An Exploration of the Collegiate Experiences of Theatre Students in a Regional University

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCES OF THEATRE STUDENTS IN A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY
AN EXPLORATION OF THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCES OF THEATRE STUDENTS IN A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Higher Education

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose for conducting the study was to describe the collegiate experience of performing arts students studying theatre in a comprehensive university setting through a qualitative examination of the perceptions that theatre students hold regarding their interactions with faculty, students, administrators, and the college campus. The study was guided by an ethnographic design identifying the sample of theatre students as a culture-sharing group engaged in the formal study of theatre in a university setting. The significance of the study rested in its identification of theatre students as a student subpopulation in need of further study aimed at providing a narrative that might aid in improving the overall experience of theatre students as well as contribute to the existing dialogue regarding the benefits of artistic engagement in higher education.

The results of the study revealed a positive student perception of interactions with theatre faculty accompanied by an inconsistent perception of interactions with non-theatre faculty; a limited positive perception of administrative support for the theatre program; a strong preference for teaching and learning styles utilized and inspired by creative course content and structure regularly employed by theatre faculty; a perception of physical and social isolation from the campus resulting from the demanding time commitment required of students majoring in theatre; and a positive perception of interactions with other students resulting in ample opportunity to engage in the typical college experience although the theatre student’s social circle is clearly dominated by other theatre students.
This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council

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Robyn N. Pursley

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I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Michael Miller for serving as my dissertation advisor. Through the many unique obstacles I encountered on this journey, he was always diligently standing by for whatever support I might need. For that patience and professional excellence, I am grateful. I also want to acknowledge my committee members Dr. Daniel Pugh and Dr. Adam Morris. Their agreement to serve in this capacity and especially to be active committee members during the summer term was greatly appreciated.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

King (1999) compared the collegiate experience to the process of completing a jigsaw puzzle, identifying the student as the party that has been charged with the daunting task of putting together a puzzle comprised of unique educational experiences without the aid of a guiding image of what the final product should resemble. Although higher education has traditionally been viewed as a means of achieving an educated human population full of well-rounded, contributing members of society, this perception has been altered to a view of higher education as a personal investment on the part of the student (Gohn & Albin, 2006). Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, warned that research has also shown that the public perception of the value of higher education has shifted from the desire for an educated citizenry to the need for a skilled workforce (Hersh & Merrow, 2005). Today’s student holds a specific viewpoint of what an education is going to do for them as individuals, rather than how it will make them a contributing member of society (Gohn & Albin, 2006). This viewpoint is consistent with the characteristics identified with one of the latest generations of college students to be identified: Millennials. These students include a total of 100 million individuals born between 1982 and 2002 and will constitute classes of entering freshmen from 2000 to 2021. This generation represents a large portion of the students engaging in higher education for the next decade (Strauss & Howe, 2000), and the unique characteristics, needs, desires, and drives of this generation will impact how higher education evolves.
The depiction of opportunistic college students coupled with a growing population of Millenial students has resulted in a student body that must be studied for the sake of appropriately serving students and for the sake of preserving higher education. The approach to this study might most effectively be through the lens of a student subpopulation (Gohn & Albin, 2006). A qualitative exploration that describes student experiences within a particular subpopulation can provide a foundation for understanding an entire generation, and specifically, can localize unique generational characteristics that can be responded to by an institution and its faculty.

Context of the Problem

The student population of colleges and universities today is widely diverse and difficult to characterize. Within the larger body of students, there is a combination of individuals from different generations coming from a variety of backgrounds who engage in higher education for different reasons. Given the broad variety of individuals it is important to note the significance of the groupings of students into subpopulations that share common characteristics. The following major subpopulations were identified by Gohn and Albin (2006) across many college campuses: Greek students (fraternities and sororities, Residence Hall students, Honors Program students, Student Athletes, First Generation students, Minority Students, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual students, Working students, Transfer Students, International Students, and Disabled students. A majority of students find themselves a member of one or more of these subpopulations during their college career and these major groups can be considered the primary subpopulations of a college.
In addition to membership in one of the Gohn and Albin primary subpopulations, some students will also identify with an additional smaller subpopulation that is unique from these larger groups. This category of smaller subpopulations is where an academic area of study may be the major characteristic grouping students together. According to Gohn and Albin (2006) the current body of research is insufficient in many of these areas because they fall into various subpopulations that have yet to be identified and consequently have been overlooked by existing studies. This failure to identify and study these smaller subpopulations results in a lack of understanding of the needs of the students involved in such groups. In order for these students to be fully served by the higher education system the subpopulations that they fit into must be studied as thoroughly as the larger subpopulations that have already been clearly identified.

It should be noted that existing descriptions of primary subpopulations can be adapted to suit smaller subpopulations that have not yet been studied and officially identified. One example of this type of adaptation can be taken from Gohn and Albin’s description of Honors program students as those who have been selected to participate in a unique or special campus or college program designed for entering students who have excellent test scores or high school grade point averages or those who have earned through scholarly work and activities, the opportunity to participate in an honors program. Many of these students are on some type of academic scholarship and most are traditional age. (Gohn & Albin, 2006, p. 24)

This description also fits students who are participating in performing arts programs with only slight alterations to the specific criteria for classification. Performing arts students, including those studying music, theatre, and dance, are participating in a unique program designed for students who excel in the arts or have proven interest and basic abilities in the arts (Pollak, Hager, & Rowland, 2000) and arts students are typically traditional-aged
(Winner & Hetland, 2008). Thus, performing arts students can be identified as a valid student subpopulation worthy of study.

Purpose of the Study

According to Harwood (2007) there is a distinct “lack of theoretical framework for artistic development and there is no established theory of artistic development in the college years comparable with the multiple models of intellectual, ethical, and psychological development” (p. 315). Scholars have found it difficult to study arts programs in a methodical manner because the programs and activities are frequently deeply ingrained in the institution (Polla et al., 2000). The purpose for conducting this study was to describe the collegiate experience of performing arts students studying theatre in a comprehensive university setting. The Library of Congress identifies the performing arts as music, theatre and dance. Theatre includes the following areas of artistic craft: acting, directing, production design, technical production, and theatre management (www.loc.gov/performingarts).

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their personal relationships with theatre faculty, non-theatre faculty, and university administrators?

2. What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their academic and extra curricular experiences on campus?

3. What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their role in and interaction with the campus environment?
Definition of Key Terms

*Performing arts:* the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts identifies the performing arts as including all areas of music, theatre and dance (www.kennedy-center.org, 1990-2010).

*Traditional students:* defined by their “age, how recently they graduated from high school, their living accommodations, membership in organizations, abilities, and race, ethnicity or heritage” (Gohn & Albin, 2006, p. 24). This study used this definition as a guide and specifically classified students as traditional undergraduate performing arts students if they met the following criteria: began college study within two years of high school graduation, lived locally or in campus housing, and actively participated in performing arts program activities and course work.

*Active participation:* is met when the student shows full commitment to the activity from the point that the activity was introduced through the completion of the activity. Raein (2004) explained that some subject areas, primarily in the arts, necessitate the practical application of selected techniques and skills in order to fully assess the degree to which learning has occurred. In these areas it is vital for students to actively participate in the practical learning–related activities.

*Learning communities:* described by scholars (Brower and Dettinger, 1998; Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith, 1990; Lenning and Ebbers, 1999; Zhao and Kuh, 2004) as encompassing the following characteristics: enrollment of students in two or more common classes, engagement by the students in group learning activities, student application of information across courses, and increased opportunity for out-of-class interaction among students.
Personal relationship: the way in which the student and a second party regard and behave towards each other.

Role: used in reference to the student and his or her assumed function within the campus environment.

Perceptions: characterized as the student’s individual interpretations of the given situation.

Interactions: all activities during which the student engages with any piece of the campus including people, activities, services, etc.

Assumptions

The underlying assumption of this study was that the specific experiences of a small sample of theatre students could be collectively identified as representative of general experiences of theatre students. In addition, this study worked under the assumption that senior students held a more vast body of collegiate experiences than freshmen students.

Theoretically this study accepted that the body of research led by Pike and Kuh supporting the importance of collegiate activities in the development of the student was accurate. Additionally the qualitative nature of this study was based on the assumption that student experiences were unique to a degree that made quantitative analysis difficult.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study was limited by the inclusion of only one campus of a single institution located in a small community in the Midwest. It was also limited to the study of one theatre program located on that campus.
The students at the institution studied were typically from small Midwestern communities in which access to the arts and attitudes supporting the arts were both limited. The criteria identified by the study (students who were actively participating in the program or had been active participants within the last four years) limited the number of students available for study.

The qualitative nature of the study (focused on individual interviews) limited the number of students who could be studied. The nature of the design also only presented accounts of individual experiences. Not all individual’s experiences were represented.

**Significance of the Study**

In an age where the value of education is continually growing, it is essential that the arts become widely recognized as an opportunity to take the next step in developing the individual to his/her full capacity (Green, 1984; Durden, 2001; Winner & Hetland, 2008). Universities must aid students in understanding that all educational experiences are connected by the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are continually cultivated through each experience. This recognition will then provide a fundamental understanding of the educated individual that they are creating (King, 1999). If this understanding is to take place then the value of creative and divergent thinking cannot be underestimated and this type of thinking must become a desired attribute of all students, particularly, as in the context of this study, college students.

In addition to the acknowledged value of education, there is a recognized need to preserve the arts and to cultivate an appreciation for art in our society (Pollak et al., 2000; Winner & Hetland, 2008). If higher education is going to support this need, then institutional leaders must begin to acknowledge the importance of engagement in the arts
as a fundamental aspect of developing all college students. In order to begin this critical
dialogue about human development the student must be empowered to explore the
educational opportunities afforded by engagement in the arts (Greene, 1984). University
arts programs are an excellent starting point for the investigation into the impact of
engagement in artistic activity on the college student.

Researchers acknowledge that it is difficult to study arts programs in a methodical
manner because the programs and activities are frequently deeply ingrained in the
institution (Pollak et al., 2000). Additionally, “in some geographical areas, the local
university may be the main source of arts activities” (Pollak, Hager, & Rowland, p.146).
In this type of setting the campus arts activities, although potentially ingrained in the
institution, may be the introductory and sole access to the arts available to the college
population, therefore these activities have great potential to impact the college population
due to the lack of alternative access. Green (1984) acknowledges that not all students will
actively participate as creators in a formal art form therefore it is important that students
engage in the arts alternatively. Students and faculty should be aware of the artistic
possibilities that surround students daily in communication with others, self-expression,
and opportunities for divergent thinking.

In conjunction with this empowerment to employ artistic opportunities, Hartley
and Greggs (1997) caution that many secondary level teachers approach divergent
thinking students with apprehension, frustration, and even hostility. Although there are no
current findings in higher education showing the same results, Hartley and Greggs report
that the negative impact of the attitudes of teachers at the secondary level on students
with this type of creativity can be assumed to carry over into their collegiate academic
careers. Research has shown that education has the ability to alter student attitudes and values (Anderson et al., 2007) and consequently faculty members need to recognize how their classes impact a student beyond the knowledge and skills exchanged, specifically in reference to attitudes towards creative and artistic engagement.

The significance of this study is rooted in the need to assess the impact of the arts on university campuses. A strong initial step towards understanding the importance of artistic engagement for all students is to recognize and study those students who have chosen to actively participate in arts programs on university campuses. A better understanding of arts students might provide a platform to compare the artistic experiences of all students as well as measure the impact of artistic engagement on the overall student experience.

In addition, the findings of this study might aid the retention and recruitment efforts of theatre faculty by providing specific qualitative data describing the experiences of current students that could be used to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the programmatic impact on students. Long-term results might include increased satisfaction of theatre students with their educational experiences, improvements in the graduation rates of theatre students, an increase in the number of students engaging in theatre arts, and an increased awareness of the impact of theatre programming on the college campus.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Given the demand for accountability in higher education it is necessary for all types of programs on the college campus to be regularly evaluated to ensure that students are receiving a quality education (Johnson, 2002). Research has shown that students are impacted most by what they choose to “do” while in college (Pike & Kuh, 2005), and this
suggests that students’ experiences will vary depending on the track of study they choose and the activities in which they choose to engage. Given that theatre can be characterized as an extra-curricular activity, this finding supports inquiry into theatre students and their experiences and interactions on campus, in the classroom, with each other, and with those who provide support from the institution, namely, college administrators.

According to the National Association of Schools of Theatre, theatre students experience unique activities within their curricular requirements. Specifically, students engage in extracurricular activities such as rehearsals, performances, and auditions as standard components of their training (http://nast.arts-accredit.org). Given this active engagement outside of the classroom the overall experiences of performing arts students are clearly unique to the area of study, such as theatre, music, or dance. Therefore specific study in each area of performing arts could yield valuable insight into the needs of students in that area and due to the diversity of activities involved in each area, specific study in each area would be most productive.

Research also shows that arts students learn different things in different ways and because of this they often learn in ways that are difficult to describe and measure by traditional methods. Many of the skills taught in the theatre field are difficult to evaluate using standard grading scales. In addition to these classroom-learned skills such as acting techniques, students are also evaluated on extracurricular activities such as performance and design. Because standard measurement devices cannot be used to evaluate many of the activities in which arts students are engaging arts programs are frequently identified as areas of nonessential study (Greene, 1984). As a result, empirical research in many areas of the arts is lacking, notably in the areas of theatre, music and dance (i.e. the
performing arts), although academic journals do exist that focus on education in the performing arts areas, specifically music. Edstrom (2008) noted a small collection of existing examples of research in the area of arts education including Hansen’s (2001) study of art school teaching, Gorts’ (2003) study of being an art student, and Edstrom’s study of artistic development. The problem with this limited existing body of research is that much of it is focused on the visual arts and there is a distinct gap in the research specifically focused on student experiences (Edstrom, 2008). Therefore any expansion on this limited body of research focusing on student experiences will aid in the understanding of students in the performing arts.

In addition, the unique nature of artistic creation results in curricular and extracurricular experiences that may be extremely diverse for each individual participant. For this reason the study of theatre students is an ideal candidate for qualitative inquiry that can account for individual experiences and perspectives. Therefore the conceptual framework of this study centers on the expansion of the lacking body of knowledge focused on the unique collegiate experiences of theatre students as a culture-sharing student subpopulation.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In his book *A Larger Sense of Purpose: Higher Education and Society*, Shapiro (2005) prompted that institutions of higher education have historically served a social purpose. He went further to identify smaller subsections of that purpose, one of which was to educate the individual and thus provide a better-equipped member of society at large. Another important subsection was to provide the platform to examine aspects of society in a manner not always readily acceptable within other settings of daily living.

Based on these tenets, there is a real benefit in examining students (the individual who is being prepared for society by higher education) in order to better understand their experiences and address issues and obstacles that they face through their journey in higher education. This study focused on exploring the individual experiences of students of higher education engaged in the art of theatre on a college campus. This focus on theatre students offered commentary on both the general student experience and the experiences of individuals who engage in formal theatre activities as a component of their degree program. In order to fully appreciate the need for this type of investigation, it is important to understand the scope of the existing body of literature related to the experiences of theatre students in higher education.

The current body of literature on this topic is limited. Studies focusing on student experiences in other areas identified as performing arts, namely music, are more prevalent than those focusing on theatre. The sources explored through this literature review were obtained from the University of Arkansas and Northeastern State University libraries. Journal articles were obtained through the use of the EBSCOhost databases,
Academic Search Premiere, and ERIC. Dissertation and thesis sources were found using the ProQuest database. A variety of search terms were explored including theatre, students, theatre students, higher education, student experiences, and student subpopulations. The most relevant sources were found through the use of the following combinations: a) student and experiences, and b) theatre, students and experiences.

An EBSCO search narrowed to the Academic Search Premier and ERIC databases using the terms student and experiences with the limiters full-text, and peer reviewed articles yielded over 2,000 articles. An additional narrowing by subject decreased the number of articles to 589. This pool of articles was then narrowed to those that discussed the general student experience in a higher education institution. A similar search using the terms theatre and students yielded a smaller original pool of less than 400 articles. This search was then narrowed by subject to 72 articles. These articles were then filtered to those that discussed the experiences of theatre students. Because the search for articles specifically focusing on theatre students yielded limited results, the ProQuest database was then explored for possible dissertations related to the topic. A ProQuest search using the terms theatre, students, and experiences yielded 62 documents. Of this pool of resources, 10 documents were downloaded; of those 10 documents, two were utilized as primary resources for identifying additional journal articles to be explored. Some of these articles were then found through EBSCOhost.

The JSTOR database of Performing Arts journals was also explored. A search of the term combination theatre and students in the JSTOR database with the narrowed scope of Performing Arts journals yielded 44 articles. A search of the term combination students and experiences in the JSTOR database with the narrowed scope of Performing
Arts journals yielded 257 articles. Of the 44 articles found using the terms theatre and students, none of the articles discussed student experiences in the context of university study; all were related to the study of Shakespearean plays and performance. Of the 257 articles found using the terms students and experiences, many were also focused on the exploration of Shakespearean plays and performance. No searches were limited by date range due to the lack of initial results in each search. This database did not yield usable results for the study.

