student retention, particularly of academically underprepared students, was a substantial problem in many two-year colleges that utilized extended orientations. Evidence to support this idea was presented by Young (2020), who investigated 896 institutions across the United States and found that institutions utilizing academic first year seminars had 6% higher retention rates compared to those utilizing extended orientation seminars. In a specific first year seminar that involved both academic and non-academic elements, students gave higher rankings to the academic components of the seminar, including a library workshop and writing and formatting workshops, compared to non-academic components such as healthy campus, enrollment planning, and success at university (Ahadi et al., 2019).

Because of the advanced technology allowing easier access to information regarding institutional resources or basic study skills, the introduction and discussion of such topics in extended orientation seminars may have less value for students compared to academic-related topics (Culver & Bowman, 2020).

More benefits of academic first year seminars were presented by Conefrey (2021) and Krsmanovic et al. (2020). First-generation students in Conefrey's (2021) study indicated that they perceived significant improvements in their reading and writing skills after the seminar. Their ePortfolios, or collection of evidence of learning, also served as evidence that they were applying what they had learned in the seminar. Krsmanovic et al. (2020) further found that academic seminars led to significant improvements in responsibility, task-planning, competition, expectations, college involvement, family involvement, wellness, time management, persistence, and precision. They found that the academic-themed seminar had a stronger influence on wellness compared to the other dimensions, which suggests that academic first year seminars can also be effective in improving non-academic outcomes .

Other more specific types of first year seminars include discipline-linked seminars (Lane & Miller, 2019), onboarding (Samuel et al., 2021), outdoor orientation seminars or excursions (Petersen & Arends, 2018; Pickard et al., 2020), and student or alumni testimonials (Ahadi et al., 2019; Hatch et al., 2018; Ramirez et al., 2021). Discipline-linked seminars are designed to prepare students for a specific career or profession (Lane & Miller, 2019; Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Such seminars were more likely to be offered in two-year colleges serving academically underprepared students (Lane & Miller, 2019). Although discipline-linked seminars may be helpful for students' long-term goals, they may be inappropriate for students who have not yet decided on a career path (Kepple et al., 2021). Onboarding programs provide more

individualized services and occur at least one month before regular courses (Samuel et al., 2021).

Key components of onboarding programs include personalized interactions, community building,

and monitoring program requirements. Such programs were purported to be appropriate for adult

learners who may have unique needs and other responsibilities.

Outdoor orientation programs (OOP) or excursions involve residential seminars that

typically last at least three days, involve various group activities, and occur outside of the

institution (Petersen & Arends, 2018; Pickard et al., 2020). In Petersen and Arends's (2018)

study in Johannesburg, the OOP covered various topics ranging from HIV and AIDs to

leadership and pedagogy. Students were deliberately grouped to have diversity in gender,

ethnicities, and cultures within each group. The OOP in Pickard et al.'s (2020) study was mainly

focused on team building. Both OOPs involved various games and activities, free time, and a

relaxed environment to foster social integration among students and with faculty and staff

(Petersen & Arends, 2018; Pickard et al., 2020). The residential aspect of OOPs was cited to be

effective in building intimacy between participants (Petersen & Arends, 2018; Pickard et al.,

2020). Particularly in Petersen and Arends's (2018) study, the OOP also allowed students to

experience cultural and religious exchange. Despite the clear advantages of the OOP, Pickard et

al. noted that allocating student groupings and roommates were not always effective as some

students were not socially compatible. Furthermore, the length of stay may not be ideal for some

adult learners who hold responsibilities outside of their studies.

Some first year seminars include student or alumni testimonials to give the first year

students a realistic perspective of what to expect in their college life (Ahadi et al., 2019; Hatch et

al., 2018; Ramirez et al., 2021). To demonstrate, Ramirez et al. (2021) conducted experiments to

determine the effects of student testimonial videos. The videos included the experiences of local

students, including the challenges they faced, as well as the available resources to help the students with such challenges. Based on their results, student testimonial videos positively influenced students' grades and their interest in utilizing institutional resources. Alumni testimonials, which provided more long-term visions for students, have also been found to be helpful for first year students to gain a realistic perspective of prospective career opportunities, which could help them in goal setting and planning (Ahadi et al., 2019). Testimonials of other adult learners, not necessarily from students or alumni of the same institution, have also been cited to serve as inspiration and motivation for adult learners to persist in their education regardless of their age or other factors (Hatch et al., 2018).

Each type of first year seminar has been purported to have its own advantages. However, first year seminars in this study that are shorter and that provide more realistic perspectives of college life were noted to be generally more effective (Karmelita, 2020; Permzadian & Crede, 2016; Xavier et al., 2022). While Permzadian and Crede (2016) did not specify the ideal length of first year seminars, they did indicate from their systematic review results that the effectiveness of such seminars was negatively related to their length. In terms of being realistic, both Karmelita (2020) and Xavier et al. (2022) found that students felt some first year seminars did not reflect the environment of other courses in the institution. One adult learner who underwent a transition program stated that they perceived the program to be too easy, which would leave them unprepared for actual courses (Karmelita, 2020). In Xavier et al.'s (2022) study, all students who had dropped out shared unrealistic expectations such as the amount of time and effort they would need to put in their schoolwork. Based on these findings, program designers should aim to keep their first year seminars concise and as close to actual courses as possible.

