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**THE HIGHER EDUCATION EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM (Act 101):
PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE AND
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, COUNSELORS, AND TUTORS**

A Dissertation in

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by

William Joseph Augustine

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The dissertation of William J. Augustine was reviewed and approved* by the following:

William J. Rothwell
Professor of Education
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee

Wesley E. Donahue
Associate Professor of Management Development

Edgar P. Yoder
Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education

Richard A. Walter
Associate Professor of Education
Professor-in-Charge of Workforce Education and Development

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

The labor market in America has undergone a fundamental transformation over the past 25 to 30 years. The large loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector has created a dual labor market largely made up of marginal jobs in the retail and service sector (with low wages, inadequate or no fringe benefits, and little or no chance for career advancement) and significantly better white-collar and professional careers (with good pay, adequate benefits and career trajectories) for those with proper academic credentials (Wilson, Mason, & Ewing, 1997). This labor trend had resulted in the shrinking of the traditional middle-class and the frustrating inability of many younger Americans who are struggling financially to maintain the lifestyle of their parents and in many cases are unsuccessful (Newman, 1993). These changes are especially crucial for the at-risk student as they lack both the informal employment contacts and the financial cushion that traditional middle-class students often enjoy. So the emphasis on earning a college credential has increasingly become the determining factor as to who is better qualified to acquire the better jobs. Attaining a college credential is especially crucial to improving the quality of life and economic condition of marginalized groups and historically oppressed individuals which is comprised of a high proportion of at-risk students. Colleges and universities have become increasingly important gatekeepers to acquiring what is, for many at-risk students, the passport to upward social mobility and the realization of the American Dream (Newman, 1993).

The purpose of the present study was to explore, describe, and interpret Act 101 students' perceptions of what personal and academic challenges they encountered when

first enrolling in college, which support services were most important, and why some eligible students chose not to participate in Act 101 program services. The setting for this qualitative study was 32 community, four-year public and four-year private colleges and universities located throughout Pennsylvania that were participating in the Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program (Act 101). Focus groups were conducted to learn the perceptions and experiences of currently enrolled Act 101 students, program counselors/advisors, and program tutors.

The research findings for research question one included personal, financial, accountability, grades, and lack of preparation themes. The research findings for research question two included counseling/advising, program director, tutors, and other service themes. The research findings for question three included personal, outside perceptions, and program service themes. The themes developed from the student responses were consistent with the themes developed from the counselor and tutor themes. These findings were consistent even though the type, availability, and delivery of program services differed at individual institutions as did the cultural backgrounds and residences of the students. Based on the study findings, the researcher concluded that all Act 101 programs that participated in this study shared similar challenges with at-risk students. The researcher further concluded that all Act 101 programs could benefit if similar types, availability, and delivery approaches of program services were utilized in meeting the needs of Act 101 student's. The research findings also supported Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure which focused on academic and social integration directly impacting student departure decisions. The researcher found that the participants'

quotes and developed themes consistently reflected how the availability and delivery of Act 101 program support services created an overall conducive environment to academic and social integration. This integration positively impacted retention and persistence results for at-risk students in every Act 101 program that participated in this study.

Finally, we must continue to evolve with the changing times that demand new thinking and a willingness to adopt new approaches in the way we address at-risk student's needs. Designing, implementing, and maintaining effective support services for at-risk students is critical to increasing retention and persistence rates among the at-risk college population.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	xi
Acknowledgements	xii
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program (Act 101)	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Research Questions	3
Significance of the Study	4
Policy Contribution	4
Empirical Contribution	4
Practical Contribution	5
Research Objective	5
Theoretical Perspective and Framework	5
Research Scope	6
Limitations and Assumptions	7
Definition of Terms	8
Chapter Summary	11
Chapter 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	13
Introduction	13
Constructing a Review of Literature	13
Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure	16
Three Research Studies by Tinto	18
The Higher Education Act (101)	27
Centralized Organizational Structure	29
Skills for Being College Ready	31
Transition to College	32
Not College Ready - At-Risk Students	33
Retention and its Importance to the At-Risk Student	35
Retention Strategies	38
Support Services Needed by At-Risk Students	42
Intrusive Counseling/Advising	43
Tutoring	45
Orientation Program	46
Bridge Programs	46
Supplemental Instruction	47
Mentoring	48
Remediation	49
Cultural Events	49
Learning Communities	50