The literature discussed in this review was divided into two major sections: 1) the college experience and 2) experiences of theatre students. In the major section “The College Experience” the following sub-headings were discussed: a) the impact of the classroom, b) the impact of extra-curricular experiences, and c) the student experience and success. In the major section “Experiences of Theatre Students” the following sub-headings were discussed: a) benefits of experience in the arts and b) obstacles experiences by students of the arts. Section 2 also provided an overview of theatre as an area of academic study in higher education. The chapter was concluded with a summary of major ideas explored in the reviewed sources.

The College Experience

Bowen (1977) reported that studies of the student experience in higher education have been common since the 1940’s. These types of studies collect data from alumni with the aim of providing information that can be used to improve student satisfaction through program and quality adjustments. Bowen revealed that while a majority of these studies have consisted of quantitative surveys, many have also allow for qualitative feedback in the form of additional comments and that this type of qualitative data has typically been
collected via person to person contact between alumni and university employees in order to cultivate alumni support for the university.

Donald and Denison’s (1996) study examined how student-reported college experiences could be used to determine suggestions for program improvement on a variety of levels. The study consisted of current graduate students in a variety of areas as well as alumni from the same areas. The study method involved a series of survey questions combined with open-ended questions. They found that a series of “broad indicators” revealed common experiences associated with the satisfaction of students and alumni. The study showed that the most common area in which students and alumni felt their education was lacking was in the use and development of critical thinking and analyzing skills. Donald and Denison reported that the qualitative components of their results were essential in the interpretation of the quantitative results. They advocated the use of a qualitative component in future studies focusing on student satisfaction determined by student experience.

Braunstein and McGrath (1997) charged that there has been a need for the study of students, especially freshman students, on individual college campuses. They explained that due to the specific environmental factors that might vary greatly from campus to campus and the impact that such factors have on student experience, it would be wise for all institutions to support research of this type to be conducted on their campus.

King (1999) compared the college student experience with that of completing a jigsaw puzzle by equating puzzle pieces to the courses and activities that a student chooses, and assembling the puzzle to the process of a student trying to fulfill degree
requirements with their experiences. King further asserted that the problem with the student’s typical experience of piecing together an educational plan is parallel to the challenge of assembling a puzzle without the picture on the front of the box to guide progress. King addressed this lack of guidance by contending that the major obstacle for the student exists in the conflicting focus between cognitive development and interpersonal/social development that is typically experienced in the campus environment. She concluded that the solution to this problem resides in the recognition by administrators and faculty that the student’s total college experience is worthy of comprehensive study and that this type of study is essential to improve the student experience.

*The Impact of the Classroom*

Weaver and Qi (2005) reported that individual experiences of a typical college student inside the formal classroom have a great impact on the overall student experience. They identified a variety of factors that impact the classroom experience including student age, class size, faculty authority, and student preparation. They acknowledged that while involved in this formal classroom setting, students are also engaged in an informal social setting that directly shapes their participation inside the classroom and consequently their overall collegiate experience. The most notable influence surfacing from this informal setting has been defined as the importance of peer perception.

According to the study of approximately 1,800 students at a mid-sized, mid-western public university, the student experience inside the formal classroom was impacted most by the individual student perception of peer judgment. Also reported was that faculty involvement plays an important role in student self-identification of positive
experiences inside the formal classroom. The study showed students who had regular and what they deemed quality interactions with faculty members inside the classroom more frequently self-identified as having positive experiences in the classroom (Weaver & Qi, 2005).

In addition to identifying a value in faculty/student interactions in the classroom, Weaver and Qi (2005) also reported that possibly the most influential factor in determining student experiences in the classroom was faculty interaction outside of the classroom setting. Students self-reported that encounters of a positive nature outside the formal classroom setting not only positively impacted student experience inside the classroom directly by making them feel less intimidated by class content and faculty authority, but also by increasing self confidence to participate in classroom discussions and activities along with peers.

The authors concluded that the importance of classroom experiences in shaping the overall student experience at a university should be weighted heavily in the consideration of efforts to improve student experiences; and the value of faculty interaction with students should be recognized and reinforced possibly through a formal reward system in order to encourage faculty to make efforts to ensure that they have a positive impact on the student experience (Weaver & Qi, 2005).

Anderson, Teist, Criner, Tisher, Smith, Hunter, Norton, Jellison, Aloyokhin, Gallandt, Haggard, and Bicknell (2007) presented the results of a study measuring the impact of general education courses on student attitudes towards the environment. The study showed that the major field of study was directly correlated to student attitudes towards the environment and that these attitudes tended to shift throughout the process of
engaging in the same coursework (general education) as students in other fields.

Anderson et al. concluded that these findings asserted that students engage in the same information through varying lenses that are typical of individuals in the major area of study that they have chosen. However, they pointed out that in a more general sense, these findings indicated that teachers should be very aware of how greatly their course content and presentation can shape the attitudes of students on a variety of topics and issues.

Greenberg, Lester, Evans, Williams, Hacker, and Halic (2009) reported the results of a study aiming to understand student perceptions of various techniques of evaluation in the classroom. The students involved in the study were evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively regarding their experience with classroom learning evaluation methods, specifically with learner-centered exams and traditional exams. The results of the quantitative measures revealed no great difference in student performance on learner centered versus traditional classroom exams. In contrast, the qualitative measures revealed that student perceptions of the same evaluation procedures positively favored learner-centered assessment. Greenberg et al. concluded that there was a distinct need for educators to consider the style of evaluation used in the classroom. They also noted that the use of a qualitative method in the study produced more applicable results than the quantitative method alone.

Black (2010) reported that a growing concern for higher education professionals is the manner in which the student has changed. She explained that the nature of this change may directly impact the ability of faculty to interact and more importantly connect with the newest generation of students, those born between 1981 and 2001,
commonly labeled Millenials or Generation Y. Though many differences exists between the Millenials and the Baby Boomers, the generation of which many experienced faculty are a member, Black identified the difference in the diversity of backgrounds and the difference in technology literacy as major points of concern regarding faculty/student connection.

Black (2010) labeled today's student a "digital native" who is accustomed to the regular use of technology in order to function in a base manner. Because many faculty members do not identify themselves as technically savvy, the dependence on technology that characterizes today's student has been identified as a serious obstacle in the goal of meeting the needs of students, which in turn can negatively impact the student experience in higher education.

The information compiled in her study revealed that today's student finds traditional teaching methods such as lecture boring and ineffective. The reason for this disconnect with traditional teaching techniques has been related to the need for constant stimulation and immediate gratification that characterizes today's student (Black, 2010).

Black (2010) cites an exchange at a session of the 2002 National Learning Infrastructure Initiative annual meeting where two students were asked to identify the most difficult aspect of being a student. Both students replied, "Having to sit through class lecture without being able to check e-mail, surf the web, or listen to music" (p. 97). An attending faculty member was asked the same question and said, "I would have said calculus" (p.97). Black pointed out that this difference in viewpoint was indicative of the "disconnect" between faculty and today’s students. She added that this exchange also provided a glimpse into the typical classroom experience of today's student.
In addition to the impact that their reliance on technology has had on their classroom experience, Black (2010) also reported that the student experience has been impacted by technology on a social level. She found that students actively engaged in social networking to a degree that lowered the overall quality of relationships and interpersonal communication that the student experiences. She wrote that because a large part of the college student experience is composed of social interactions with peers, students are negatively impacting their own college experience through heavy use of social networks in the place of traditional face-to-face interaction. Black concluded that higher education has no option but to adjust to the changing needs of today's student and to recognize and accept that traditional component of teaching and learning will soon be the exception rather than the norm.

*The Impact of Extra-curricular Activities*

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) supported the theory that extra curricular activities are important in framing the individual’s college experience. The authors provided reference to a large body of existing research that advocates the study of student experience as a tool to be used in measuring student learning and success.

DeMoulin (2002) reported the results of a study conducted on high school students focusing on the impact of participation in extracurricular activities on personal development. The study utilized the Personal Development Test, which is based on the Global Assessment Functioning Scale created by they America Psychiatric Committee. The findings showed that participation in extracurricular activities increased student scores on measures of maturity, leadership, and social integration. DeMoulin concluded that extracurricular involvement had a positive impact on personal development although
the results were limited in that the study did not allow for identification and inclusion of all extracurricular activities due to the large number and diversity of activities available to students.

Pike and Kuh (2005) explored the possibility of creating a typology of engagement that would characterize individual colleges and universities into common groups. The study involved senior students that participated in the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE). Pike and Kuh noted the significance of the NSSE and its broad acceptance as a standard measure of student experience at a variety of colleges and universities. The framework of the study referenced the large body of research that existed regarding the examination of student engagement and explained the importance of student engagement on student success and learning. Pike and Kuh determined that due to the broad nature of the NSSE, the results typically are most useful in efforts to examine existing policies and make general university wide improvements with the goal of positively impacting student success.

The study supported the assertion that NSSE-style evaluation tools would be most effective if it could be shown that the tool speaks for students in particular program areas, because then faculty in those areas would be more likely to utilize such data. They concluded that a typology could be created that characterized schools into categories based on their strengths regarding student engagement and asserted that the use of such a typology might improve the scope of action surrounding student engagement (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

The ASHE Higher Education Report *College Experiences* (2007) showed that student perceptions of their college experience are positively impacted by engagement in
activities and involvement in organizations on campus. The report concluded that the identification of student characteristics that directly impact student involvement should be studied more extensively in the future.

Ethington and Horn (2007) conducted a study testing Pace’s model for the study of student development and college impress. They cite Pace’s book *Measuring Outcomes of College* as the source of his model, which was the basis for the creation of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) and the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ). Ethington and Horn addressed the validity of Pace’s assertion that student effort is a key construct of student outcomes in college. The findings of their study supported Pace’s conclusion that student time and effort committed toward engagement in university activities positively impacted student development and student experience. Ethington and Horn reported that their study showed that student effort was the most determining factor influencing student experience. Therefore when a student put more effort into chosen university activities, the student’s perception of the university improved as a result of a more positive student experience. Ethington and Horn suggested that the findings of their study and similar research be used to develop and modify university policies and procedures to capitalize on the correlation between student effort and university perceptions.

Tchibozo (2007) explored the impact of extra-curricular activity in higher education on the student’s transition into the job-force. The results of the study showed that extra-curricular activities definitely had an impact on the transition process from student to employee. Findings included a positive correlation between activities encouraging leadership and citizenship and employment status and a negative correlation
between general participation in extra-curricular activities and employer perception.

Tchibozo interpreted the finding to indicate that although employers may have perceived participation in extra-curricular activities as having a negative impact on employee commitment to the career, if the activities in question encouraged leadership and citizenship skills, the perception of impact became significantly positive. He concluded that these findings should be further explored and utilized by placement and counseling services in campuses in efforts to help students understand the positive impact of engagement in campus extra-curricular activities.

Steele and Fullagar (2009) explored the nature of student engagement on the college campus by comparing the characteristics associated with the use of the term engagement in reference to the job force and in reference to students. They found that core characteristics associated with engagement were more applicable to student engagement than engagement on the job force. These characteristics were described as actions resulting from companionship with mental engagement. The finding was explained as notable because the current body of research regarding student engagement in higher education focused on engagement in activities on campus, thus failing to account for mental engagement that the study proved lead to activity engagement. Steele and Fullagar recommended that this partnership between mental engagement and activity engagement be factored into assessment of student engagement on the college campus in order to accurately evaluate the student experience.

Ferrari, McCarthy, and Milner (2009) explored the correlation between student perception of university mission identity and student engagement on campus. Previous research was cited supporting the existence of a connection between students who
participated in campus activities and a positive student perception of institutional mission. The study focused on students at a variety of types of institutions, including faith-based universities. The findings showed that students who participated in extracurricular activities that were tied to the institutional mission in some way self-reported a supportive perception of the institution’s mission. The same results were reported within faith-based institutions. The researchers concluded that student perception of institutional mission and its connection to student engagement was an area in need of further study. They also suggested that future researchers consider utilizing a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research in order to achieve results that can provide administrators with the information needed to specifically address means of clarifying and improving student understanding of university mission.

*The Student Experience and Success*

Feldman and Newcomb (1969) reported that student evaluations have been an integral part of higher education for nearly a century. Since the 1930’s, the type of evaluation has historically been focused on satisfaction with instruction.

Kuh, Pace, and Vesper (1997) reported the results of an evaluation of identified indicators of student performance on a large sample of male and female students at a variety of universities. The College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) was the source of survey items presented to the student sample. Three indicators in particular were measured in order to determine their impact on student gains, and included student-faculty interaction, active learning, and cooperation among students. The results of the study showed that active learning and cooperation among students had the greatest impact on student gains. Kuh et al. concluded that this type of research has strong
implications for administrators and policymakers because it supports the use of
estruments such as the CSEQ to determine the best practices to positively impact student experience.

Sutton and Henry (2005) reported that in addition to the large volume of research that has been conducted regarding assessment of student learning, there has been a need to expand the body of research exploring the student experience and its relation to student learning and success. They noted that due to the “consumer” mindset and attitude of many students in higher education today, it is essential that university policymakers take into consideration student perceptions of quality and learning progress in addition to traditional measures of student learning. The aim of the study was to determine if there was a correlation between student perceived learning experiences and actual learning outcomes. The results showed that there was a correlation thus supporting the validity of student perceptions of their learning experiences.

Lambert, Terenzini, and Lattuca (2006) reported that their study of the impact of program characteristics and faculty activities on student learning provided limited results that indicated a need for investigation of specific variables on a large scale. The study was supported by a large body of existing research, which neglected to consider the impact of variables specific to individual institutions and faculty procedures. Lambert et al. noted that although the study revealed only an indirect impact of program characteristics and general faculty behaviors and attitudes, it showed a strong direct impact of faculty development activities on student experience. The researchers concluded that the findings supported a need for further research focused on identifying the impact of specific program characteristics on the student experience as well as a need
for administrative recognition and praise of faculty who engage in developmental activities that positive impact student experience in an effort to encourage all faculty members to seek out such activities.

Thompson, Orr, Thompson, and Grover (2007) examined freshman student perceptions of the transition into the college experience. They reinforced the benefit of the study for student recruitment and retention offices. The study acknowledged a series of factors identified by the existing body of literature that influence student success. The factors were used in the creation of a survey presented to freshmen students after their first semester of enrollment and included "time management/goal setting, academic advising, stress, and institutional fit/integration (p.640)." The survey results indicated that most of participating students at the study site perceived their transition into higher education as easy or average. Thompson et al. asserted that the factors identified above directly contributed to student perception and that the combination of the factors define the student perception of success. They acknowledged that the study was limited in that it was focused on one institution and recommend that all universities conduct similar studies specifically focused on their student population.

Wessel, Ryan, and Oswald (2007) explored the differences in perceived fit and objective fit in relation to major outcomes, adaptability, and institutional perceptions. They reported a lack of evidence that there was any significant difference between perceived fit and objective fit in relation to major outcomes, but a presence of evidence that perceived fit strongly correlated to institutional satisfaction and adaptability. Therefore individuals characterized as adaptable were more likely to “believe” that they fit within their major and to make the most of any environment, which accounted for
institutional satisfaction. The researchers noted that a distinct limitation of the study was the lack of delineation for different major areas that could strongly impact student experience. They suggested that further research of this type make efforts to account for differences among major fields of study in order to expand the existing knowledge base of the impact of fit on student experience.

Palmer, O'Kane, and Owens (2009) supported the assertion that campus integration and fit are essential factors in determining student experience. They reported that for most new students an "event" or "experience" at the university takes place within the first six to eight weeks that determines the success of their transition into college. This determination is generally grounded in the development of a sense of belonging to the university.

The study utilized a qualitative approach to examining the perceptions of the group of students studied. They reported that the qualitative nature of the study enhanced the results due to the ability to obtain not only the data regarding whether a student felt a sense of belonging to the university, but also how they individually coped with the process of either successfully or unsuccessfully achieving fit within the university. They concluded that future studies are needed to further explore the endless variety of events and experiences that become turning points for students in their efforts to transition into the new university environment. Studies of a qualitative nature will continue to be necessary in efforts to fully understand student experiences that are unique to each university and each student (Palmer et al., 2009).

Smith and Zhang (2009) studied the impact of a variety of factors on the college student’s first year experience. A survey distributed to first-year students revealed that
the impact of a student’s mother figure on the transition from high school to college was perceived to be greater than that of any other individual. The authors noted that their study was based on student perceptions of the impact of individuals; when compared with student performance, the impact of the mother was not significantly greater than that of other individuals. Smith and Zhang concluded that this discrepancy supported a need for more extensive research of student’s experiences in order to develop an understanding of how a student’s perception of their experience corresponded either positively or negatively to their academic performance, thus clarifying the relationship between student experience and success.