Effectiveness of First Year Seminars

As stated in chapter one, research has long shown that first-year seminars are beneficial for first-year students, and participation in the course has a positive impact on grades and retention (Al-Sheeb et al., 2018; Das et al., 2021; Guarneri & Connolly, 2019; Krsmanovic, 2019; Miller & Lesik, 2015; Permzadian & Crede, 2016; Valentine & Price, 2021). In a case study involving 11 institutions in Florida, Krsmanovic (2019) found that first year seminar participants had significantly higher rates of continuous college enrollment and more college credits in their first year compared to non-participants. Similarly, Al-Sheeb et al. (2018) reported that first year seminar participants had significantly higher overall satisfaction with college and commitment to finish college compared to a control group. In Valentine and Price's (2021) study, adult learners who participated in a first year seminar and learning community were 6% more likely to earn a 24% increase in credits during the first term and 8% more likely to earn a 73% increase in credits during the first year. Das et al. (2021) presented more nuanced findings, showing that first year seminar attendees' grade point average (GPA) did not significantly differ from non-attendees during the first two terms. However, by the second fall-term, attendees' GPA were significantly higher than non-attendees, suggesting that first year seminars may have long term effects that did not materialize until later. Waggener (2018), who designed and implemented a first year seminar course, agreed that the first year seminar was only an initial step in students' educational journeys, and that it may take time for students to apply and appreciate what they have learned in such seminars.

The nuances of first year seminars' effectiveness have been further reported across systematic reviews and other studies showing that the significant influence of first year seminars on student performance and retention may not be generalizable (Choudhury & Runco, 2020; Crede & Nierhorster, 2012; Culver & Bowman, 2020; Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Results from

two separate systematic reviews were indicative of only a weak relationship between first year seminars and outcomes including student adjustment, GPA, and retention rates (Crede & Niehorster, 2012; Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Based on a longitudinal and multi-institutional study from 2006 to 2008, Culver and Bowman (2020) used propensity scores to balance institutional and student characteristics, which then resulted in the non-significance of first year seminars on outcomes including GPA and fourth year satisfaction. Choudhury and Runco (2020) further found that first year seminars were negatively related to student retention. However, the effect was weak and not causal, which means that first year seminars do not necessarily cause a reduction in student retention. These findings do point to other possible factors that may interfere with the effectiveness of first year seminars. Furthermore, the impact of first year seminars appeared to be more pronounced in students identifying as minority, many of whom could use the additional advantages and support to persist in higher education (Culver & Brown, 2020; Krsmanovic, 2019).

Although first year seminars have been offered for several years now, there remains a gap in the literature regarding their ideal design (Culver & Bowman, 2020; Das et al., 2021; Permzadian & Crede, 2016), especially for adult learners (Karmelita, 2020). Most of the research has focused on outcomes from the course, with little research on the course content. Krsmanovic et al. (2020) noted a dearth of qualitative evidence regarding first year seminars that could be used to build recommendations for program improvement. Considering the needs and challenges of adult learners discussed earlier, they may have different needs and perspectives regarding first year seminars. Existing knowledge and evidence regarding curriculum and program design for meeting adult learners' needs are discussed in the following section.

Curriculum and Program Design

Designing a first year seminar and curriculum for adult learners can be challenging. As noted in the previous section, several variations of first year seminars exist, each with their own purported advantages (Permzadian & Crede, 2016). There is also a notable dearth of literature surrounding best practices for first year seminars geared towards adult learners. Nonetheless, resources exist and may be helpful in this matter, including the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition database (Lane & Miller, 2019). While such resources and recommendations may not be applicable or appropriate for all institutions and students, they may serve as a starting point for meeting the needs of adult learners.

In exploring the needs of adult learners, a salient issue that has frequently appeared is the need for family friendly schedules for classes and resources (Bok, 2021; Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Klempin & Lahr, 2021; Roper et al., 2021; Sutton, 2019; Zart, 2019). Most class schedules in higher education fell between eight in the morning and five or six in the afternoon, which made it difficult for employed adult learners to attend (Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Danganan et al., 2022; Zart, 2019). In Bok's (2021) investigation of Malaysian adult learners, participants indicated that they could only attend to their education at around nine in the evening after they have finished their work and home responsibilities. However, when more courses were offered during weekends or evenings for T.N. Reconnect students, the number of adult learners in such classes was fewer than expected (Klempin & Lahr, 2021). A staff member indicated that many T.N. Reconnect students worked night shifts and actually preferred early morning classes. Furthermore, adult learners' physical and mental capacities may already be exhausted by the time they finish their work and home responsibilities (Bok, 2021). The availability of schedules beyond the typical nine to five business hours should also apply to administrative offices, libraries, and other institutional resources so that adult learners could easily access them

(Klempin & Lahr, 2021; Roper et al., 2021; Sutton, 2019). Regardless of how helpful a first year seminar may be in helping adult learners adjust in the different dimensions, it will all be futile if the adult learner cannot adjust to the schedules of the institution or its resources.

In terms of target topics for first year seminars, adult learners who struggle with identity management could benefit from strategies and skills, such as developing a flexible mindset or a sense of control (Brunton & Buckley, 2021). For instance, an adult learner shared their strategy of proactive planning wherein they organized their daily schedule in efficient ways such as traveling off-peak and setting aside study time. Adult learners may benefit from perceiving their studies as a job and emphasizing the need for commitment and dedication (Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Buckwalter & Togila, 2019; Collom et al., 2021; Xavier & Meneses, 2022). A participant in Brunton and Buckley's (2021) study emphasized the importance of rejecting other commitments to focus on their education. Other adult learners used time-tracking tools to stay committed to their studies (Xavier & Meneses, 2022). Collom et al.'s (2021) participants stated that it was easier for adult learners to keep a mentality that their education was like a job, which they were more accustomed to. Such strategies could be presented as part of the first year seminar curriculum for adult learners.

Adult learners' rich experiences can be utilized in a positive way by connecting them with lessons (Danganan et al., 2022; Thao et al., 2022). In Thao et al.'s (2022) study of the perspectives of instructors on adult learners' characteristics and the appropriate instructional strategies to meet their needs, participants shared that they tried to connect their lessons to their students' existing knowledge. Similarly, adult learners in Danganan et al.'s (2022) study stated that they found it much easier to understand classroom discussions if they related it to their own experiences. British adult learners further shared that it was easier to write academic papers

when they drew from their own experiences from working, and that it gave them a greater sense of authorship (Mason & Atkin, 2021). Klempin and Lahr (2021) suggested that adult learners could serve as advisors themselves to their younger classmates. Providing such opportunities to adult learners could not only help the younger students obtain sound advice from experienced individuals, but also help boost the adult learners' confidence.

Adult learners may benefit from the development of various skills, such as study skills, writing skills, and communication skills, (Buckwalter & Togila, 2019; Karmelita, 2020; Lane & Miller, 2019; Stevens et al., 2019; Walling et al., 2020). Community college representatives from Buckwalter and Togila's (2019) study shared their strategy of having students maintain a journal to develop their writing skills. Based on NSFYS data from 2012 to 2013, few institutions included basic skill development in their first year seminars (Lane & Miller, 2019). Institutions that required academically underprepared students to attend first year seminars had a 5.6 % higher probability of offering seminars on basic study skills, including notetaking, test-taking, and critical reading. Adult learners, who may have similar needs to academically underprepared students might also benefit from such seminars. Non-traditional students in Walling et al.'s (2020) study likewise shared that the offering of basic study skills enticed them to enroll in the first year seminar. Aside from basic study skills and core subjects, adult learners may also benefit from having their programs' foundational courses during their first year so that they may perceive if their program aligns with their interests and goals (Klempin & Lahr, 2021).

In planning for the ideal modality of education for adult learners, many adult learners have expressed a preference for face-to-face courses (Bok, 2021; Klempin & Lahr, 2021; Lanford, 2020; Yin & Lim, 2020). Based on survey data from 886 adult learners, face-to-face classes were rated as the most preferred medium by 61.3% of participants; blended learning was

preferred by 30.2%, and fully online classes were preferred by only 8.5% (Yin & Lim, 2020).

Many adult learners at this time are accustomed to face-to-face classes and found the online

setting to be an isolating experience (Lanford, 2020). Participants in Xavier and Meneses's

(2022) study stated that online education required significantly more self-regulation than face-to-

face classes, making the online setting more difficult. Adult learners also highlighted the

disadvantage of slower feedback and responses from instructors in the online courses compared

to face-to-face meetings (Bok, 2021; Xavier et al., 2022).

Conversely, King-Spezzo et al. (2020) found that adult learners had similar expectations

from face-to-face and online course environments, which suggests that the strategies and level of

engagement in face-to-face learning simply needs to be maintained during online courses.

Furthermore, some adult learners also appreciated the convenience of online education compared

to face-to-face classes (Danganan et al., 2022; Xavier & Meneses, 2022; Xavier et al., 2022).

The flexibility of online courses allowed adult learners to manage their studies in their own time

(Xavier et al., 2022) and in their preferred locations (Danganan et al., 2022). As the benefits of

online education have been recognized by some adult learners, it may be a matter of adjustment

to this relatively new setting for students who still preferred face-to-face classes.

In line with the above findings, some adult learners may need training with technology

use (Brown et al., 2021; Karmelita, 2020; Samuel et al., 2021; Silverstein et al., 2019; Yin &

Lim, 2020). Orientations for technological skills included training on Microsoft Word and

Powerpoint, online research, online forums, and other educational software utilized by the

institution (Karmelita, 2020; Silverstein et al., 2019). Embedding the technology skills training in

first year seminars would allow adult learners the opportunity to practice such skills in a safe

environment without affecting their grades (Yin & Lim, 2020). Seminar instructors could then

gradually reduce the support and build adult learners' independence in technology use. Technology skills training may be useful even beyond higher education, as Brown et al. (2021) found that older employees with more technology skills had significantly greater income.