Goode (2010) examined technology identity as an aspect of student experience that has to a great extent been overlooked by the academic research community. Goode reported that the importance of technology identity development has been severely underestimated by the current body of research. The results of her study showed that students entered college with varying degrees of technology literacy and quickly defined a sizable portion of their college-self by their capacity for technology. Findings revealed that students with lower levels of technology literacy achieved lower levels of academic success in college. Goode noted that this finding was not surprising given the importance of technology in society, but elaborated on an additional finding that was surprising; the impact of technology identity on social development in college. Because the study was designed with a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, Goode was able to determine that technology illiteracy was a common reason for negative social activity. Students reported a feeling of alienation from technology savvy students and added that this feeling led to a stifling of their social interaction with other students inside and
outside of the classroom. Goode also reported that most students identifying a low level of technology literacy also reported little to no access to technology in high school. As a result, she concluded that technology identity was a substantial component of the student experience and identified the development of technological skills as an area of educational focus that needs to become a standard part of all educational levels in order to effectively prepare students to succeed in higher education.

Experiences of Theatre Students

Theatre was described by the Association for Theatre in Higher Education as a discipline that empowers students to synthesize historical, theoretical, and practical elements into knowledge that can be applied to formal productions presented for an audience. Coursework for a theatre major surveys a variety of areas including acting, directing, design, management, history, and technical production. Theatre is described as being interdisciplinary by nature due to the wide range of skills and knowledge utilized in theatrical production and has been frequently identified as the study of the human experience (ATHE, 2006-2010).

Urice (1976) identified his study as one of the few academically based research efforts focused on theatre arts at the post-secondary level. He illustrated the need for such as study through responses collected in interviews of arts administrators and a description of the declining job market that forced efforts to prepare graduates for employability in a broad manner, not a specific field. He argued that fields of study such as theatre arts should take this opportunity to advocate their utility in an insecure economic climate by noting the universally marketable skills developed by students as a result of their field of study.
Urice’s (1976) study focused on the students at Florida State University who were admitted into the undergraduate and graduate theatre programs. The students were surveyed and interviewed regarding their experiences with and expectations of the theatre program as well as their post-graduate plans and career aspirations. The study results revealed a consistency in answers among a majority of the theatre students with a few incidental exceptions. In general, students expressed strong satisfaction of program related coursework and faculty, but reported negative experiences and low satisfaction of coursework and campus environment outside of the theatre program. Students also reported a strong positive perception of their theatre student peers and satisfaction with the type and level of training that they were receiving through the program.

Most students indicated that the primary reason for choosing the university was the theatre program’s reputation. This finding implied that theatre students overwhelmingly choose their intended major prior to enrollment in college. Regarding career aspiration and post-graduate plans, students reported a common desire to work in the field of theatre and as a result of that desire, most planned to continue their studies on a graduate level in efforts to better position themselves for successful employment in the field (Urice, 1976).

Overall the findings of the study reported a strong positive impact of engagement in theatre arts on the college student experience. Urice (1976) concluded that there was definitely a need for continued study of theatre students in particular due to the severe lack of existing research and in order to position arts administrators to accurately argue for the support of theatre arts using legitimate research findings that reveal the positive impact of theatre study on the student experience.
Benefits of Experience in the Arts

Greene (1984) argued that there is a distinct need for increased awareness of the arts in education. She maintained that the arts should be viewed as more than separate areas of study, and thus integrated into other areas of the curriculum as innovative modes of thinking. She noted the distinct bias of traditional assessment measures to discount skills developed through engagement with the arts such as communication and a higher order of viewing the world in general. She concluded that the concept of integrating ideas generated through arts training into other aspects of higher education would positively impact the educational preparation of students.

Hartley and Greggs (1997) sought to determine whether the results of Hartley and Beasley’s 1969 study that showed arts students differ significantly from science students on tests that require and/or measure divergent thinking would still be applicable to arts and science students nearly 30 years later. The replicated study revealed that a significant difference still exists between levels of divergent thinking utilized by arts students and that utilized by science students. Hartley and Greggs reported that this difference in mode of thinking might provide explanation for the difficulty that some faculty members who are convergent thinkers have with students of the arts in their classrooms. They noted that research in secondary education has explored this relationship obstacle, but there has yet to be any equivocal research conducted in higher education specifically aiming at this specific student/faculty relationship. Based on the findings of the study they recommended that institutions of higher education follow the example of secondary education and begin to explore this relationship obstacle in order to enhance the experience of arts students on campus.
Bresler (1998) explored the implications of three national publications regarding policymaking in the arts. These publications reflected the need for collaboration among researchers, teachers, and policymakers when issues in arts education are examined. The author reviewed the scope of the current bodies of research related to visual art, music, dance, and theatre. The review illustrated a clear lack of thorough research in the theatre area that is accounted for by an explanation of the reasons that theatre programs are difficult to study, capitalizing on the integration of theatre content within other areas of education. It was added that a majority of the existing research focuses on theatre education in the high school setting. Bresler supported the need for further research in all areas of the arts with the stipulation that the research be applicable to the aims of both policymakers and educational practitioners and consequently advantageous for students.

Garcia (1999) explored theatre student perceptions of “community”, described as a coming together of individuals in the name of common ground. The study involved qualitative responses to a series of thematic ideas related to this concept of community presented to a group of students at a university that were engaged in a theatrical production that centered around the issue of diversity in society. Garcia reported that the students perceived theatrical participation as an ideal setting for a diverse collection of individuals to come together working towards a common cause. The students expressed a view that the theatre setting naturally projected a sense of accessibility to anyone who was interested in becoming involved. In addition, due to the diverse nature of participating roles available on and off stage, most students who initiated involvement developed a sense of ownership of the theatrical production itself. Students also reported that they found theatrical engagement to be a consistent opportunity to sound their
individual voice regarding their own perceptions of and experiences with diversity in society. Garcia pointed out that in reality many plays written for the theatre are innately biased with regard to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Regardless of this biased reality, the study showed that student perception of theatrical engagement was typically positive with regard to the promotion of diversity.

Pollak, Hager, and Rowland (2000) aimed to explore the validity of placing university arts programs into a conceptual framework that characterizes the programs into one of three categories regardless of individual university characteristics. The results showed that most university arts programs could be placed into one of the categories based on level of community involvement and the educational mission of the program. The researchers concluded that these results imply that regardless of the university in which it is embedded, arts programs fitting into the same conceptual category serve similar functions and provide similar benefits and experiences to students. Therefore the study of specific programs on any campus could reasonably be applicable to programs on a different campus regardless of size, type, or locale, given that both programs fall into the same conceptual category.

Pollack et al. (2000) explained the lack of research regarding particular areas of university arts as a result of the embedded nature of the programs; because the programs are considered a piece of the university as a whole, they are in many cases not accounted for or addressed in research studies of arts organizations. They pointed out that in some cases the local university might be the primary cultural outlet for the area, which would increase the pressure on the university arts faculty, staff, and students to extend their arts activities far beyond the classroom. They noted that the arts typically extend to a large
degree beyond program activities and performances through extracurricular arts activities on the campus and in the community in which the arts faculty, staff and students participate in varying capacities such as talent shows, presentations, and performances.

Durden (2001) reported “an estimated 40 percent of the Fortune 500 chief executive officers in 2000 graduated from a liberal-arts college or received a degree with a liberal-arts major” (p. 1). He attributed this trend to the fact that liberal arts students “see their thoughts and ideas received and discussed by others, providing external recognition that those thoughts and ideas have value” (p. 1). He concluded that while the section of society that received a liberal arts education benefitted from this type of learning, other sections, those who did not receive a liberal arts education, failed to climb political, social, and corporate ladders of achievement.

Corner (2005) argued that fine arts education, regardless of the specific source of the educational experience, provides a unique learning experience that is not paralleled by other areas of education. He reported a distinct set of core principles/skills that are universally applied in all settings of fine arts education. These principles/skills include conceptual skills, critical and analytical skills, and an understanding of the impact of culture on society. Corner concluded that due to the inherent acquisition of these principles/skills through fine arts education, students in this field graduate well prepared to succeed in society.

Collinson (2005) explored the student process of developing identity through a study of doctoral students in art and design. The study supported the theory that students develop an identity throughout their education journey. Data was collected through qualitative interviews of 50 doctoral students. The author noted the importance of the
qualitative design of the study in the full understanding of the student experience. The study revealed that students of the arts developed a reflexive self-identity that was based on their artistic experiences. This new identity could be contrary to the student’s identity as perceived by others due to the critical nature of self-perception that students of the arts adopted.

The research also revealed that arts students developed a creative self-identity that described them as artists. According to Collinson (2005), this particular identity was passionately monitored by the student and viewed as an important component of individual identity. Students reported a heavy influence of faculty and peer criticism in the development of these identities. Collinson suggested that recognition of this variety of identities that arts students are prone to develop could aid in understanding student attitudes and actions. The most significant finding of the study was that although arts students initially viewed the prospect of formal research as a risky endeavor because the stereotypical idea of academic research contradicts the nature of artistic creativity, their final perception was much different, seeing research as an additional opportunity for creativity. Collinson concluded that the findings could be vital information for faculty members attempting to engage arts students in research to share with their students.

King, Brown, Lindsay, and VanHecke (2007) explored the learning outcomes associated with typical liberal arts education. Their goal was to identify specific learning outcomes that worked interdependently to develop responsible citizens focused on community. They expanded on the existing results of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNSLAE) by combining the existing literature with the qualitative data reported in the original study. The result was that the research team was
able to expand on the WNSLAE’s original seven categories of independent liberal arts learning outcomes, by identifying a total of ten strategies for creating interdependent outcomes that are embedded in an institution. The strategies reported included incorporating multi-dimensional learning approaches in all facets of education on campus. King et al. concluded that this particular strategy could provide essential enhancement of the learning process of students and make the application of learning to life a viable option for students to explore.

Lampert (2007) supported the findings of existing research literature that identified critical thinking as a desired outcome of general education course requirements. Lampert conducted a study of undergraduate students involved in a variety of courses in order to determine the impact of their coursework on their critical thinking abilities. The findings showed that students involved in arts courses measured higher on critical thinking scales than those involved in non-arts related courses. Lampert reported that a possible explanation for this difference in measure could be the methods used in the classroom as well as instructor attitudes towards course material. This theory is supported by the existing research that showed a distinct difference of teaching methodology used in arts versus non-arts courses. Lampert concluded that the study supported a need for further investigation into the variables contributing to the development of critical thinking skills and suggested that future research involve qualitative measures in efforts to account for contributing variables that are not easily identified by quantitative survey techniques. She also identified implications for faculty and policy makers in higher education including the incorporation of teaching
methodologies regularly adopted by arts faculty into non-arts general education classrooms.

Pitts (2007) explored the student experience of participating in a secondary school musical theatre production. The study was qualitative in design, utilizing a variety of methods including interview, video diary, and open-ended surveys. Pitts noted the lack of research within the existing body of literature concerning the impact of extra-curricular activities on student experience with the exception of academic impact. According to Pitts, this lack of study indicated a misconception that the value of extra-curricular activities is limited to a positive impact on academic success. Pitts’ study showed an expansive range of response to participation in musical theatre activity, both positive and negative. She reported negative aspects of participation including the large demand of time and effort as well as positive aspects such as a sense of community between the participants and individual feelings of investment in and ownership of the production. Pitts asserted that these findings were comparable on some level to those of adult musical theatre participants and concluded that the results of this study supported the need for further research on this topic.

Winner and Hetland (2008) conducted a study of high school art students in an effort to identify the types of learning that occur inside an arts classroom that may not be found in other academic classrooms. They reported that students engaged in a variety of modes of thinking including observing, imagining, innovating through exploration, and reflective self-evaluation and as a result developed skills such as persistence, expression, and the ability to critically analyze. The authors contended that these skills and modes of thinking are highly sought in a variety of professions outside of the arts world and
therefore arts classrooms prepared students to more efficiently engage with society. They suggested that teachers in all academic areas consider bringing techniques utilized in the arts classroom into their own classroom settings in order to help students develop these desired skills and advocated further research into the modes of thinking and skills that the arts encourage to students to develop.

Edstrom (2008) reported the benefits of artistic educational experiences similar to studio conversations for visual art students. In a discussion of the limited research on the experiences of arts students, she questioned the reason for this gap and cited Eve Harwood’s 2007 survey of research based on teaching and learning in the arts over a thirty-year period:

Two circumstances account for the paucity of answers to this question: the lack of theoretical framework for artistic development, and an untheorized teaching tradition that is largely mimetic from expert teacher to student novice. There is no established or even tentative theory of artistic development in the college years comparable with the multiple models of intellectual, ethical, and psychological development. (p. 315)

Edstrom’s study analyzed data gathered through interviews with studio art students who engaged regularly with faculty and peer artists in a critical manner. The study revealed that students perceived their faculty supervisors as not only authority figures in an academic setting, but also as professional mentors. The findings implied that the students perceived the faculty members as models for who they desired to become as artistic members of society. Students also reported that they were greatly impacted by the “reality check” measure of peer criticism of their studio work. They also revealed that they perceived these practical experiences as preparing them to engage in professional artistic work.
According to Edstrom (2008), the study results supported the assertion that studio art experiences aid in the development of meta-cognition skills. The findings provided essential evidence of the need for further research into the teaching and learning experiences in higher education. Edstrom also reported that the small body of existing literature about arts education in higher education failed to recognize the unique nature of the different areas of the arts. She explained that these areas may differ in not only the mode in which the student engages in the art, but also in the restraints placed on the artist by the art. Therefore it is essential that all individual areas of the arts be recognized as unique.

Zdriluk (2010) explored the experiences of four high school graduates who had been active members of a large high school theatre company. The graduates were interviewed and asked to provide written responses to questions regarding their experience as a member of the theatre company. Zdriluk supported the need for this type of study with a review of literature that discussed the ongoing academic debate regarding the use and benefit of drama in education. The review delineated between the terms “drama” and “theatre” in an effort to separate theatrical activity focused on educating the participant from theatrical activity focused on performing for an audience.

Zdriluk (2010) provided evidence that theatre as an educational tool has historically been proven to be useful in a variety of classrooms focusing on all subject areas of education. Resources cited showed that theatre used in this capacity provided substantial benefits to students in the areas of personal and cognitive development. Zdriluk argued that theatre performance activities can also provide the same type of outcomes for students who participate in an educationally based performance activity
such as a school-sponsored theatre company and positioned his study to support this assertion.

The findings of the study revealed that participants reported personal growth as a result of theatre participation including a strong work ethic, respect for culture, recognition of the power of process and the power of a group, and an increased concern for social injustice. The participants also reported the development of a variety of skills via theatrical activity that they regularly utilized in their daily lives including communication skills, leadership abilities, logical thinking skills, and interpersonal skills. Zdriluk (2010) concluded that the study added to the limited existing body of literature, providing narrative specific student-reported experiences with educational theatre participation.

Obstacles Experiences by Students of the Arts

March and Roche (1996) examined the perceptions of high school performing arts students with regard to their abilities in the performing arts in comparison with their abilities in core academic areas. The framework provided by the authors equated performing arts students with student athletes when characterized by their non-academic activities in relation to their academic pursuits. They noted that although these students attended a high school, their educational experience was closely comparable to that of a college student due to their emphasis in one area of performing arts and the additional study of core subject areas including math, English, science, and social sciences.

The results of the study showed that students perceived their competency in the performing arts areas in which they declare focus as much greater than all other academic areas as well as other performing arts areas. The study data was collected via a series of
survey questions taken from Vispoel’s Arts Self-Perception Inventory (ASPI). The authors concluded that the ASPI provided a general picture of how performing arts students perceived their individual abilities in both the arts and core academic areas, but note that there is a lack of empirical evidence describing the individual student experiences involved in framing such self-concepts (March & Roche, 1996).

Schjeldahl (1998) commented on the tendency of students in the arts to fail as students in settings where they are not encouraged as artists. He explained that student artists naturally form cohorts or “gangs” with other students studying the same art form and that the formation of this support group can greatly improve the learning experience and rate of success for students in the arts, but that educational officials must not fail to recognize that it is the nature of some artists to fail in the structured higher educational setting yet flourish in an open forum that encourages artistic expression. He recommended that faculty members in higher education should strive to identify students who need the open forum setting to flourish as artists and support the decisions of these young artists to engage in a mode of art not educationally based. Schjeldahl’s commentary was based solely on his experience as a teaching artist and was not supported by academic research.

Johnson (2002) challenged the accountability measures enforced by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in higher education. She charged that the QAA has historically been biased in its measured of student learning outcomes due to a consistent lack of capacity to account for non-traditional modes of learning that do not cease to function at the end of an assignment or at the end of a course calendar. She added that these modes of learning involve skills such as imagination and conceptual abilities, skills that are
highly sought in the “real world” today and should be valued highly by the higher education system. Johnson supported her charge with evidence that the higher education system has become increasingly consumer-based and focused on vocational-type training of students as products to be directly placed into employment. She noted that the irony of this state in that a majority of the skills measured by the QAA instruments are not those that characterize students as “marketable”, but rather identify them as average and minimally qualified.