With the various needs of adult learners, many have expressed their appreciation for the introduction of institutional resources during first year seminars (Cassidy, 2020; Karmelita, 2020; Walling et al., 2020). Visits to campus offices during the first week of the semester was a part of Cassidy's (2020) appreciative advising approach, allowing students to develop relationships with instructors and staff members. In Karmelita's (2020) study, trips around the different offices and guest speakers from different institutional staff members were some aspects of the transition program that adult learners found useful. Meeting these staff members led to the adult learners' increased utilization of services such as career counseling or disability services. Similarly, Walling et al.'s (2020) participants shared that their online first year seminar met their expectations of learning about institutional resources such as the scholarly article database and tutoring services, among others. Another strategy was to have an information center for such resources specifically for adult learners, such as the Reconnect Café in Nashville State where individuals can obtain information regarding the institution, its available services, and the T.N. Reconnect grant (Klempin & Lahr, 2021).

The participation of various offices and partners in designing a first year seminar was also found to be vital in developing a holistic curriculum (Ahadi et al., 2019; Bordelon et al., 2019). In Bordelon et al.'s (2019) article regarding designing an interdisciplinary first year seminar for students, they established a task force comprising representatives from various offices to develop the curriculum. They also held a campus-wide symposium to discuss and improve the curriculum, which was attended by administrative staff, business staff, human

resources, advisors, student affairs, student senate, and campus police. On a similar note, Ahadi et al. (2019) made it a point to include various representatives in their revision of their first year seminar, including but not limited to the faculty, library services, academic advisors, alumni relations, teaching assistants, and health and counseling services. The emphasis of such collaborative efforts was on students' belief that they were valuable stakeholders in the success of students (Bordelon et al., 2019).

As major stakeholder in student success, training and preparing faculty and staff regarding the various needs of adult learners has been cited as an important strategy (Cassidy, 2020; Klempin & Lahr, 2021; Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019; Sutton, 2019). In Cassidy's (2020) study, all first year seminar instructors were required to be full-time members of the institution. This strategy was designed to ensure that the instructors were well-versed with the institution and that students could meet them outside and after the seminar. Faculty members could also be trained as advisors so that adult learners could easily access academic advice when needed (Sutton, 2019). Having a liaison officer or point person to coordinate the various efforts and services specifically for adult learners was also cited as a vital strategy to make adult learners' adjustment to higher education easier (Klempin & Lahr, 2021; Lewis & Bailey-Webb, 2019). In preparing adult learners for higher education, faculty and staff should also be prepared to aid and accommodate them.

Adult learners may also benefit from appreciative advising, which involves a process of trust and relationship building with academic advisors (Cassidy, 2020; Klempin & Lahr, 2021). Some adult learners have indicated that having an advisor who fully understood them was the most important aspect of advising (Klempin & Lahr, 2021). Advisors in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) likewise indicated that it was important to take an

individualistic approach as adult learners can be in different developmental stages and have different expectations of higher education (Smith & Alston, 2019). Colleges may provide success coaches or advising centers that may help adult learners navigate through their academics and beyond (Buckwalter & Togila, 2019; Sommo et al., 2018). The value of academic advisors was highlighted in Sommo et al.'s (2018) study involving three institutions in Ohio wherein many students continued to meet with their advisors in later semesters even though it was no longer required after the mandatory sessions during the first semester. In line with this, career advising, goal setting, and reminding adult learners that goals can be changeable were also cited as vital elements of adjustment (Cassidy, 2020; Stebleton & Diamond, 2018).

With the increasing types and variants of first year seminars, it is imperative to obtain more evidence on which elements are effective and can be considered as best practices (Lane & Miller, 2019). Like many institutions with a first-year seminar course, College Success was designed primarily for traditional-aged students in their first year of college (D. Lampley, personal communication, 2021). Dr. Dearl Lampley, vice president at Columbia State Community College, served as the committee chair responsible for creating the College Success Course in 2014. In personal communication with Dr. Lampley (2021), he shared that he and the committee intentionally designed the course for 18-year-old first-time college students due to the expected increase in first-year enrollment following the announcement of the Tennessee Promise grant. Dr. Lampley also shared that no changes have been made to the course since its original design despite the addition of the Tennessee Reconnect grant, which is targeted at adult learners.

The course intends to provide students with information and skills to assist in their adjustment to college. At Columbia State Community College, the College Success Course is a required course for all students to complete during their first year of college. The only students

who are not required to take this course are students who began at Columbia State prior to 2014 or completed a similar course at another institution. This gap in design is a critical factor in my decision to explore the perceptions of adult students completing this course to determine if the current curriculum supports their adjustment.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews relevant literature regarding adult learners' adjustment to college and the impact of a first-year seminar course on student success. According to the principles of the Adjustment framework (Baker & Siryk, 1984), students' adjustment in the academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional dimensions are vital for their performance and retention. Adult learners, who fall under the category of non-traditional students, may have different and additional needs for their adjustment to higher education (Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). One way to help adult learners adjust is through first year seminar programs, which can take several forms (Young, 2020). However, existing evidence is indicative of a weak and inconsistent effect of first year seminars in general (Crede & Nierhorster, 2012; Culver & Bowman, 2020; Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Within the literature, fragments of strategies and recommendations for curriculum and program design for adult learner adjustment have been presented (Bok, 2021; Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Cassidy, 2020; Karmelita, 2020; Lane & Miller, 2019). However, more research is needed to determine the optimal curriculum and program design (Lane & Miller, 2019), particularly for adult learners in community college. The purpose of the present study is to examine the perceptions of adult learners in College Success 101, the first-year seminar course at Columbia State. The methodology for achieving such purpose is presented in the following chapter.

year seminars in general (Crede & Nierhorster, 2012; Culver & Bowman, 2020; Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Within the literature, fragments of strategies and recommendations for curriculum and program design for adult learner adjustment have been presented (Bok, 2021; Brunton & Buckley, 2021; Cassidy, 2020; Karmelita, 2020; Lane & Miller, 2019). However, more research is needed to determine the optimal curriculum and program design (Lane & Miller, 2019), particularly for adult learners in community college. The purpose of the present study is to examine the perceptions of adult learners in College Success 101, the first-year seminar course at Columbia State. The methodology for achieving such purpose is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Three

Introduction and Overview

This bounded system case study aims to explore the perceptions of adult learners completing the college success course at Columbia State Community College in Tennessee. This research should provide the institution with a better understanding of the adjustment needs of adult learners and how to develop a course curriculum to support them. In seeking to understand, I will interview adult learners about their adjustment needs, their perceptions of the required college success course, and whether they feel the content of the course aided in their adjustment.

This chapter will describe the research methodology and include discussions around the following areas: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) description of the research sample, (c) summary of information needed, (d) overview of research design, (e) methods of data collection, (f) analysis and synthesis of data, (g) ethical considerations, (h) issues of trustworthiness, and (i) limitations of the study. The chapter culminates with a brief concluding summary.

Rationale for Case Study

By choosing to examine student perceptions of the college success course at Columbia State, I have determined that using a case study methodology is the most appropriate approach for the primary objective of my study. Hancock and Algozzine (2010) state that case studies are more illustrative, seek identify themes rather than test hypotheses, and create opportunities for the researcher to explore additional questions. Their view of case study methodology lends itself well to my research because in order to understand how the course content impacts a student's adjustment to college, it is necessary for me to ask questions that will allow the participants to provide more in-depth responses along with any follow up questions that may arise based on those responses (Yin, 2018). Because I will be interviewing multiple students but focusing on a

single system, the college success course at Columbia State, this will be a bounded system case study as defined by Creswell and Poth (2018). A bounded system case study is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life bounded system (case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I will collect data from students prior to and following their participation in the course to identify recurring themes related to the course content and its impact on student adjustment. The focus on understanding the impact of course content makes interviewing an appropriate approach for most data collection. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) posit that interviewing has become the most common source of qualitative data because it can elicit more in-depth data-rich responses capturing the participants' experiences.

Data for a case study can come from multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I will also use the course description in the course catalog and a copy of the course syllabus provided by the program director at Columbia State. These materials will provide additional data on the content of the course and the intended outcomes for the course.

Proposed Setting

For this study, I have selected Columbia State Community College, located in middle Tennessee, as I am currently employed by this institution and feel this data would provide my employers with helpful information for improving student services. Columbia State is the first community college established in Tennessee in 1966. It is a Tennessee Board of Regents member, the governing body that oversees all community colleges and technical schools in Tennessee. Columbia State services nine counties (Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Lewis, Marshall, Maury, Perry, Wayne, Williamson) in middle southern Tennessee and has five campuses located

in Columbia, Franklin, Lawrenceburg, Lewisburg, and Clifton, TN. Sitting close to the Nashville Metro area, Columbia State also attracts students from Rutherford and Davidson counties.

The service area's population for Columbia State varies significantly, ranging from 8,366 in Perry county to 247,726 in Williamson county. Persons identifying as "white alone" make up about 70% of the state's total population, which is reflected in the racial demographics for each of the nine service counties. The service area of Columbia State Community College is predominantly white and lives in rural areas; of the nine counties in the service area, all but Williamson (19.4%) report at least 60% or more of their population live in a rural or isolate area, with three counties reporting 100% rural (Tennessee Arts Commission, n.d.). This data will impact the study's selected participants.

Proposed Participants

In the fall of 2021, Columbia State had an enrollment of 5,385 students, of which approximately 20% were adult students aged 25 and older. The average age of a Columbia State student is 22.2 years. Nearly 77% of the students at Columbia State identify as white, and 63% of the students identify as female. Data for the fall 2022 class will not be available prior to the start of data collection.

Proposed Research Sample

A purposeful sampling procedure will be used to select this study's sample. Purposeful sampling is a "strategy for accessing appropriate data that fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked and the constraints and challenges being faced." (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 186). The decision to use purposeful sampling is framed by the fact that this study seeks data from a specific population and how those participants interact with

a specific course. In order to achieve this purposeful sample, I will work with the Office of

Institutional Research to collect a sampling of students using the following criteria:

- participants are classified as adult learners (25 years or older)

- participants are receiving the T.N. Reconnect grant

- participants are in their first semester of college with no prior college experience

- participants are enrolled in the college success 101 course for the Fall semester

The fall semester is chosen for this particular study because the number of sections of college

success 101 offered in the fall is greater than the number offered in the spring semester. A listing

of all students meeting the above criteria will be obtained from the Office of Institutional

Research and used to solicit individual participants. Each student will be contacted via their

Columbia State email and offered an opportunity to participate in the research with the goal of

obtaining at least ten willing participants. A copy of the email text can be found in appendix B.

Participants will be scheduled for a one-on-one interview during late fall. Participants will be

offered a choice of a $20 Starbucks or Amazon gift card for completed participation, to be sent

following the completion of their second interview.