In efforts to understand the perception of those working in fields where the students are learning skills typically not valued by the QAA, Johnson (2000) interviewed a fine arts faculty member regarding her experience with QAA visits and assessments of her teaching. The results showed that the faculty member acknowledged the validity of the QAA assessment of structural and strategic methods, but was skeptical of any desire or ability on the part of the organization to measure learning activities and approaches not used in most traditional classrooms. Johnson concluded by suggesting that administrators at high education institutions take this concern and skepticism as a serious cue that additional assessment methods may be needed in order to ensure that the student experience with learning, whether traditional or atypical, is fully accounted for and credited with the potential outcomes that it provides.

Raein (2004) argued that students working in the art studio setting are regularly limited in their learning experience due to a misconception that practical learning and theoretical and written learning cannot take place in the same setting. The research presented showed that students learned to a great degree by “doing” in the studio setting and that their work was assessed through a critique process that engaged the student in
dialogue regarding their work rather than traditional quantitative assessment. Raien acknowledged that although these components of studio learning typically apply to the visual art field, they are applicable in a variety of other arts areas and utilized in varying forms by many teachers in the arts. The concluding suggestion was that faculty members in the arts make efforts to integrate both practical learning and theoretical and written learning in order to most effectively prepare students in the arts.

Mckillop (2006) conducted a study of art and design students in order to explore their experiences with assessment in their coursework. The results of the study showed that students overwhelming held a negative perception of assessment experiences within their major. Mckillop noted that the qualitative design of the study was essential in this type of research effort due to the subjective nature of student perceptions. He explained that students involved in fields in which they base much of their work on their personal experiences are prone to be ultrasensitive to the assessment process because ultimately they view the assessment of their work as a critique of their personal thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Mckillop concluded that further research of this nature is essential for faculty to understand the impact that assessment within their major, specifically majors in the arts, has on the overall student experience and ultimately student self-perception of their artistic talent.

Sternbach (2008) reported an explanation of the educational experience of music students from the perspective of a music teacher, music professional, and psychoanalyst. Early in the article Sternbach equated the experiences of music students with those of dance and theatre students. He reported that these students managed the same class loads and social stress as students in other disciplines, however these performing artists also
had to manage their artistic activities. He noted that in contrast to music students, students of theatre and dance had the benefit of engaging in social and communal activities related to their art, while music students spent a majority of their time in isolation while they honed their musical skills.

Sternbach (2008) wrote extensively about the frequent harsh criticism heaped on these performing arts students that lead to excessive self-criticism and potential issues with confidence and self-esteem. He observed however that for many students involved in these stressful areas of study, the presence of stress was a comfort and challenge that drove the students to achieve success. The author advocated that teachers of this type of high-stress student help improve the student experience by reinforcing the importance of positive thinking with regard to their artistic endeavors, thus lightening the negative impact of stress in their daily lives.

Terry Boytenga (2009) investigated the journey of theatre transfer students as they transitioned from a junior college to a four-year institution. She argued that this specific type of study was necessary because there was a distinct lack of research regarding transfer student experience within particular disciplines. She noted that the existing body of literature regarding theatre in higher education was extremely lacking and limited almost entirely to production reviews and reports of design and production innovations. In addition, she noted that the small number of studies that commented on student experience focused on the secondary level of education and of those, few were conducted in the United States.

In a review of literature Terry Boytenga (2009) explained the transfer phenomenon as well as the typical place of theatre as a program in higher education,
expanding, exploring the options of degrees to be earned as well as the general perceptions of what a theatre education provides for a student. With regard to the experiences of transfer students in the theatre discipline, Terry Boytenga’s study revealed a distinct lack of guidance for students at the four-year institution outside of the university office of transfer affairs. He reported that this lack posed substantial problems for transfer students in theatre including difficulties in timely graduation and alienation from the theatre program production activities. Participants in the study reported confusion regarding student expectations within the theatre program related to course enrollment and extra-curricular protocol. The findings supported the assertion that transfer students are in need of discipline-specific guidance immediately upon their arrival at a four-year university.

Terry Boytenga (2009) also revealed that a commonly used resource reported by the transfer students was theatre program Facebook pages. Students reported that they engaged frequently with the Facebook pages in order to obtain information about four-year theatre programs and in some cases to communicate with current students in the programs. This finding supported the claim of transfer students that they were attempting to seek out any available information that might aid their transition and suggests that specific programs work to meet students halfway in their transition from a junior college to a four-year university.

Chapter Summary

The existing body of literature related to the study of theatre students in higher education is limited. The research that has been reported justifies the need for further study of these students by revealing the common conclusion that experiences outside of the traditional classroom have a great impact on the overall collegiate experience of the
student in addition to the student’s success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; DeMoulin, 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ethington & Horn, 2007; Tchibozo, 2007; Steele & Fullagar, 2009; Ferrari et al., 2009; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Kuh et al., 1997; Sutton & Henry, 2005; Lambert et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2007; Wessel et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2009; Smith & Zhang, 2009; Goode, 2010). The literature also provides an argument for the study of students in the arts based on the acknowledgement of soft-skills developed through an arts education that are highly sought by employers in a variety of career fields (Tchibozo, 2007; Steele & Fullagar, 2009; Urice, 2006).

The existing literature supports the qualitative design of the current study through discussion of the benefits of qualitative research in understanding unique experiences of students in higher education (Donald & Denison, 1996; Greenberg et al., 2009; Ferrari et al., 2009; Palmer et al., 2009; Lampert, 2007).

The existing literature provides a small body of findings to be pooled with the findings of the current study in order to provide a more extensive understanding of the experiences of theatre students on the college campus (Urice, 1976; Greene, 1984; Hartley & Greggs, 1997; Bresler, 1998; Garcia, 1999; Pollack et al., 2000; Durden, 2001; Corner, 2005; Collinson, 2005; King et al., 2007; Lampert, 2007; Pitts, 2007; Winner & Hetland, 2008; Edstrom, 2008; Zdriluk, 2010; March & Roche, 1996; Schjeldahl, 1998; Johnson, 2002; Raein, 2004; McKillop, 2006; Sternbach, 2008; Terry Boytenga, 2009). It also provides an overall foundation for the study of students in any discipline through description of the general student experience and identification of factors that impact student gains through their college career (Bowen, 1977; King, 1999; Weaver & Qi, 2005; Anderson et al., 2007; Greenberg et al., 2009; Black, 2010).
The current study has potential to provide useful data for recruitment and retention of theatre students in higher education. This assertion is supported by the existing literature that explores how the student is impacted by a variety of higher education components, most notably faculty/student interaction, classroom experiences, institutional and programmatic structures, and extra curricular involvement (Donald & Denison, 1996; Barunstein & McGrath, 1997; Black, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh et al., 1997). Therefore the findings of the current study will have the potential to aid higher education administrators, faculty, and policymakers in efforts to improve the student experience and possibly increase student success.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose for conducting the study was to explore the collegiate experiences of theatre students studying in a comprehensive university setting. The study was designed to describe the experiences of theatre students in relation to the campus community, including other students, faculty inside and outside the theatre program, and university administrators. The results of the study can be used by university personnel in efforts to enhance recruitment, increase retention, and improve the overall experience of theatre students as well as contribute to the existing discussion regarding the benefits of artistic engagement on the overall experience of all students in higher education.

Chapter III is outlined in six major sections: 1) sample, 2) design, 3) instrumentation and collection of data, 4) data analysis, 5) validity of the study and researcher bias, and 6) chapter summary.

Sample

The site of the study was Northeastern State University (NSU) located in Tahlequah, OK. The institution is Oklahoma’s fourth largest university with an enrollment of just under 10,000 students on three campuses. The pool of participants from which the sample was selected consisted of all undergraduate students studying theatre on NSU’s Tahlequah campus as well as alumni who graduated from the theatre program in the past four years. The pool of alumni was limited to those for which the College of Liberal Arts holds current contact information on file. It was important to
include alumni in order to obtain data representing a full range of student experience including post-graduate perception.

Pitts (2007) and Diramio and Payne (2007) recognized that full involvement in extracurricular activities is necessary in order for the student to reap the full benefits of the college experience. Therefore a purposeful sample was chosen in order to identify undergraduate students who were fully active in theatre program activities and academically full-time students. The total population of students in the theatre program and graduates from the past four years was approximately 50 students. Of those 50, approximately 25 were currently active in the program and 12 were recent graduates.

The study sample included students from all classifications including freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior, as well as alumni. This range of classification ensured that all student levels were represented as well as provided the opportunity for the exploration of differences in student experience related to classification. Eligible students were identified by the researcher and contacted via e-mail to propose participation. As the researcher, I was able to determine eligibility and obtain contact information for students due to my position as theatre program coordinator. Prior to contacting the sample pool, I obtained permission to study the students from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Arkansas, the Institutional Review Board of NSU, and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. I also informed the Chair of the Department of Communication, Art, and Theatre, and the other members of the theatre faculty of the intentions and processes associated with the study.
Design

The study was guided by a qualitative ethnographic design. Creswell (2008) described ethnographic design as a form of qualitative research that is used for “describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group’s shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time” (p.473). Consistent with the description, Creswell cited LeCompte, Priessle, and Tesch (1993) to provide a definition of culture as “everything having to do with human behavior and belief” (p.5). By these descriptions, theatre students qualify as a valid subject for this type of research design as they could be classified as a culture-sharing group as defined by Creswell as “two or more individuals who have shared behaviors, beliefs, and language” (p.480). Specifically the study can be classified as a case study, defined by Creswell as “an in-depth exploration of a bounded system” (p.476). For the study, the system explored was the collegiate journey of theatre students. Creswell noted that a case study is bounded “in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries” (p.476). Because a range of student classifications were represented in the study, it was not bounded by a traditional measure of time, but by a continuum of student career spans, and was bounded physically by programmatic structure and the university itself.

In addition to complimenting the shared-culture of theatre students, the ethnographic design of the study provided me an opportunity to reflexively report my role in the study. Because I am a faculty member in the theatre program as well as an alumnus of the theatre program, my personal reflections on the research process and data collected will augment the study.
Instrumentation and Collection of Data

Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2010) reported that typically the researcher is the primary instrument used in most forms of qualitative research. They explained that the researcher takes on the role of data collector by conducting interviews and/or observations and personally analyzes and interprets the data collected. Accordingly, for this study the researcher served as the instrument of data collection. Data was collected through individual interviews. The interviews were conducted over a course of four weeks. All participants engaged in one face-to-face interview with the researcher. As a result of time constraints and access limitations, follow-up interviews, when deemed necessary, were conducted via e-mail correspondence with participants.

Interview questions, developed by the researcher, explored the academic and extra curricular experiences of the participants. The questions focused on the student’s academic experiences in the classroom, social experiences on campus, extra curricular experiences on campus, and specific program experiences with students and faculty. An interview protocol created by the researcher was used to clarify interview procedures and serve as an additional mode of recording data. The validity of the interview protocol and interview questions was ensured through two techniques. First, the theatre faculty members were asked to evaluate the protocol and questions for clarity to the interviewee and applicability to the research questions. Then, a pilot test of the interview protocol was conducted with one undergraduate student and one alumnus. This test indicated that the interview protocol and questions did yield data applicable to the research questions guiding the study. No revisions were made to the interview protocol and interview
questions as a result of the validity tests, however it was noted that the interview questions did allow for a variety of follow-up questions to be posed to each participant.

All interviews were audio and video recorded in order to utilize nonverbal data as well as verbal data. According to Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2010), the value of nonverbal communication is becoming increasingly recognized as a valuable form of data to be collected through qualitative research. Notes of nonverbal data was recorded on the interview protocol form and added to the interview transcripts when relevant. The interviews began with a series of 10 open-ended questions that allowed for additional questions to be added as prompted by the participant’s answers. As the interview process progressed, it was noted that similar questions were prompted by similar participant responses to the initial interview questions.

Data Analysis

Responses to interview questions were used to address the three research questions guiding the study. Each interview question was linked to a specific research question in the following manner:

Research Question 1, “What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their personal relationships with theatre, non-theatre faculty, and university administrators?” was addressed by asking the following interview questions:

1. Tell me about your interactions with faculty in your major.
2. Tell me about your interactions with faculty outside of your major.
3. How do you think your relationship with theatre faculty differs from that of students in other majors and their major faculty?
4. What kind of experiences have you had with administrators at NSU?
Research Question 2, “What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their academic and extra curricular experiences on campus?” was addressed by asking the following questions:

5. Tell me about your extra-curricular experiences at NSU?
6. Tell me about your academic experiences in your major.
7. Tell me about your academic experiences outside of your major.

Research Question 3, “What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their role in and interaction with the campus environment?” was addressed by asking the following questions:

8. Tell me about your overall experience as a student on NSU’s campus.
9. How do you think your experiences on campus at NSU are different from those of other students in different areas of study?
10. Tell me about your experiences on campus with other students outside of the theatre program.

Once the interviews were complete each audio recording was transcribed by the researcher. These transcriptions were then compared with the video recordings of the interviews for accuracy and to add relevant nonverbal communication notes. These completed transcripts were then e-mailed to the participants in order to utilize member-checking as an additional measure of validity. No major corrections were requested by any of the participants.

After all interviews were transcribed the data was coded for common themes. Three main domains designated by relation to the research questions were used as a basis for initial coding. Following initial coding, new themes were identified that combined
and delineated aspects of the main domains where the collected data merged two topic areas. The following seven themes were identified: 1) the theatre family, 2) a different type of learning, 3) the unique nature of the theatre program, 4) a vast commitment, 5) campus relations, 6) the non-theatre perception, and 7) preparing for the future. These new themes were used as the main outline for presenting the results in Chapter IV.

Validity of the Study and Researcher Bias

The validity of the study was ensured through member checking with participants following data transcription. Participants were provided a full transcript of their interview with the addition of non-verbal notations. No major revisions were requested after review of the transcripts. Minor revisions of grammar and correction of mentioned names/titles were requested.

Due to the connection that I, the sole researcher, have with the theatre program, it is necessary to acknowledge the presence of researcher bias in the study. I am currently a faculty member in the theatre program who interacts on a regular basis with the students. This relationship had a positive impact on the study because students were comfortable in the face-to-face interview setting. A conflict of interest for myself as an instructor of record for many of the students was avoided through the voluntary nature of student participation. It was made clear to students in the initial correspondence regarding their proposed participation that they were in no way required to consent to participate. The initial response resulted in an excess of students willing to participate. Due to time constraints associated with qualitative interview-based research, I selected a group of students whom I judged best represented all classifications of students. In addition to my connection with the program as a faculty member, I am also an alumnus of NSU who
experienced the theatre program between 1996 and 2000. This experience provided me with a unique perspective that aided in the interpretation of data provided by participants. Regarding the ethnographic design of the study, the unique position of myself in relation to the theatre program provided an excellent platform for researcher reflexivity.

Chapter Summary

Chapter III summarized the methods used to explore the collegiate experiences of theatre students in a comprehensive university setting. A sample of actively involved theatre majors and theatre graduates provided data through a series of interviews focused on reflecting the theatre student experience. A qualitative ethnographic research design guided the study. The collected data were analyzed by coding first to apply the data to the identified research questions and then to identify common themes through which the results of the study could be presented. University personnel can use the results of the study in efforts to enhance recruitment, increase retention, and improve the overall experience of theatre students as well as contribute to the current dialogue regarding the impact of artistic engagement on the overall student experience in higher education.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Summary of the Study

Gohn and Albin (2006) acknowledged the existence of a variety of small student subpopulations where students are grouped together through the common thread of a specific degree program. They added that these smaller subpopulations are essentially absent in the existing body of research focused on the current higher education system. In order for higher education to fully serve all students it is vital for all students, including those categorized by these smaller and virtually unknown subpopulations, to be studied in order to provide data that can be used by university personnel to improve the student experience. This study presented an exploration of the collegiate experiences of theatre students (a subpopulation categorized by students engaging in the academic program area of theatre) studying in a comprehensive university setting.

The purpose for conducting the study was to expand the existing body of research focused on student subpopulations by expanding the current system of such groups to include students studying theatre in a collegiate setting. The results of this study provide a narrative explanation of the perceptions that students studying theatre in a collegiate setting have of their educational experience with other students, faculty, and the university campus.

The study was significant in its potential for the improvement of student satisfaction in higher education. University personnel can use the results of the study to increase retention, improve recruitment, and address the overall student experience of those individuals who have chosen to study theatre in higher education. In addition,
positive experiences related to faculty and student interaction shared by participants provide working examples of current practices that may be applicable to program areas other than theatre, thus contributing to the current dialogue regarding the benefits of artistic engagement on the student in higher education.