Proposed Research Design

For this study, the first-year seminar course, college success 101, at Columbia State will

serve as the bounded system for a narrative case study. Students meeting the participant criteria

will be interviewed to gather data regarding their experience with the course. Case studies are the

most commonly used method for qualitative inquiry. This study will provide me, as the

researcher, with insights into the course design (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019) and its influence on

student adjustment. As stated previously, studies have shown a significant connection between

adjustment to college and student retention and success.

Interviews were selected for the data collection due to their potential to elicit a more robust description of students' experiences and allow the researcher to clarify statements and probe for additional information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Using the research questions in Chapter 1, I will conduct intensive one-on-one interviews with each participant to capture their perspective of the course content and how it may have impacted their adjustment to college (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Prior to data collection, I will submit materials to the University of Arkansas' and Columbia State Community College's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval following the proposal defense. Upon approval, I will contact the list of potential participants via their Columbia State email. Those who agree to participate will be scheduled for interviews. All interviews will be conducted one-on-one with the participant and researcher at a location chosen by the participant (in-person, zoom, and telephone options will be available). All interviews will be recorded with the participant's consent. Recordings will be transcribed and analyzed for recurring themes. A sample of the informed consent form appears in appendix C.

Proposed Data Collection Methods

A majority of the data will be collected through recorded one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol is available in appendix D. The recordings will be transcribed by me using transcription software for assistance. Completed interview transcripts will be shared with the participant to allow them to provide any additional clarifications or corrections.

Additional data will come from the course description in the course catalog on the Columbia State Community College website and a copy of the course syllabus (Appendix A). The description and syllabus will provide insight into the course's intended outcomes and content. The participants will be provided with the course description and syllabus prior to their

interview to allow them to review it and provide their perception of the course outcomes based on the description and recall course content.

Proposed Data Analysis Methods

Participants will be given an opportunity to provide feedback and clarification on their interview transcripts, once finalized I will review the transcripts to identify recurring themes. Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data to identify patterns in meaning across the data. Thematic analysis is a strategy of reviewing data in a repetitive and ongoing manner in order to identify recurrent themes. The emergent themes should be examined in light of the research questions in order to construct a tentative answer. After all of the information has been reviewed, themes for which the preponderance of information supports an answer to a research question it will be reported as a finding (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016).

The depth of the data in the transcripts should provide a detailed description of the course, the content, and the impact on the participants completing the course. An additional review of the transcripts and other data will be conducted to address any potential rival explanations for the participants' perception of the course content, such as out of class distractions impacting course engagement or negative experiences with an office or service discussed in the course. Once all relevant explanations have been addressed, the resulting data should provide a robust description of the impact of the course on the participants' adjustment to college (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

As the primary researcher, I will be conducting this research at my current institution of employment, which may present a conflict of interest. I intend to address this by ensuring that all selected participants have had no prior contact with me professionally or personally. I have also

withdrawn from serving as an instructor for the college success course for the past two years. I am not vested in the course changes that may result from this research, as I am not currently serving as an instructor or curriculum designer. Before publication, I will seek guidance from institutional leadership on using the school's name in this dissertation. Ensuring participant anonymity will be very important, and participants will be given an opportunity to select a pseudonym, those pseudonyms would be used in any resulting work that include individual examples, should the research be completed and published. Participants will be given an opportunity to provide informed consent at the beginning of the process. They will continue to receive reminders on how to withdraw their participation at any point.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The goal of any researcher is to produce results that are valid and reliable. In order to put the results to use in practice, a practitioner must be able to trust the results have been extensively assessed for issues of trustworthiness. Quantitative research uses terms like validity and reliability for their tests of trust, however, terminology for qualitative research rigor has been in flux for some time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the purposes of this study, I will be using the terms for the naturalistic mode of research as proposed by Guba (1981), credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability.

Credibility

Credibility is aligned with validity in that both seek to find the value of truth in the data. While an objective truth is not possible in qualitative research, there are strategies to help the researcher increase the connection between research and reality. The best-known method for establishing credibility is using triangulation. Triangulation can be achieved using multiple sources of data which includes cross-checking data collected at different times or from follow up

interviews with the same people. Additionally, I will be utilizing the respondent validation strategy for credibility (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015).

For this study, the data will be collected at different times and each participant will be given an opportunity to review transcripts. The transcripts will also be reviewed by a professional peer, any discrepancies will be identified and reviewed for clarity, and the finalized transcripts will be merged into one full transcript. The merged transcripts for each interview will then be given to the participant for a final review, allowing them to clear up any confusion or misinterpretation. The multiple sources of triangulation should enhance the credibility of any findings that result from a completed study.

Transferability

In quantitative research, reliability is the measure of how well the findings of the research can be replicated, this can be problematic in qualitative research because the variables are often humans and their behaviors which are not static and difficult to replicate regardless of the circumstances. Instead of demanding results to be the same, Guba (1981) proposes the results are consistent with the collected data. Do the results obtained make sense with the collected data. Triangulation of data and an audit trail are the best methods for establishing reliability of data for a qualitative study. My methods of triangulation are described above. (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015).