The study was guided by a qualitative ethnographic design in which theatre students were the culture-sharing group examined. The ethnographic design was appropriate since the common variable for the students being studied was their active participation in the theatre program at the study site. The qualitative nature of the study provided a relevant method of inquiry to account for unique individual perceptions of experiences within the culture-sharing group. The study was also classified as a case study in which the defining system being explored is the collegiate journey of the participants.

Data were gathered through individual face-to-face interviews during which each participant was asked to discuss individual experiences with faculty, administrators, and students, as well as perceptions of their collegiate experiences on campus. Once collected data were verified through individual member checking of all interview transcripts. Follow-up interviews were conducted be means of e-mail if necessary.

Chapter IV provides the results of the study in the following sections: summary of participants and data collection, data analysis, and chapter summary.

Summary of Participants and Data Collection

All participants were current students or alumni of the theater program at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. A total of 11 individuals participated in the study. Prior to each interview, participants were asked to sign an
informed consent form for both the University of Arkansas and Northeastern State University study protocols found in Appendix A and Appendix B. Each participant engaged in one 15 to 20 minute face-to-face interview with the researcher. Each interview was audio and video recorded and took place in the office of the researcher located in the Shawnee Street Theatre. Of the 11 participants, all classification levels were represented: three alumni, three seniors, one junior, one sophomore, and three freshmen. Each participant was given a code to be used for identification. The letters A through K were assigned to participants at the time of the initial interviews. Of the 11 participants, three were male and eight were female; all of the participants had been involved in theatre on some level during their high school careers; two of the participants began their careers at NSU as transfer students; six of the participants were double majors; two participants were involved in the Greek fraternal system; and one participant was a non-traditional student as defined by age.

Interviews were guided by the interview protocol found in Appendix C. Participants were allowed to respond to each question with no imposed time constraints. Although the interview protocol was used as a guide, questions were added and altered at the researcher’s discretion during each individual interview. The question “Do you think you have had a typical college experience” was added to all interviews beginning with participant “D.” At the end of the interview participants were given the opportunity to add any commentary that they deemed relevant to the understanding of the collegiate experiences of theatre students. Some participants took this time to reinforce the demanding nature of theatre studies:
We work our butts off! I think a lot of people look at theatre as grown-ups kind of playing make believe. They don’t realize the time and effort that go into it, which I guess is kind of what we want them to believe, but man, if it isn’t living the life of the underappreciated! (Participant C)

Others took the opportunity to provide words of wisdom for potential students: “It can be difficult, but it’s really worth it, if you really want it” (Participant F).

Following the collection of data through the initial interviews, five participants were contacted in order to clarify or expand their comments on particular questions. The most common question requiring additional explanation was “Tell me about your extra-curricular experiences on campus.” Four of the five participants contacted for clarification provided little response to the initial question. When approached about expanding their responses and asked why they did not discuss their theatre activities in response to the question about extra-curricular activities they each provided a similar explanation to that of Participant B:

I actually wasn’t really involved in extra-curricular activities…most of my time was spent at the theatre. Most people think of theatre as an extra-curricular activity, like my parents, but it’s a major, something you can do as a career, not just a hobby.

The final data were then coded in order to identify common themes. After initial coding to relate data to the three research questions, a second stage of coding was conducted and the following seven themes were identified: 1) the theatre family, 2) a different type of learning, 3) the unique nature of the theatre program, 4) a vast commitment, 5) campus relations, 6) the non-theatre perception, and 7) preparing for the future. The following section of Chapter IV, Data Analysis, describes the results in terms of these categories and then relates the data to the three research questions.
Data Results

The Theatre Family

Participants were asked questions concerning their experiences with faculty members in the theatre program as well as with those outside of the theatre program. A common theme that surfaced in the responses to these questions identified a perception of a close relationship with theatre faculty. Of the 11 participants, 10 described their relationship with theatre faculty as unique. Participant D, a male sophomore, explained his alternative perception of faculty/student interaction:

I seem to get along with a lot of my teachers. I seem to get along with my major professors like their friends rather than my professors and in my major courses people are a little more laid back. There’s not major differences though. I really think it depends on the people, not the major, as to whether the students and faculty get along and how they interact with each other.

The discussion of the close relationship with the theatre faculty led to reference of the theatre program as a family unit consisting of faculty and students working together to achieve a common goal. Participants showed positive non-verbal signs when discussing the theatre faculty including smiling, physical energy, and laughter. Participants described their relationships with theatre faculty members through a variety of equivalents. Participant B, a female alumnus, equated theatre faculty with parents:

I’ve always had really good connections with the theatre faculty. You guys are always willing to help. I believe in school teachers should be there to help you pass. We are all on a first name basis [with the theatre faculty]. They care about your school as well as your life in general. They are more like parents than just teachers.

Participant I, a male alumnus, described theatre faculty as mentors:

My relationship with the theatre faculty was very close and personal. I practically lived inside the theatre. I had a very close relationship with all of my instructors compared to with teachers outside of my major. In the general elective classes I had not that close of a relationship with the faculty, just more of a student teacher
thing, but in the theatre class it was more of a mentorship with the instructors. In
the classroom I felt like I could walk up to my major instructors much more easily
because they knew me, I knew the, and I knew how to converse with them. With
other teachers I was little less comfortable approaching them.

The adjectives “comfortable” and “approachable” were used repeatedly by participants:

“My interaction with the theatre faculty was right off very comfortable when I came in.
They were always there and ready to talk. Very approachable” (Participant A).

Supplementing the use of these casual adjectives was a common reference to the informal
use of first names with the theatre faculty. This practice was described as an asset in
reinforcing the close relationship between faculty members and students:

We are all on a first name basis. It was actually the second semester that one of
our new faculty was here before I really connected his last name with his first
name! I think that makes us more comfortable with you guys because we work
around you all the time. It’s hard to not be close to the theatre faculty.
(Participant C)

Participants made regular comparisons between theatre faculty and faculty in other
programs. Some of these discussions concluded with direct reference of the theatre
program as being similar to a family:

In theatre the faculty are a whole lot more approachable. I call all my theatre
teachers by their first names whereas in English they’re approachable because
they are lax and cool most of the time but there is that line between theatre and
teacher that is clearly there but in theatre that line is a little different because I feel
like I can like go up and hug you or pop my head into Chris’ office and say hey or
see Tim out shopping or something and it’s normal. If I see my English teachers
outside of like class then it’s kind of weird. It’s much more of a family
atmosphere in the theatre. (Participant G)

Participant I explained that the faculty/student interactions contribute to the family-like
atmosphere in the theatre program:

The current theatre faculty is great. They will do anything they can to help you
achieve your goals. They are knowledgeable and provide opportunities to apply
what is being taught to real life situations. They put a lot of work into what they
do, which causes the students to respect them and want to make them proud by
putting their all into it. It becomes like a family environment because you have to trust, depend, and believe in one another to be successful.

Participant F, a female freshman, joked about how much the theatre program functions like a typical family unit:

In here it’s like one big happy family, sometimes dysfunctional, but happy! I mean, we all have our bad days, and occasionally mom and the dad’s get mad at the kids, but we all love each other in the end. If we didn’t enjoy it then we wouldn’t do what we do!

This discussion of the theatre program as a family was not limited to faculty student interaction and noted that student interaction mirrored a family unit as well: “I love all the theatre people. One of the older theatre students is kind of like my mom because she sort of took me in and helped lead me when I started the program” (Participant F).

Participant G, a female junior double majoring in theatre and English, described her perception of the difference in the student interactions within the theatre program versus student interactions within the English program:

I have friends who are biology majors and they are really competitive whereas in theatre we are really competitive with each other but we are also a family with each other and with our teachers. Most theatre people hang out with theatre people all the time. You’re not going to have English people that hang out with each other outside of class and maybe studying but in theatre we go to renaissance fairs and parties and stuff together and spend lots of time with each other outside of the required time with our major and with the teachers it’s sort of the same thing. We spend lots more time with our teachers outside of class and that just makes us all so much closer.

A Different Type of Learning

Along with commentary on student/teacher relationships in the theatre program, participants also discussed their experiences in the classroom. Questions were asked about student experiences in both theatre and non-theatre classes. Participants responded with comments about the different types of learning experiences that they had
encountered in the theatre classroom and the general education classroom. In addition to this comparison, the four participants who were double majors also compared their experiences in each major. Participant A, who majored in theatre and history, explained that it was difficult to compare different academic settings:

It’s hard to compare the rigor in the general education and history and theatre. History would be trying to read and memorize and figure things out. With theatre you were trying to create things, and well, you had to memorize a lot, but in a different way; it was kind of like using a different muscle, being creative and making things. In theatre you didn’t necessarily have to be more studious but you had to create things and pull things out of thin air and sometimes spend more time on things where in history it was more analyzing and finding a hard answer to things. Within the theatre department a lot of our coursework is either group work or group projects—very project oriented. Whereas in the history department it was really you read and write a paper. Not to say that there aren’t theatre classes such as theatre history that were more structured like typical classes, but things like directing and acting were very different.

Participant G relayed her perception of the differences in teaching style within major and non-major classes:

I think there are differences in the way major classes and gen ed classes are taught. In major classes you can learn all of your students and make changes in the way you teach to tailor your class to the students that you have. In a gen ed class it’s hard to do that without taking up too much time and not getting to cover everything you need to cover in the class. Even in my English classes they teach tailored to the students to help us all learn better. In my theatre classes it’s even better because they are smaller.

In a similar manner Participant C, a female senior, discussed her impression of general education courses and her perception of the impact that teaching style can have on the student experience:

I hate most of my gen ed classes because their gen eds. They’re not necessarily difficult, but I’m already bored with the subject. I was trying to be a business minor for a long time and I couldn’t find a professor in the department that I liked the way they taught. They were just kind of dry. I guess I’ve been kind of spoiled by all of my professors in my theatre classes where we can just have a conversation about a subject instead of being lectured at. The majority of classes that aren’t theatre are mostly just lecture. There may on occasion be some little
group project that you have to present and you have to work on it out of class. But mostly it’s just lecture, note-taking and paper writing. And a lot of the time the professors have been doing this long enough that they have it very prescribed. They have it so planned out of what is going to fill the class time exactly, so there isn’t any time for extra discussion or questions. Where in theatre classes it’s kind of an immersive learning. Instead of just writing, you actually get up and act a scene or make yourself old using makeup or build a prop. It’s more hands on and practical.

Participant D noted the unique nature of the content of theatre classes: “I get to take classes where I get to ‘feel.’ I get to cry in class! I’m pretty sure other people don’t get to do that. You get to do crazier stuff in theatre classes. It’s fun!” He also noted the importance of practical experience within theatre coursework: “I’m a very tactile learner, so I need a really hands on experience in class. My theatre classes come to me easier because they have more hands-on activity.”

A common topic discussed in response to questions regarding academic experiences was the motivation to learn. Participants discussed the impact of subject on their individual desire to succeed:

There is more motivation to go to the classes that you really want to go to. The theatre classes are always fun. Like my Comp II class, I don’t have any friends in there so there’s not a whole lot of motivation to go. (Participant F)

Participant G explained that although she has had success in most of her classes, the motivation for that success has differed:

I’ve taken 77 hours in 3 semesters and have a 3.9 GPA. My theatre classes are my favorite part of school because I learn so many neat and interesting things in them and it doesn’t feel like I’m in a classroom. There’s a difference in workload but also in “caring “load. I do good in my English and theatre classes because I want to know the information but I try hard in my gen ed classes because I want the A.

Participant B explained that motivation as well as the structure of the course and style of teaching had a great impact on her success in the classroom. She also noted the importance of practical experience in the classroom:
In my theatre degree I made As and Bs. Not because it was easy, but I learned that if subjects are more interesting to me I tended to do better with my grades. And actually there were more opportunities for me to get better grades in theatre classes because you had more homework and projects and points for being in class. Where in science you have basically four tests and a final so you don’t really have a chance to improve your grade. For someone like me who doesn’t do well in a lecture setting, it’s harder for me. My grades aren’t as good in science as they were in theatre. I’ve never flunked a class. Gen ed classes were basically blow-off classes. I was engaged in my science classes, but humanities and English and history and those the teacher would just drone on and on. In science, especially like labs we are using our hands and I learned way more in those types of classes because they were like theatre classes where we learned in a more hands-on way.

*The Unique Nature of the Theatre Program*

Two aspects of the theatre program already discussed include faculty/student relationship and student experiences in the classroom. An addition to discussing these aspects independently participants also discussed them in comparison with other programs on campus. These discussions led to the further identification of the theatre program as unique by multiple means. Participants showed non-verbal signs of confidence in their discussions of this topic including an opening up of the body position, crossing of legs and a leaning back of the torso, and a shaking of the head as a precursor to their statements about theatre is a unique program. Participant B, a double major in theatre and organismic biology compared interactions with theatre and non-theatre faculty in the classroom:

The science teachers try to make you fail. They are here basically just to do their research. I know one example in an ecology class, one of my teachers Dr. Smith, freaked out on someone because they called her Mrs. Smith. And I mean I always call her doctor, because she earned that, but for her to freak out on everyone because someone called her that is ridiculous. I’ve noticed with majors that are, I don’t want to say not as hard, but more for left-brained people, they are more open to you interpreting the material and trying to make sure you are learning instead of worrying about their research and their own stuff. Theatre teachers really want you to succeed and you can tell by the way they treat you in the classroom. I had a friend who was an English major and she was very close to her
professors; they were like that and I know people in the art department that are like that.

In a similar manner Participant C explain her perception of the possibility for the theatre student/faculty relationship to be mirrored in other programs:

I think the student faculty dynamic is very different in theatre. I think the same relationship that we have with theatre faculty is possible with other areas but it is more likely on a smaller scale. Like as an English major you would probably be really close to your advisor but not really know any of the other faculty very well. Whereas with theatre we know all of you well, not just our advisors because we see you so much outside of class. I can see how music is a lot closer to the way theatre is because their students have a lot of one on one time with faculty, so I can see how that would let their students be closer to their faculty as well. But with theatre you spend a lot of time with faculty because there is work call and rehearsal and you work on a lot of things outside of class.

Participant A who worked in an institutional position at the university’s Jazz Lab where she interacted daily with students and faculty in the jazz program also reported the perception that the music program might come close to mirroring the theatre program student/faculty dynamic:

There were other departments such as music, those in the arts, where students were less formal in addressing and approaching faculty. There was less differences between certain music faculty members and theatre faculty. There were the music faculty who were more relaxed and hung-out with the students. But there were still some [music faculty members] that kept strictly to the formal student-teacher relationship. In music, the performance faculty were more laid-back whereas those teaching the music theory classes and stuff were the more standard interactions with students. With theatre faculty, I always felt very comfortable talking to all theatre faculty whereas I don’t think a music major would have felt comfortable talking with all the music faculty.

Participant H, a female senior, agreed with this perception that the student/faculty dynamic in theatre would be difficult to replicate in other programs:

I think that maybe the closest to the relationship between theatre faculty and theatre students would be something in the arts. I think the big difference is that we are all so passionate about what we do. I guess don’t really see anyone being really passionate about something like math. I don’t think the relationship could even start to be possible with other majors.
Of the 11 participants, five noted a perception of the type of program coming closest to mirroring aspects of the theatre program would be an athletic team. Participant J, a male senior double majoring in theatre and accounting, began his college career as a member of the NSU soccer team and he discussed the similarities between theatre and sports:

From my experience I would say it somewhat resembles like being on a school sports team. It’s a group of people that are trying to achieve the same goal. You all have to work as a team and end up functioning like a family. In both situations you also have moments during the year that you are a representative of the school and student body to outsiders. And you form bonds with the other students that will last forever. I’m still friends with guys I played soccer with and I know that I have formed theatre friendships that will last a long time too.

Participant C also discussed the similarities between theatre and athletics by noting the emphasis on teamwork:

Theatre is like playing a sport. You learn teamwork and you have to work as a team in this department or nothing gets done. A lot of pressure is put on you to work together especially when it comes to a show, to get the show together, to get the set together to get the lights together or you’re going to have a really crap show. In the science department they work together maybe on research or something and yeah, they’re working for the greater good or whatever, but their interaction isn’t quite like ours.

Participant D, a member of a Greek fraternity, noted his perception of the main difference between the theatre program as a group and the other groups in which he is involved:

I’m ridiculously involved on campus. I’m involved in the Greek system and have been really involved in lots of activities. The major difference I’ve seen between theatre and other activities is that in theatre we all seem to get along better. Here it seems to be a group effort and everyone respects that. I mean there are bossy people but everyone doesn’t let that ruin it. We still all are trying to get the same thing done.

A Vast Commitment

In connection with the unique nature of the theatre program, participants specifically noted the massive individual commitment perceived as a necessity for a
student actively participating in the theatre program at NSU. Participants were each asked about their involvement in extra curricular activities on campus. The response to this question frequently referenced the large time commitment required to be involved in the theatre program. On the topic of extra curricular activities, Participant B clarified her perception of theatre within that group of activities:

I actually wasn’t really involved in extra-curricular activities…most of my time was spent at the theatre. Most people think of theatre as an extra-curricular activity, like my parents, but it’s a major, something you can do as a career, not just a hobby.

Of the 11 participants, six identified various honors societies and social clubs on campus in which they were involved in some manner. Five of these six participants discussed the difficulty in juggling other activities in conjunction with theatre activities. Participant F, a female freshman who is a member of a Greek sorority, noted this difficulty but concluded that ultimately it comes down to prioritizing your activities:

It’s hard to be in a sorority and be able to balance it all. But my sorority sisters know that I’m a theatre kid and that’s where my priorities lie. Sometimes you have two things that you need to do but some things take priority. Like a performance takes priority over anything else, but maybe during rehearsals something else might take priority. Work-call takes up a lot of time as a theatre major. It’s a lot to juggle.

“Work-call” is a designated period of time that occurs two days each week during which theatre students and faculty work in a completely hands-on manner on the current theatre production that the program is producing. Each work-call session lasts approximately five hours. During this time students and faculty members work side-by-side on all technical aspects of theatrical production. Students are divided into crews that are led and supervised by faculty members. Each crew is responsible for one area of technical theatre including scenery, lighting, costumes, and properties. This activity is
required for majors who are receiving a scholarship from the theatre program and encouraged for other students who want to be involved in the theatre program. All participants in this study were active majors receiving theatre scholarships, therefore each participant regularly attended work-call sessions. Work-call is recognized by the theatre faculty as an important social aspect of the program as well as an absolutely necessary practical application of theory and coursework. Participant I provided a student perspective on the impact that work-call has on a theatre major:

I really enjoyed the camaraderie that was involved with being a theatre student. There of course is an ebb and flow with students graduating and new students coming in. Work-call really establishes that I think. When I came into the program we had work-call everyday and I think with that you get a great mindset of working almost in overdrive and the atmosphere was certainly all about working but everyone experienced a bonding process related to that. I think that type of regular interaction for us students outside of classes was really important in all of us getting to know each other and to get along when we were working on shows. We learned a lot too. In work-call you get to do things that you’ve never done before and by the time you graduate you know how to actually build stuff and hang lights and stuff. It’s pretty cool to really know you learned something and can actually do it!

In reference to the overall large time commitment required of theatre majors, Participant I provided his perception of the value of this investment by the student:

I think the time commitment to being a theatre major is justified through the mindset of wanting to learn things. Theatre is really hands-on and if you want to learn it, then the amount of time doesn’t bother you.

Participant G reported that the end justifies the means when it comes to the time consuming life of a theatre major:

If you want to be a good theatre major you have to devote a lot of time to being a theatre major. You have to go to work call and do shows and stuff and it does take a lot of time but you have to do those things if you want to get out of here and have that practical experience that will help you get a job. My high school teacher told me that [in college] I would spend every waking hour in the theatre and I was like I already spend every waking hour in the theatre in high school and then I got here and I was like oh my gosh, I am spending every free second in the theatre,
and I love it! I wouldn’t want it any other way. I feel lucky to be doing what I love on a daily basis.

_Campus Relations_

As a performing arts-based unit, a college theatre program is a visible aspect of any campus. The program presents theatrical productions that are attended by the campus and local communities. Participants were asked about their interactions with the campus as a theatre major and to discuss their perception of support for the theatre program from the campus community. Of the 11 participants, eight discussed a perception of indifference regarding support from administrators with the exception of the Dean of Liberal Arts and the President of the university. Three of the participants noted no interaction with administrators thus far in their college career. Two participants showed non-verbal signs of disapproval including a shifting and tensing of body posture when the topic of administrative support was introduced. Overall the common perception was that there is some support from administrators but a perceived lack of awareness of the theatre program. Participant H relayed an incident where she interacted with administrators as a theatre student and her perception of their support for the program:

Dr. Westbrook (the Dean of Liberal Arts) always recognizes me and knows me even though he doesn’t really have to and I think that’s good. He comes to all of our shows and sometimes to our company meetings and stuff. He seems to really like what we do and be interested in the theatre program. I haven’t had too many interactions with other administrators except for Dr. Betz (the President of NSU). He and his wife come to shows, especially the summer shows, and that’s kind of neat that he takes the time to do that. The only times I’ve really actually talked to him is during the Christmas Lights On ceremony when I’ve played Mrs. Claus, so I’ve only ever talked to him like while I was in costume and in character, so I guess that counts as interaction!
Participant I reported a similar perception of administrative support but noted his assumption that the theatre program was not alone in the limited visibility of administrators at program events:

The only interactions that I really had with administrators was Dr. Westbrook. When he would come to shows I got to converse and get to know him a little bit. Other than him, the support of the administration for the theatre program hasn’t been overly strong. The president and one of the vice presidents every once in a while comes to shows and sees what we are doing, but I don’t think it’s really much beyond that. And I’m sure that’s how it is with other programs too because they are so busy and have so much going on. They don’t really have time to figure out what’s really going on with every program and come to everything.

Three participants reported an exceptionally positive perception of most administrators on campus. Participant B discussed her perception of the mindset of most administrators and specifically accessibility to theatre students:

I haven’t really had any problems with administrators. I’ve always, if I had an issue, been able to go to higher ups and it will be taken care of. The administrators now, especially with the president, are all about students and getting them through college and getting them a job when they get through. As theatre students, anytime we needed help we could go to Theatre Coordinator or the Dean and they would listen to you and try to help you. They don’t just say, oh, you’re a student and you don’t matter. They really care about us and want to help us. It was nice to know that. I don’t think other students really had that. I know that I didn’t feel that way with my science stuff. I actually went to the Theatre Coordinator with some of my problems with science stuff and she helped me get through those things.

In contrast to this discussion of a supportive, student-focused administration, three of the participants reported problems with faculty members outside of the program. In these scenarios the student perceived the problem to be a result of their choice of major. Participant C reported assumptions cast upon her as a student due to the fact that she had chosen theatre as a major:

Most teachers seem to not really treat you much differently because you’re a theatre major, but I’ve had a couple that have made a joke or something like the first day of class when they have you say your name and your major and
something about yourself sort of thing. They act like it’s not a real major or
something. I think that to a certain extent they sometimes underestimate me for
being a theatre major or categorize me as being a dreamer type or less focused
than I really am. But I think that is something that theatre people in general have
to deal with. I’ve heard other students talk about similar situations. I guess it’s
stereotyping and we all do it anyway, but it makes you feel like you have to prove
yourself or something. Just makes for unneeded pressure.

Participant B relayed a more negative perception of some faculty members’ attitudes
towards theatre:

In one of my science classes we were going out to the Illinois river to
electroshock fish and my teacher asked me about my double major and what it
was and I said it was theatre and she gave me sort of a sneer and I was like, well
what’s wrong with being a theatre major? Do you watch TV? That’s theatre. It’s
an art. Without theatre and art this would be the most boring place on earth. It’s
an escape. Then she just sort of rolled her eyes and walked away. I think a lot of
people in the science department just look down their nose at theatre and think it’s
beneath them.

Overall the participants’ perceptions of support for the theatre program from faculty and
students campus-wide was positive. Two of the participants noted a perception that other
students and some faculty members view theatre as exciting and seem interested in
theatre activities:

Sometimes my other friends outside of theatre will excuse my craziness because
I’m a theatre kid. The teachers usually get excited when they find out I’m a
theatre major. They all think we’re insane but they ask about shows and stuff.
The students get excited too. A lot of them say they didn’t even know you could
major in theatre. It’s always fun during show weeks when I get to do my PR pitch
in all my classes! It’s neat to see other students at shows, and teachers too.
(Participant F)

Participant B reported the same fascination of peers with theatre as a chosen major
despite her negative encounters with the faculty in her second major:

A lot of students in the science department have come to see the shows and they
think it’s fascinating because my majors are so far apart. Deep down I think
everyone wants to be an actor. I’ve never really had any problems with my peers
finding it beneath them or thinking it’s not a real major, just teachers sometimes.
But a lot of the teachers come to shows too and they seem to think it’s neat, especially like English teachers and stuff.

Participant E, a female freshman double majoring in theatre and English education, reported a contradiction in some students’ attitudes towards theatre as a major:

In classes people always seem interested when I say I’m a theatre major. A lot of people will say they want to come to shows and some of them do, but at the same time, most of them also always say well, what are you going to do with that? Like being a theatre major’s not something real to do. That makes you feel kind of frustrated because they obviously like watching plays, but then don’t think you’re getting a “real” degree or something.

Four participants reported some type of commentary relating to recognition on campus as a result of performing in theatre productions. Participant A stated, “It was always weird when people would recognize you from a show. It was kind of embarrassing and at the same time you couldn’t believe it. You were famous for like a day!”

In addition to recognition on campus and the encountered attitudes of faculty members and peers, participants also discussed campus relations in terms of involvement. Seven of the 11 participants noted a feeling of isolation or separation as a theatre major from the rest of campus. Participant A explained this feeling as a result of the physical location of the theatre facilities and noted her perception of her own connection as a student to the rest of the campus:

I always felt a little bit removed from the campus because the theatre was on the fringe of campus. I think the theatre being off-site from the rest of the campus lends to the theatre program being a little separated from the rest of campus and people almost forgetting about it. As far as being connected to the university, a lot of other people had strong ties to NSU, but I had strong ties to the theatre department, not necessarily to the university. Instead of saying that I was part of NSU I would say that I am a part of the theatre department at NSU. My freshman year I a couple of friends in my dorm that I hung out with pretty regularly. I didn’t really have any friends other than that outside of theatre after my freshman
year except for some of the history majors that I met once I added the history major. Mainly because I was always doing theatre stuff.

Participant C provided a similar account as well as a possible explanation for this feeling of isolation:

We’re kind of separate from campus to an extent. Most of our spaces are off campus. I think most theatre majors, if they are on campus it’s because we are dealing with something like the bookstore or going to a class. Everything else is pretty much just at the theatre. We basically live there! We eat there, nap there, study there; we always talk about how they should make us a theatre dorm at the Shawnee Street Theatre! I don’t think we really like going on campus. It always seems like a hassle.

Of the 11 participants, four expressed a strong disinterest in campus life outside of the theatre program. Participant G discussed this attitude in reference to her personal investment in NSU:

I’m invested in NSU so much as I go to school here and I might as well care about it while I’m here. But I don’t plan on ever coming back because Tahlequah is way too small for me. I mean, I like NSU. I like that it’s small enough that I can get anywhere on campus in 10 minutes or less and I like that I can walk into the cafeteria and know like 40 people in there, but I don’t plan on sticking around here after graduation. I know that I’ll keep in touch with theatre faculty and students, but probably not with anyone else on campus.

Participant H reported that her desire to engage in theatre overshadowed other activities on campus and noted her perception of the potential difficulty in balancing additional activities:

I was involved in mainly theatre stuff. Not really anything outside of that. I just wasn’t really interested in other things. I just wanted to do theatre. I came to school knowing that so I never really even tried to get involved in anything else. Besides, I think it would be hard to juggle other things with theatre. There would be a lot of conflicts so you couldn’t be fully committed to anything. I wouldn’t want to be like that.
The Non-Theatre Perception

Participants were eager to discuss their perception of the non-theatre person’s ideas about what being a theatre major entails. All 11 participants reported the perception that individuals not involved in college-level theatre do not have a clear idea of what being a theatre major entails. Five participants were noted for showing non-verbal signs of frustration when the subject of non-theatre perceptions was broached including a negative shaking of the head and throwing back of the upper body. Specifically, participants discussed a lack of recognition of the amount of time and energy that is involved in being a theatre student:

There’s a whole lot more time put into theatre than people think. I tell someone I’m a theatre major and they are like oh, that’s so cool, but they don’t realize that I’m at the theatre like all day five or six days a week. People don’t realize that it takes so much time to be a good theatre major. I mean you could take classes and stuff and not do any extra things, but you wouldn’t get any of the hands on experience that we get. It’s hard work and it’s definitely not for everybody. It takes the right kind of person to make it through as a theatre major. (Participant G)

Participant I discussed his perception that there is a moment when an audience member develops an appreciation for theatre practitioners:

I don’t think people outside of theatre really understand the time commitment until they actually get involved. I think they have an idea but don’t really experience that a-ha moment until they do it. Then after that they have a real appreciation for theatre.

Four participants expressed a frustrated perception that non-theatre individuals assume that majoring in theatre is quite easy:

I think most people think theatre is probably something pretty easy to do. They think oh, well anyone can act, but if they tried to step into it they would fall on their ass. They don’t realize that you have to be totally immersed in it to do it well. I don’t think they would have any idea of how much time you have to spend on it. But it’s worth it. (Participant H)
One male participant reported the frequent stereotypical perception by non-theatre individuals that because he is a male theatre student he must be homosexual. Participant H attempted to explain this perception:

I think other students have a broad scope of what theatre students are like all the guys are queens and everyone sings show tunes or walks around in renaissance garb. They seem to think that lots of people in theatre, guys especially, are gay. I’ve never really understood that one.

Preparing for the Future

The college experience is meant to ultimately prepare each student to step into the world as a well-prepared member of society. Participants in the study were asked to discuss their college experience and their perception of the level of preparedness their chosen program of study had provided. The three alumni interviewed reported a positive perception of being prepared to seek out employment in the professional theater world.

Participant A discussed the value she had found in her undergraduate theatre experiences:

In theatre you learn to work with others and to discuss and it helps prepare you to work with others on a job. In a work setting you have to rely on other people. The theatre department was much more project-oriented and focused on working in groups than other classes. Being able to discuss and be analytical was really helpful when I moved on to grad school because it was structured in a similar way where you discuss in a forum and maybe write something. I also found myself using the creative skills I built at NSU in projects and stuff like making displays; things that weren’t really traditional theatre, because I was in a history grad program, but I was still using my theatre training. Now I’ve been out of NSU for a couple years and out of my masters for about five months, now with my job at the museum I find myself using my theatre training a lot in my day to day job. I can do things that maybe a typical worker wouldn’t be able to do. I think theatre taught my to get up and do things without being specifically told how to do it. I think a lot of people might say, oh, a theatre major, that won’t ever get you a job, but I think it really can help, maybe not just to get the job, but once you are on the job. It has been quite beneficial in that regard.

Seven of the 11 participants reported a perception that they have had a typical college experience thus far in their educational career. Of those seven, four noted one common
major difference in their college experience: they feel that they have built stronger
relationships than students in other majors and possibly have developed into more well-
rounded individuals. Participant B noted this perception:

I’ve had my crazy drunk college nights that every college student goes through. I
think theatre students have a pretty typical college experience. I’ve made better
friendships and learned more and grown more as a person than I would have if I
hadn’t been in theatre.

Participant K reported a similar perception:

I think I have had a pretty typical college experience. In theatre we work hard and
play hard. It has also given me my best memories from college and I have
experienced things I will never forget. I have built better relationships with
students and faculty in theatre than in anything else. I have friendships developed
that will last the rest of my life. It also puts you out into situations to meet a wide
range of people. It has also taught me to be more creative, trust in yourself and to
be a more confident person overall.

In contrast, two participants reported a perception that their college experience has not
been typical due to their involvement in theatre. Both individuals discussed this atypical
label as a positive aspect of their experience:

I wouldn’t say I had a typical college experience. There were definitely times that
I drank too much and those types of things. But even then, it was with theatre
people. A lot of people can’t say that 90% of the time that they were in college,
they were in a show and that’s just fine with me. I’m fine with being as busy as I
was. It’s what I wanted to do and I got to do it!

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What were the perceptions of theatre students regarding their
personal relationships with theatre faculty, non-theatre faculty, and university
administrators?

The data showed that theatre students perceive an intensely positive personal
relationship with all theatre faculty members. This perception was consistent among all
participants. Theatre faculty members were discussed in terms of being equivalent to parents, role models, and mentors.

With regard to non-theatre faculty members, the data showed an inconclusive collection of both positive and negative perceptions. Participants did report a positive perception of support for the theatre program from non-theatre faculty members due to attendance of theatre activities.

The data showed an uncertain perception of relationships with administrators with the exception of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Participants reported a strong positive relationship with the Dean but a less consistent pattern of engagement with other administrators.

*Research Question 2: What were the perceptions of theatre students regarding their academic and extra curricular experiences on campus?*

The data showed that theatre students perceived their extra curricular experiences on campus as limited due to their involvement in theatre. This is not to say that students did not report extra curricular engagement. Students reported regular involvement in honors societies and campus social groups and it was noted that extracurricular involvement was complicated by the extreme time commitment required of a theatre major.

The data showed a variety of academic experiences reported by theatre students. Typically accounts of theatre-related academic experiences were positive. Students discussed the variety of learning activities utilized in the theatre classroom in contrast to traditional teaching methods used in some non-theatre classrooms. Students reported a positive experience with theatre faculty members in the classroom and noted deviations
from traditional classroom characteristics such as the use of first names, the number of creative exercises, and the regular incorporation of group activities. With regard to non-theatre classes, students reported isolated incidents of discrimination and misjudged expectations by teachers as a result of being a theatre major.