The study design is simple to replicate and could provide additional insights if utilized in other locations and types of institutions. Any findings that would result from this study should be fully documented and made available to allow other researchers to examine the data and understand how results were derived. The potential findings from this study could help provide a foundation for continued research on adult learners and first-year seminar courses.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research is often equated with objectivity in quantitative research because they each seek to establish the findings are derived from the data. However, in qualitative research the investigator is not able to claim objectivity. The researcher must show their findings are the result of the research rather than the biases and subjectivity of the researcher. In order to establish confirmability, the researcher should engage in triangulation of data and detail a transparent audit trail for all collected data (Bloomberberg & Volpe, 2019; Guba, 1981).

As mentioned above, I will be triangulating my data through the use of peer review and subject review. All subjects will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of their responses to make any revisions or clarifications. Additionally, I would seek a professional colleague to review all transcribed notes to provide their assessment of relevant themes to compare with my own assessment.

Should the research be completed, copies of all recordings and transcripts would be kept on file in my office or the office of institutional research for a specified amount of time to allow for external review.

Dependability

Quantitative research seeks to achieve reliability of their findings, meaning the research can be replicated and the findings would remain statistically consistent between each instance. Naturalistic or qualitative research seeks dependability of findings because of the nature of the findings do not often lend themselves to consistency in the same way as a quantitative study would. While accounting for the differences in human behavior and responses as well as changes over time, consistency in a qualitative study when the findings from a replicated study are found to be stable and align with the findings of a previous study without the use of statistical

procedures. Dependability seeks to establish stable and consistent findings over time and ensure the findings answer the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Guba, 1981).

Many of the methods mentioned above can also be used to establish dependability of the findings including a robust audit trail, triangulation of data and peer review, all of which would be utilized for any resulting data collected for this study

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations are factors that may have an impact on the study and the generalizability of the conclusions. Limitations are factors that beyond the control of the researcher, while delimitations are self-imposed boundaries affecting the purpose and scope of the research (Lunenburg & Irby, 2007, Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Limitations

Limitations are factors that may impact a study that are out of control of the researcher (Lunenburg & Irby, 2007). Some limitations that may exist because of the pool of potential participants include unequal gender, age, and race distributions. The selection of participants will be randomized as best as possible. Still, there may be some issues with the overall pool being heavily comprised of white females of a younger age (25-40) based on Columbia State's enrollment data (Columbia State Community College Fact Sheet, 2021). While I will be offering to accommodate the participants and their life schedules, some may not be able to complete interviews due to the time frame and circumstances that may arise to cause them to withdraw.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries on the purpose and scope of the researcher put in place by the researcher. This study will not address any other services, supports, or experiences that may

also impact adjustment to college. As the researcher, I have made the choice to focus on a

particular course and a specific population, which would serve as a delimitation for this study.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an overview of the plans for conducting the research was provided. A

brief overview of the study setting and participant pool used for selection are detailed. I reviewed

my plan for utilizing a case study research method employing interviews and thematic data

analysis. The collected data will be analyzed and provide a set of themes to lend an

understanding of the shared experience for the selected participants.

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College Success Course Syllabus Template, Spring 2022
With permission from Meredith McCoy, Director of College Success

The complete syllabus is 13 pages long; therefore, I will share sections relevant to my research

purposes and literature review.

Assignments

Reflection is critical to learning. Each of the assignments we complete this term, both in-class

and out-of-class, requires you to think about the selected topic and its relation to your life and

goals.

An outline of the course topics, dates, and learning outcomes is in Appendix A.

- Time Management System or Academic Success Planner, 100 points

- Sexual Assault Prevention Training, 100 points

- Syllabus Quiz, 50 Points

- Extra-Curricular Activity Report, 50 points

- Scavenger Hunt, 50 points

- Note-Taking Report, 50 points

- Career Exploration & Academic Major Report, 50 points

- Community Service/Job Shadowing Report, 50 points

- Becoming a Learner Paper, 100 points

- Course Progress, 50 points

- Participation / In-Class Activities, 100 points

Course Schedule

Dates	Topics	Assignments **Exact Due Dates are listed in Calendar, Assignments, Quizzes**	**Learning Outcomes for Module** **At the end of this module, you will be able to:**
Jan. 18 - 25	Module 1 Introduction to Course and Classmates	Review all Material in Content Start Here Syllabus Quiz (L01) Course Progress (LO3) Use Planner (L06) Begin reading *Becoming a Learner* (L01)	• Use a time management system (LO6) • Locate Online Campus (LO3) • Use Online Campus Assignments (LO3) • Describe professor expectations (LO1) • Locate information in Online Campus (LO3)
January 25 - February 1	Module 2 Technology at CState	Sexual Assault Prevention Training Part 1 (LO1, LO2) Continue reading *Becoming a Learner* (L01) Course Progress (LO3) Use Planner (L06) Sexual Assault Prevention Training Part 1 (LO1, LO2 , LO3, LO5)	• Locate information in Online Campus (LO3) • Locate information on CState website (LO3) • Understand common CState terminology (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO5) • Support personal safety (LO1, LO2 , LO3, LO5)
Feb. 1 - 8	Module 3 Introduction to CState	Continue reading *Becoming a Learner* (L01) Course Progress (LO3) Use Planner (L06)	• List study abroad and research opportunities (L02) • Identify college assistance resources (LO1, LO2) • Describe professor expectations (LO1)