In relation to academic and extracurricular experiences, participants discussed a positive perception of preparation for employment provided by the theatre program. *Research Question 3: What were the perceptions of theatre students regarding their role in and interaction with the campus environment?*

The data showed an inconsistent perception of campus interactions. A majority of students reported a sense of separation from the campus community resulting from the isolated location of theatre facilities as well as the time-consuming nature of theatre activities. Although most students reported some involvement on campus, overall it was limited and data showed a minor pattern of disengagement with the campus in terms of personal investment.

The data showed the perception of a positive relationship between theatre students and their non-theatre peers on campus. Students reported positive daily interactions as well as a perception of average support for theatre activities.

**Chapter Summary**

The study was a qualitative examination of the perceptions of 11 theatre students regarding their experiences in a collegiate theatre program. The participants included representative from all ranges of student classification as well as both male and female students. The participants were interviewed in a face-to-face setting and provided additional data via e-mail when necessary. All interviews were video and audio taped and
transcribed fully by the researcher. Final transcripts were verified using member checking. The collected data was initially coded into three main domains related to the research questions and then coded further into seven smaller thematic groups.

The results of the study showed an overall positive perception of the collegiate experience by theatre majors. Theatre students perceived some level of campus support for the theater program activities in which they are engaging on a daily basis despite a moderate pattern of disengagement with the campus. Academic experiences reported by theatre majors presented a positive perception of the teaching styles and classroom techniques utilized by theatre faculty members. Theatre students did acknowledge a massive time commitment involved with majoring in theatre on the collegiate level and perceived a notable lack of awareness by non-theatre individuals regarding this time commitment. The data showed a positive perception of preparedness for the future provided by theatre program studies.

The results of the study have been reported in the form of raw data categorized according to common themes. This data is discussed in terms of relation to existing research and implications for future application in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter of the study provides a discussion of the implications of the results reported in Chapter IV. Following a summary of the study, results are discussed in terms of common themes and in relation to the reviewed existing literature. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of recommendations for application of the results of the study, reflections of the researcher’s experience, suggestions for further research, and a final summary of Chapter V.

Summary of the Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for conducting the study was to explore the collegiate experiences of theatre students in a comprehensive university setting. Given the limited body of existing literature focused on theatre students on a collegiate level, the study expands the current available research on this topic. The results of the study support the identification of theatre students as a specific subpopulation of the university student body worthy of further study.

Significance of the Study

The study was significant in its potential for improving the student experience in higher education. The results of the study provided a narrative of student perceptions that can be considered by university personnel in efforts to enhance the recruitment, retention, and satisfaction of theatre students. In addition to the potential positive impact on the experiences of theatre students, the results may be applicable to other areas of study where students engage in similar activities and circumstances and may contribute to the
existing dialogue regarding the benefits of artistic engagement on the students experience in higher education.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews conducted with 11 participants. Participants included active theatre students and alumni who graduated with a theatre degree within the last four years. All undergraduate classification levels were represented in the pool of participants. Interviews were video and audio taped and lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes each. Participants were contacted via e-mail for follow-up interview questions. Each interview was fully transcribed by the researcher and interview transcripts were sent to participants via e-mail for validation.

Once the data were collected and validated, they were coded into three main domains related to the research questions guiding the study. Data were then further coded into seven themes: 1) the theatre family, 2) a different type of learning, 3) the unique nature of the theatre program, 4) a vast commitment, 5) campus relations, 6) non-theatre perception, and 7) preparing for the future. The study results were reported in Chapter IV in terms of these seven themes.

Assessment of Research Questions

The seven themes identified through data analysis in Chapter IV were used to answer the three research questions guiding the study. The data collected showed that theatre students perceived an intensely positive personal relationship with all theatre faculty members. With regard to non-theatre faculty members, the data showed an inconclusive collection of both positive and negative perceptions. A perception of a positive relationship between theatre students and their non-theatre peers on campus was
also revealed. The data showed that theatre students perceived their extra curricular experiences on campus as limited due to their involvement in theatre and typically accounts of theatre-related academic experiences were positive. Students reported a positive experience with theatre faculty members in the classroom and noted deviations from traditional classroom characteristics such as the use of first names, the number of creative exercises, and the regular incorporation of group activities. The data also showed an inconsistent perception of campus interactions as well as a minor pattern of disengagement with the campus in terms of personal investment. Overall students reported positive perceptions of theatre-related aspects of their collegiate experience.

Findings and Interpretations

In the following discussion of the study results reported in Chapter IV, five conclusions will be offered and the findings will be considered in relation to the existing research examined in Chapter II: Review of Literature.

1. The theatre program unit in a university setting functions as a support system of peers and authority figures in which students develop uniquely close relationships with other theatre students and theatre faculty members that directly impact their overall collegiate experience in a positive manner.

   A frequent comparison reported by the participants in the study was between the theatre program and a family unit. This comparison was made in reference to theatre student relationships with theatre faculty as well as with other theatre students. Faculty members were described as not simply instructors but also as parental figures, mentors, and role models. Edstrom’s 2008 study supports this perception that theatre faculty members function more frequently in the role of mentors than simply instructors. This
relationship with faculty members seems to be unique to the theatre program according to the perceptions of theatre students.

Students also expressed a perception that theater faculty members are concerned for the students’ success on all levels, not just within the theatre program. This concern is present and consistent from the beginning of the student’s collegiate journey within the theatre program. Students feel that they can approach theatre faculty with questions and concerns outside of the theatre subject and receive valuable and accurate advice and assistance with those inquiries. Such experiences with theatre faculty members can be equated to Palmer et al.’s (2009) assertion that an “event” or “experience” early in the student’s college career determines the student’s future success due to the degree of impact of said experience. This early mentoring process leads to the close relationship with theatre faculty that all participants discussed. Participants explained this feeling of closeness with faculty members as a result of the frequent daily interactions with faculty in the classroom and outside the classroom while engaging in theatre extra-curricular activities. This perception of the positive impact of faculty interactions is supported by Weaver and Qi’s 2005 study of the collegiate student experience as well as Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991) and Demoulin’s (2002) studies showing the positive impact of extracurricular activity engagement.

In addition to a close relationship with theatre faculty, students also noted a uniquely close relationship with other theatre students. This perception shows that students in theatre enjoy a strong peer support system that is built-in due to program involvement. Theatre students may encounter an eased process of initiating new friendships and acquaintances due to active engagement in the theatre program which
includes activities such as work-call during which students interact in a semi-social setting with peers and faculty.

An additional comparison made by theatre students is that of a theatre program to an athletic team. This comparison is supported by March and Roche’s (1996) study examining the perceptions of high school performing arts students. This comparison is valid on many levels. The faculty members in the theatre program function in many capacities similar to that of an athletic coach: leading a group of students, providing constructive criticism, spending time with students outside of the classroom practicing for a big event, and having concern for all aspects of the students’ lives. The theatre program functions much like an athletic team: members practice together, members wear coordinating clothing, members bond during program activities, members have their own language with which they communicate with each other, and members seek the support of outsiders. This comparison is significant because athletic teams are recognized as a primary student subpopulation (Gohn & Albin, 2006) and thus have been deemed worthy of specific study in the academic world. Therefore this comparison further validates the need to study theatre students.

2. Theatre students occasionally encounter negative experiences due to their choice of major, however students more commonly experience positive support from members of the campus community for their theatre activities. Therefore, the campus community recognizes the importance of the presence of performing arts in the university setting.

The negative experiences that theatre students reported were associated with classroom interaction with non-theater faculty members. These negative encounters have the potential to impact the overall experience of theatre students. According to Anderson
et al. (2007), Greenberg et al. (2009), and Hartley and Greggs (1997) students encountering these types of negative experiences are impacted to a larger degree than faculty recognize. This type of negative effect needs to be recognized by non-theatre faculty members. It should be noted that older students (junior, senior, or alumni classification) reported negative experiences with faculty members more frequently than younger students (freshman or sophomore classification). This contrast may imply that negative encounters increase as the student progresses through the college journey into upper-division courses.

Theatre students are confident that the artistic activities in which they regularly engage through the theatre program are important in their development as individuals. This type of individual development is at the heart of the liberal arts based higher education system. Shapiro (2005) and Collinson (2005) discussed the importance of arts in the educational process of developing the individual. Although it is clear that students engaging actively in the arts are enjoying this process of development, a concern for higher education policymakers is the presence and impact of the arts on all students. Greene (1984) and Corner (2005) supported this assertion that awareness of the impact of arts in education is needed within our higher education system. Zdriluk (2010) added that engagement in theatrical activity might aid not only the active theatre students’ development, but also that of any student engaged in the activity on any level, even as an audience. This positive impact of artistic engagement should be explored in reference to possible application for all students in higher education.

The results of this study showed that students perceive a moderate amount of support from administrators. This perception suggests that in order for non-arts students
on campus to fully recognize the importance of engagement in artistic activities, perhaps stronger, more visible, and more consistent support for the arts on the part of a variety of administrators is needed. In addition, deeper personal engagement in arts programming on campus by administrators might provide them with a fuller understanding of the potential for extraction of the benefits of artistic engagement for all students.

3. Theatre students overwhelmingly encounter positive experiences in the theatre classroom that can be attributed to the use of non-traditional teaching techniques and engagement in course content that is interesting to and applicable for the student. The result of this classroom structure is a student who feels well prepared for employment after graduation. Outside of the theatre classroom, theatre students encounter obstacles to learning including boring and predictable teaching styles and seemingly inapplicable course content.

Black (2010) and Lampert (2007) reported a greater degree of student success in classrooms where teachers utilize non-traditional techniques. Faculty members in the theater program utilize non-conventional classroom activities including regular groupwork and practical applications of course content. As a result, theatre students are invested in the coursework and feel a stronger obligation to attend classes and apply themselves to assessment activities. Urice (1976) reported similar results in a study of theatre students at a Florida university. Sutton and Henry (2005) assert that students’ perceived learning experiences and actual learning outcomes are related. Therefore the perception of theatre students that theatre classroom experiences are superior to non-theatre classroom experiences is valid.
In terms of preparation, theatre students acknowledge the value of hands-on learning in their quest to prepare for future employment. Winner and Hetland (2008) advocated this type of non-traditional learning in the arts as a vital step in preparing students to find employment in any field. Tchibozo (2007) noted the positive impact of major-related extra-curricular activities on transition into the workforce. Although the theatre program is not unique in its efforts to prepare students for post-graduate work, the manner in which students engage in practical application on a frequent basis is unique and not mirrored by other programs.

4. Theatre students commit to a demanding schedule of classes, work-calls, and rehearsals that occupy a large majority of the student’s time, making it difficult for theater students to actively engage in other campus activities. The real measure of this commitment is grossly underestimated by the general non-theatre population.

The activities associated with the theatre program can be classified as extra-curricular although a large amount of course content is applied during these activities. Theatre students are eager to engage in program activities whether they are of a social or academic-related nature. Students also periodically engage in other campus activities but are typically limited in those engagements by previous theatre commitments. Pike and Kuh (2005) acknowledge the importance of extra-curricular engagement by the student in the personal development of the educated individual. For theatre students, theatre activities take priority over other campus activities and are an expected component of their educational journey. Pitts’ 2007 study revealed that the vast time commitment involved in theatrical production can be a major obstacle for many participants. It should be noted that younger students (freshman or sophomore classification) reported more
frequent non-theatre extra curricular engagement than older students (junior, senior, or alumni).

The non-theatre population fails to recognize the degree of commitment required of an active theatre major. Individuals do seem to appreciate the effort put forth by theatre students that is displayed in the final product or theatrical presentation, however theatre students are periodically faced with negative-toned inquiries regarding their choice of major and frequently inquiring individuals do not acknowledge theatre as a valid area of college study. This charge shows that these individuals do not understand the complexity of the program of study nor appreciate the great commitment that students have made in choosing this major.

5. Theatre students do not feel fully engaged in the campus due to their separation from the physical campus via the location of theatre facilities and their separation from the social campus due to the vast time commitment required of the theatre program.

Because theatre program activities including classes, work-calls, and rehearsals are scheduled sometimes consecutively from 9:00am to 10:00 pm students have little time for engagement in other activities. To compound this obstacle, most theatre activities take place within the theatre facilities that are located off-campus. Therefore theatre students find themselves physically off-campus for a large part of their day. Typical student journeys to campus are limited visits for non-major classes or to take advantage of resources such as the bookstore or library. A sense of isolation from the campus is the result of these conditions. It should be noted that freshman students reported the perception of isolation to a smaller degree than students of other
classifications. This difference is possibly the result of the university policy that freshman students reside in the resident’s halls on campus.

Regardless of this sense of isolation, theatre students are able to have a seemingly typical college experience. The difference in this experience and the typical experience of other students on campus is the dominating interaction outside of the classroom with other theatre students. Students in other programs most likely do not have the same level of social engagement with peer majors. Therefore the theatre program functions as the primary social unit for theatre majors and consequently has a direct impact on the student’s overall college experience. Wessel et al. (2007) provides an explanation for this perception of typical experience through a discussion of perceived fit in which it is clarified that perceived fit within the major is correlated to overall satisfaction with the college experience. Given the degree to which theatre students perceive an accurate fit and positive level of satisfaction with their chosen major program of study, it is rational that these students would also express satisfaction with the university.

**Summary of Findings**

The results of the study were interpreted to offer five conclusions related to the three guiding research questions. The conceptual framework for this study was centered around the need to explore the individual experiences of theatre students in a qualitative manner because of the unique nature of experiences in the arts. In addition to providing vivid accounts of theatre student experiences, the findings reveal a positive impact of artistic engagement. This positive impact might be applicable to all students in higher education.
Recommendations

This section of Chapter V is divided into three main areas: recommendations for practice, researcher reflections, and suggestions for further research. The five conclusions offered in the previous section will be used to guide the discussion of “Recommendations for Practice.” “Researcher Reflections” will offer an explanation of the impact of the study results on the researcher as an instructor of theatre and as a theatre artist. “Suggestions for Further Research” will provide recommendations for future researchers taking on the topic of theatre student experiences in higher education.

1. The theatre program unit in a university setting functions as a support system of peers and authority figures in which students develop uniquely close relationships with other theatre students and theatre faculty members that directly impact their overall collegiate experience in a positive manner. This impact is in a large part due to the efforts and actions of theater faculty.

   Given this conclusion it is important for non-theater faculty and administrators to recognize the positive impact of this unit on the student experience. The unique relationship between faculty and students must be fostered and supported by the campus environment. This can be accomplished by the recognition of university personnel such as freshman advisors, academic administrators and even financial aid advisors that theatre faculty are very involved in the collegiate experience of their students. This relationship must also be protected and maintained by the theatre faculty and students. It must remain clear to all new students and faculty that his close relationship must maintain a level of appropriate professionalism in order to belong in the university environment.
It should also be considered by administrators that theatre faculty members expend an enormous amount of time outside of their regular course load interacting with students in extra-curricular activities. This extraneous interaction should be clarified as a given responsibility in their faculty contract. This action would ensure that future faculty members are clear of what the expectations are of their position.

2. Theatre students occasionally encounter negative experiences due to their choice of major, however students more commonly experience positive support from members of the campus community for their theatre activities. Therefore, the campus community recognizes the importance of the presence of performing arts in the university setting.

The campus-wide effort to advocate engagement in the arts must begin with administrative support. As this study has shown the theatre program as comparable to an athletic program, the theatre program should also receive similar administrative support.

The results of this study as well as the reviewed literature discuss the positive impact of artistic engagement on the development of the student. Non-theatre faculty on campus should be aware of opportunities for artistic engagement that can be provided to their students and possibly incorporated into their lesson plans.

Campus-wide awareness of theater program activities in which the entire campus community can engage should be a goal for the theatre program. This goal should be supported through campus resources such as public relations, student organizations, and faculty and staff organizations.

3. Theatre students overwhelming encounter positive experiences in the theatre classroom that can be attributed to the use of non-traditional teaching techniques and engagement in course content that is interesting to and applicable for the student. The
result of this classroom structure is a student who feels well prepared for employment after graduation. Outside of the theatre classroom, theatre students encounter obstacles to learning including boring and predictable teaching styles and seemingly inapplicable course content.

Classroom techniques utilized by theatre faculty should be used as models for non-theatre faculty who consistently receive negative teaching evaluations. Theatre faculty should make clear efforts and plans to maintain innovative classroom techniques, especially with regard to activities that help prepare students for employment after graduation. It is vital that faculty members stay current with progress and innovations in the professional theatre field in order to ensure proper preparation of students. This can be accomplished through faculty development activities that should be supported by the university.

Students need to be prepared to encounter course obstacles such as uninteresting content early on in their collegiate careers. This might be a subject that can be introduced and addressed in freshman orientation activities and courses. Students must learn to avoid or adapt to the boring and predictable classroom in order to succeed in non-major courses. This obstacle could also be successfully addressed by theatre faculty in their early interactions with incoming theatre students.

4. Theatre students commit to a demanding schedule of classes, work-calls, and rehearsals that occupy a large majority of the student’s time, making it difficult for theater students to actively engage in other campus activities. The measure of this commitment is grossly underestimated by the general non-theatre population.
In order to maintain this level of commitment, the theatre program needs to ensure that incoming students are aware of the time requirements associated with active engagement in the program. In order to aid students in their desire to engage in other campus activities, the theatre program as a unit might consider becoming more active and visible at campus wide activities. This would allow theatre students to participate in campus activities but maintain and possibly strengthen their bond with the theatre unit.

The general population is unaware of the daily activities of a theatre student. This information might be interesting to the general public. Awareness in hopes of appreciation could be attained with distribution of the unknown facts behind being a theatre major in the campus newspaper or in production programs. Although this lack of awareness can be frustrating for students, it should also be considered that this magical nature of theatre is a unique characteristic of the theatre program.

5. Theatre students do not feel fully engaged in the campus due to their separation from the physical campus via the location of theatre facilities and their separation from the social campus due to the vast time commitment required of the theatre program.

Although this feeling of isolation might have a negative impact on theatre students, it should be considered that this separation is partially responsible for the strong support structure found within the theatre program. The physical isolation from the campus is a characteristic that cannot easily be changed. However the social isolation is something that the theatre program should consider addressing as a unit. Like the problem with extra-curricular involvement on campus, the theatre unit could address this social isolation issue by encouraging students to venture to campus more frequently.
Class trips to the library, company lunches at the student union, and class meetings outdoors on campus are all possibilities for campus engagement as a unit.

*Researcher Reflections*

As an instructor of theatre and the coordinator of the theatre program at a major regional university the results of this study are important in the scope of my efforts to improve the experiences of theater students in my program. I thoroughly enjoyed the candid discussions that I had with each of the participants and the overwhelmingly honest feedback that they provided through this process. I have found this exploration to be insightful in many ways as well as predictable to some degree. I was pleasantly surprised by the positive attitude of many of the participants in the study towards administration and non-theatre faculty. Many of the relayed experiences of the participants were equivalent to experiences that I encountered as a student in this same program. I found the process of analyzing student perceptions to be relatively easy due to my previous experience as a student. On an artistic level I was excited to learn that our graduates feel well prepared for the professional world and impressed that a large number of participants recognized the self-developmental benefits of engagement in the arts. For me, this type of research is important because it is specific and I hope the results of this will prompt further research of the experiences of students in the arts, especially theatre.

*Suggestions for Further Research*

This study expands the current limited body of literature exploring the experiences of theatre students in higher education. It also contributes to the large body of existing literature related to student experiences. Future research focused on a larger population of theatre students at a variety of universities would provide a clearer
diversified picture of the theatre student experience. Further studies might also benefit from the investigation of additional aspects of the student experience including high school experiences in theatre and the decision process of choosing a college and major.

An ideal case study would involve the study of a small group of students throughout their entire collegiate career in theatre. This type of study would account for changes in perception that may take place between freshman and senior classifications. This type of continuing study might also account for differences in the perceptions of younger students and older students noted in the current study.

Another study that should be considered is one focused on the experience of the transfer student in theatre in comparison to the traditional student in theatre. Given the more vast collegiate and life experience that a transfer student begins with at a four-year institution, the student perception of the college experience might differ greatly.

If this study were to be replicated, student focus groups might provide additional insight to the functioning of the theatre unit. I would also suggest interviewing theatre faculty in order to ensure that faculty and student perceptions are somewhat congruent. Future studies might also benefit from an exploration of the possible impact of the study results in reference to teaching evaluations, the development of or support for existing student learning outcomes, and the recruitment and retention of theatre students.
Chapter Summary

As an ethnographic qualitative study of theatre students, this study provides a specific narrative account of the perceptions that the culture-sharing subpopulation of theatre students hold of their current higher education experience. Chapter V offered a summary of the entire study as well as a discussion of conclusions in relation to the existing literature and recommendations for changes in practice and for future research of this topic.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form Approved by the University of Arkansas

Institutional Review Board
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title: An Exploration of the Collegiate Experiences of Theatre students in a Regional University

Researcher(s):
Robyn Pursley, M.A., Graduate Student
Michael T. Miller, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor
University of Arkansas
Department of Rehabilitation, Human Resources, and Communication Disorders
College of Education and Health Professions
100 Graduate Education Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
(479) 575-3582

Compliance Contact Person:
Ro Windwalker, CIP
IRB Coordinator
Research Compliance
University of Arkansas
120 Ozark Hall
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
(479) 575-2208
irb@uark.edu

Description:
The present study seeks to describe the experiences of students actively participating in college level theatre. Only students who are actively involved in program activities including classes and production activities will be asked to participate. You will be asked to meet with the researcher for one 20 30 minute interview during which you will be asked to discuss your experiences on campus with faculty, students, and activities. Following this interview, the researcher may ask to schedule a follow-up interview during which you will be presented with an interpretation of the data provided during the initial interview so that you may confirm or dispute the validity of the researcher’s interpretation. All interviews will be audio and video recorded. All recordings will be destroyed after they have been transcribed with the corresponding code number.

Risks and Benefits:
The benefits of your participation include contributing to the knowledge base of the collegiate experiences of performing arts students studying theatre. There are no anticipated risks to participating in the study.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. There are no payments or college credits for participating.

Confidentiality:
You will be assigned a code number that will be used to identify your data. Your name will only be on this consent form and will not be connected with your responses in any way. Your responses will be recorded completely anonymously. All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

Right to Withdraw:
You are free to refuse to participate in the research and to withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences – no penalty to you.

Informed Consent. I, ________________________, have read the description, (please print) including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks and side effects, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each of these items has been explained to me by the researcher. The researcher has answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this experimental study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the researcher.

______________________________________________
Signature

______________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form Approved by the Northeastern State University Institutional Review Board
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Project: An Exploration of the Collegiate Experiences of Theatre Students in a Regional University

Principal Investigator(s). Robyn Pursley

Purpose of the Study: To describe the collegiate experience of performing arts students studying theatre in a comprehensive university setting.

Procedures to be Followed: The present study seeks to describe the experiences of students actively participation in college level theatre. Only students who are actively involved in program activities including classes and production activities will be allowed to participate. You will be asked to meet with the researcher for one 20-30 minute interview during which you will be asked to discuss your experiences on campus with faculty, students, and activities. Following this interview, the researcher may ask to schedule a follow-up interview during which you will be presented with and interpretation of the data provided during the initial interview so that you may confirm or dispute the validity of the researcher’s interpretation.

Discomforts and Risks: There are no anticipated risks to participating in the study.

Benefits: The benefits of your participation include contributing to the knowledge base of the collegiate experiences of performing arts students studying theatre

Duration: The study will be conducted between April 1, 2011 and May 1, 2011

Statement of Confidentiality: You will be assigned a code number that will be used to identify your data. All of the information will be recorded by the researcher. Only the researcher will know your name and will not divulge it or identify any of your comments to anyone. All information will be held in the strictest confidence

Right to Ask Questions: You have the right to ask questions of the researcher at any time prior to or during the study.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw: You are free to refuse to participate in the research and to withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences – no penalty to you.

My signature below indicates that I have read the information above and that I agree to participate in this study. I can ask for a copy of this consent form.

_________________________________________ Date

Signature of Participant

_________________________________________

Printed Name of Participant

_________________________________________ Date

Investigator’s Signature

________________________________________

Date
APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol Form
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Title of study: *An exploration of the collegiate experiences of theatre students in a regional university*

Participant code: ______________________
Interview date: ______________________
Follow-up interview date: ____________

Research Question 1, “What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their personal relationships with theatre, non-theatre faculty, and university administrators?” will be address by asking the following interview questions:

1. Tell me about your interactions with faculty in your major.

2. Tell me about your interactions with faculty outside of your major.

3. How do you think your relationship with theatre faculty differs from that of students in other majors and their major faculty?

4. What kind of experiences have you had with administrators at NSU?

Research Question 2, “What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their academic and extra-curricular experiences on campus?”, will be addressed by asking the following questions:

5. Tell me about your extra-curricular experiences at NSU?

6. Tell me about your academic experiences in your major.
7. Tell me about your academic experiences outside of your major.

Research Question 3, “What are the perceptions of theatre students regarding their role in and interaction with the campus environment?”, will be addressed by asking the following questions:

8. Tell me about your overall experience as a student on NSU’s campus.

9. How do you think your experiences on campus at NSU are different from those of other students in different areas of study?

10. Tell me about your experiences on campus with other students outside of the theatre program.
APPENDIX D

Request Form Submitted to the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board for Approval of Study
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
PROTOCOL FORM

The University Institutional Review Board recommends policies and monitors their implementation, on the use of human beings as subjects for physical, mental, and social experimentation, in and out of class. . . . Protocols for the use of human subjects in research and in class experiments, whether funded internally or externally, must be approved by the (IRB) or in accordance with IRB policies and procedures prior to the implementation of the human subject protocol. . . Violation of procedures and approved protocols can result in the loss of funding from the sponsoring agency or the University of Arkansas and may be interpreted as scientific misconduct. (see Faculty Handbook)

Supply the information requested in items 1-14 as appropriate. Type entries in the spaces provided using additional pages as needed. In accordance with college/departmental policy, submit the original and one copy of this completed protocol form and all attached materials to the appropriate Human Subjects Committee. In the absence of an IRB-authorized Human Subjects Committee, submit the original and one copy of this completed protocol form and all attached materials to the IRB, Attn: Compliance Officer, OZAR 118, 575-3845.

1. Title of Project  An exploration of the collegiate experiences of theatre students in a regional university

2. (Students must have a faculty member supervise the research. The faculty member must sign this form and all researchers and the faculty advisor should provide a campus phone number.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Email Address</th>
<th>Campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robyn Pursley</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Co-Researcher

Co-Researcher

Co-Researcher

Faculty Advisor Dr. Michael Miller & Communication Disorders XXXXXXXXXX (479)575-3582

3. Researcher(s) status. Check all that apply.

- Faculty
- Staff
- Graduate Student(s)
- Undergraduate Student(s)

4. Project type

- Faculty Research
- Thesis / Dissertation
- Class Project
- Independent Study / Educ. Spec. Project

- Staff Research
- M.A.T. Research
- Honors Project

5. Is the project receiving extramural funding?

- No
- Yes. Specify the source of funds
6. Brief description of the purpose of proposed research and all procedures involving people. Be specific. Use additional pages if needed. (Do not send thesis or dissertation proposals. Proposals for extramural funding must be submitted in full.)

Purpose of research:

The purpose for conducting the study is to describe the collegiate experience of performing arts students studying theatre in a comprehensive university setting. The results of the study may benefit university personnel in recruitment efforts with theatre students, improving retention rates of theatre students, and implementing programmatic changes to improve the overall collegiate experience of theatre students.

Procedures involving people:

Interviews will be conducted with each participant on an individual basis. Each interview will be guided by an interview protocol. Additional interviews may be scheduled at the convenience of the participant for the purposes of clarifying data collected.

7. Estimated number of participants (complete all that apply)

_____ Children under 14  _____ Children 14-17  _____ UA students  15 Adult non-students (18 yrs and older)

8. Anticipated dates for contact with participants:

First Contact  April 1, 2011  Last Contact  May 1, 2011

9. Informed Consent procedures: The following information must be included in any procedure: identification of researcher, institutional affiliation and contact information; identification of Compliance Officer and contact information; purpose of the research, expected duration of the subject's participation; description of procedures; risks and/or benefits; how confidentiality will be ensured; that participation is voluntary and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. See Policies and Procedures Governing Research with Human Subjects, section 5.0 Requirements for Consent.

☐ Signed informed consent will be obtained. Attach copy of form.
Modified informed consent will be obtained. Attach copy of form.
Other method (e.g., implied consent). Please explain on attached sheet.
Not applicable to this project. Please explain on attached sheet.

10. Confidentiality of Data: All data collected that can be associated with a subject/respondent must remain confidential. Describe the methods to be used to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained.

All participants will be assigned a letter for identification purposes. The data collected will be recorded with reference to participants A-O. Following the study the collected data in its original form will be erased/destroyed.

11. Risks and/or Benefits:

Risks: Will participants in the research be exposed to more than minimal risk? Yes ☐ No  Minimal risk is defined as risks of harm not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily
12. Check all of the following that apply to the proposed research. Supply the requested information below or on attached sheets:

A. Deception of or withholding information from participants. Justify the use of deception or the withholding of information. Describe the debriefing procedure: how and when will the subject be informed of the deception and/or the information withheld?

B. Medical clearance necessary prior to participation. Describe the procedures and note the safety precautions to be taken.

C. Samples (blood, tissue, etc.) from participants. Describe the procedures and note the safety precautions to be taken.

D. Administration of substances (foods, drugs, etc.) to participants. Describe the procedures and note the safety precautions to be taken.

E. Physical exercise or conditioning for subjects. Describe the procedures and note the safety precautions to be taken.

F. Research involving children. How will informed consent from parents or legally authorized representatives as well as from subjects be obtained?

G. Research involving pregnant women or fetuses. How will informed consent be obtained from both parents of the fetus?

H. Research involving participants in institutions (cognitive impairments, prisoners, etc.). Specify agencies or institutions involved. Attach letters of approval. Letters must be on letterhead with original signature; electronic transmission is acceptable.

I. Research approved by an IRB at another institution. Specify agencies or institutions involved. Attach letters of approval. Letters must be on letterhead with original signature; electronic transmission is acceptable.

J. Research that must be approved by another institution or agency. Specify agencies or institutions involved. Attach letters of approval. Letters must be on letterhead with original signature; electronic transmission is acceptable.

13. Checklist for Attachments

The following are attached:

Consent form (if applicable) or
Letter to participants, written instructions, and/or script of oral protocols indicating clearly the information in item #9.
Letter(s) of approval from cooperating institution(s) and/or other IRB approvals (if applicable)
Data collection instruments

14. Signatures

I/we agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects/respondents are protected. I/we will report any adverse reactions to the committee. Additions to or changes in research procedures after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review. I/we agree to request renewal of approval for any project when subject/respondent contact continues more than one year.

Principal Researcher ________________________________ Date

Co-Researcher ________________________________ Date

Co-Researcher ________________________________ Date
APPENDIX E

Memorandum of Approval Received from the University of Arkansas

Institutional Review Board
MEMORANDUM

TO: Robyn Pursley
    Michael Miller

FROM: Ro Windwalker
      IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 11-03-573
Protocol Title: An Exploration of the Collegiate Experiences of Theatre Students in a Regional University
Review Type: ☑ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB
Approved Project Period: Start Date: 04/01/2011 Expiration Date: 03/31/2012

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Compliance website (http://www.uark.edu/admin/rsspinfo/compliance/index.html). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 120 Ozark Hall, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

The University of Arkansas is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.
APPENDIX F

Memorandum of Approval Received from the Northeastern State University

Institutional Review Board
Institutional Review Board

Date: March 14, 2011

Human Subjects Review
Proposal Title: An exploration of the collegiate experiences of the Theatre students in a regional university
IRB #: 11-167

Dear Mrs. Pursley

Your research proposal has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Northeastern State University. This approval is conditional on obtaining approval of the IRB at the University of Arkansas, where you are a doctoral student, and will remain in effect for the duration and under the conditions of their approval.

In deciding whether applications can be approved by reciprocity, we look at prior approval by another credible IRB and if there is no other IRB approval yet, which IRB should have primary authority. Since you are a doctoral student there, an instructor here, and the research is for your dissertation there, I find that the primary authority lies with the UofA IRB.

However, you are also an instructor in the Theatre Department here, and you plan to use students in your class. Students in the class are a protected group because you hold the power of assigning grades, and inclusion of protected groups requires full board review. I think that it is therefore reasonable to require you to get documented approval from either your department chair or college dean to do your study at NSU. You do not have to send this to us, though the UofA IRB may want you to include it in their application.

Thank you for sending us your application for research involving human subjects. In doing so, you safeguard the welfare of participants in your study and federal funding of our university.

Signed:

Ernst Bekkering

Chair, Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX G

Memorandum of Approval to Study Students Received from the

Northeastern State University College of Liberal Arts
College of Liberal Arts
8 March 2011

Robyn Pursley
Department of Communication, Art and Theatre
Northeastern State University
Tahlequah, OK 74464

Dear Professor Pursley:

I have reviewed your research plans for your dissertation studies at the University of Arkansas. You have my permission to conduct your interviews with our current theatre students and selected graduates.

I believe this research will be beneficial to our program as we better understand the undergraduate experience of our theatre majors.

If my office can be of assistance in this project please let me know.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Paul Westbrook, Dean