Course Schedule

Dates	Topics	Assignments **Exact Due Dates are listed in Calendar, Assignments, Quizzes**	**Learning Outcomes for Module** **At the end of this module, you will be able to:**
			• Explain the importance of a welcoming environment for all cultures and identities (LO1, LO2, LO4, LO5) • Name extracurricular opportunities (LO2)
Feb. 8 - 15	Module 4 Becoming a Learner	Becoming a Learner Paper (L01) Course Progress (LO3) Use Planner (L06)	• Describe the differences between a student and a learner (L01).
February 15 - March 1	Module 5A & 5B	Note Taking Report (L01) Scavenger Hunt (L01, L02, L03) Course Progress (LO3) Use Planner (L06)	• Identify where to get tutoring (LO2) • Utilize good study habits (LO1) • Summarize course content in notes (LO1) • Evaluate media or research sources (LO1) • Identify library resources (LO1, LO2) • Locate information on CState website (LO3) • List your academic advisor's contact information (LO3)

Course Schedule

Dates	Topics	Assignments **Exact Due Dates are listed in Calendar, Assignments, Quizzes**	Learning Outcomes for Module **At the end of this module, you will be able to:**
March 1 - March 22	Module 6 A & B: Career & Academic Exploration	Academic Major and Career Exploration Report (L04) Community Service/ Job Shadowing Report (LO1, LO4) Sexual Assault Prevention Training Part 2 (LO1, LO2 , LO3, LO5) Course Progress (LO3) Use Planner (L06)	• List the top competencies that employers are wanting (LO4) • Compile a summary of your relevant experiences to demonstrate your career preparation (LO4) • Discuss the benefits of community service and internships (LO1, LO4) • Investigate a career path (LO4) • Investigate an academic program (LO4) • Create a resume (LO4)
March 22 - April 5	Module 7 A & B Personal Wellness	Course Progress (LO3) Use Planner (L06) Complete any incomplete assignments	• Discuss advantages/disadvantages of social media (LO1) • Support personal safety (LO1, LO2 , LO3, LO5) • Describe ways to handle stress (LO1, LO2, LO6) • Summarize characteristics of healthy choices (LO1, LO2, LO6)

Appendix B

Request for participation email

Dear (Insert Name using mail merge):

Welcome to Columbia State! I am reaching out to you because you have been identified as a student receiving the T.N. Reconnect grant in the fall, and you are also enrolled in the College Success Course.

My name is Michell Ivey, and I am the Director of Student Support Services on the Williamson Campus. I am also a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas, and I would like to request your assistance with completing my doctoral dissertation. I would like to meet with adult students taking the College Success course during the fall 20__ semester.

For my research, I would like to meet with adult students for a one-hour interview after the course is over in November. We can meet at any location you prefer, including virtually or by phone. I will provide you with a $20 Starbucks or Amazon gift card if you agree to participate and complete the interview.

If you are interested, please complete the form available at the following link: (link created after IRB approvals using CSCC survey software to maintain data security). A copy of the informed consent form is attached to this email for you to review. You will be asked to sign a copy before our first meeting.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.

Thank you,

Michell Ivey

Informed Consent

Dissertation Project: Examining the Experiences of Adult Learners in a First-Year Seminar

Course at a Tennessee Community College

Consent to take part in research

I, _____voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to

answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks

after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing, and I have had the

opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that participation involves one interviews lasting approximately one (1) hour in

length at a location of my choosing, including but not limited to in-person, zoom, or telephone.

The interview will occur in November 1, 20__.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

I agree with my interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain

anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview

which may reveal my identity or the identity of any others I identify during my interview.

I understand that I will be given an opportunity to provide the researcher with a chosen

pseudonym. If I choose not to provide a pseudonym, the researcher will select one for me.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in a dissertation for the University of Arkansas, presentations for Columbia State Community College, and the Tennessee Board of Regents.

I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in the researcher's locked office in a locked file drawer until July 1, 20__.

I understand a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for approximately two years from July 1, 20__.

I understand that under freedom of information legalization, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage, as specified above.

I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Primary Researcher: Michell Ivey, Doctoral Candidate, University of Arkansas

Dr. Kenda Grover, Dissertation Chair, University of Arkansas

Signature of research participant:

_____ Date: _____

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study: _____

Signature of researcher:

_____ Date:_____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Location of Interview: _____ Time: _____

Informed Consent: _____ (date signed)   Pseudonym chosen: _____

Recording # _____

- How would you describe your first semester at Columbia State?

- What has it been like to be an adult student on campus?

- How connected do you feel to other students, faculty, staff and the campus community?

- How academically prepared do you believe you are to succeed in your remaining

  courses?

- What academic resources were you made aware of during the College Success course?

  Will you utilize those resources? Why or why not?

- Do you feel the course addressed issues related to your personal health and wellness?

  Were you made aware of resources offered by the college?

- If you have a question about one of your classes, who do you go to for assistance? Why?

- How did the material covered in the course help you adjust to college life here at CSCC?

- Tell me about any topics from the course that you feel should have been covered in more

  depth, in a different way or that were not covered at all.

- Please share any additional thoughts you have about the course and how it impacted your

  experience at Columbia State.