Advocacy	51
Faculty/Administrative Partnering.....	51
Relevant Studies.....	52
Chapter Summary	53
Chapter 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	55
Introduction.....	55
Qualitative Research	56
Rationale for Conducting Qualitative Research	56
Philosophical Assumptions Underlying Qualitative Research.....	59
General Characteristics of Qualitative Design	61
Rationale for Phenomenological Tradition.....	62
Researcher Background, Roles, and Biases.....	65
Proposal of the Study.....	66
Data Collection Activities.....	75
Data Analysis	78
Verifying the Quality of the Study.....	85
Chapter Summary	88
Chapter 4. STUDY RESULTS	89
Introduction.....	89
Profile of the Participants.....	91
Data Collection Procedures and Research Questions	91
Focus Group Responses.....	93
Research Question 1: Voice of the Student	93
Research Question 2: Student.....	104
Research Question 2: Counselor/Advisor.....	108
Research Question 2: Tutor	112
Research Question 3: Student.....	116
Research Question 3: Counselor/Advisor.....	120
Research Question 3: Tutor	124
Chapter Summary	128
Chapter 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	129
Introduction	129
Study Summary	129
Summary of Findings.....	131
Research Question 1	131
Research Question 2	135
Research Question 3	143
Conclusions.....	151
Recommendations for Practitioners.....	154
Lessons Learned.....	156
Recommendations for Future Study	156

Chapter Summary	161
References.....	162
Appendix A Higher Education Equal Opportunity: Pennsylvania Code.....	178
Appendix B Chapter 44 Program Standards: Board of Education	181
Appendix C Act 101 Application Issued March 1998.....	186
Appendix D Studies Related to At-Risk Programs.....	192
Appendix E Focus Group Questions.....	205
Appendix F Participant Information	208
Appendix G Responses to Research Questions by Type of Institution	209

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Triangulation Table.....	85
Table 2	Personal Responses - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	93
Table 3	Financial Responses - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	99
Table 4	Accountability Responses - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	101
Table 5	Grades Responses - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students.....	102
Table 6	Lack of Preparation Responses – Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	103
Table 7	Counseling/Advising - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students.....	104
Table 8	Program Director - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students.....	105
Table 9	Tutoring - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students.....	106
Table 10	Other Services - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	107
Table 11	Counseling/Advising - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students.....	108
Table 12	Tutoring - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students.....	110
Table 13	Other Services - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	111
Table 14	Counseling/Advising - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students.....	113
Table 15	Tutoring - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students.....	114
Table 16	Other Services - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	115
Table 17	Personal - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	117
Table 18	Outside Perception - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	119
Table 19	Program Services - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	120
Table 20	Personal - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	121
Table 21	Outside Perception - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students	123

Table 22 Program Services - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students 124

Table 23 Personal - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students 125

Table 24 Outside Perception - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students 127

Table 25 Program Services - Themes and Direct Quotes from Students 127

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure.....	18
Figure 2	Process Flow Chart for the Outline for the Methodology Chapter 3	55
Figure 3	Comparison of Traditional Criteria and Alternative Criteria.....	87
Figure 4	Process Model for Preparing the Study Results.....	90

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The opening chapter, an introduction to the study, is presented in eleven sections. The eleven sections are: 1) The Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program (Act 101) Background, 2) statement of the problem, 3) study's purpose, 4) study's research questions, 5) significance of the study, 6) research objective, 7) theoretical perspective, 8) theoretical framework, 9) research scope, 10) limitations and assumptions, and 11) definition of terms. This chapter concludes with a chapter summary and an introduction to chapter two.

Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program (Act 101) Background

In 1971, The Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program (see Appendix A) was legislated into Pennsylvania law. The purpose of this legislation was to provide at-risk college students with support services that included counseling/advising, remedial and developmental instruction, tutoring, mentoring, and cultural enrichment activities. The expectations of the Act 101 program were to create higher retention and persistence to graduate among at-risk students. Students who are deemed *at-risk* are those "whose academic achievement, progress towards graduation and preparation for employment are in serious jeopardy" (Canales & Bush, 1992, p. 2). At-risk students possess one or more characteristics: first-generation (first person in the family to attend college); arriving at college academically unprepared to engage in college-level work; economically and culturally impoverished and significantly lacking in social skills (Palmer, 1996; Tinto, 1993).

Support services are characterized by four distinct elements: personal and academic support, skills development, cultural/social attitude change, and financial aid opportunities. Colleges participating in the Act 101 program were granted the latitude to develop and deliver these services in their own unique manner through: (a) intrusive personal and academic counseling/advising, (b) peer and professional tutoring and mentoring, (c) orientation and summer-bridge programs, (d) supplemental and remediation instruction, (e) academic skills workshops, (f) cultural events, and (g) learning communities.

To qualify for Act 101 services, students were required to be a Pennsylvania resident, deemed economically disadvantaged (not to exceed federal poverty guidelines by family size times 200%), and academically disadvantaged (low SAT scores, poor placement test results requiring developmental courses, predicted to not be able to earn a GPA of 2.0 or better in college level courses, unlikely to complete an academic credential; see Appendix A).

Statement of the Problem

No study of Act 101 students has been conducted to determine what personal and academic challenges Act 101 students encountered when they first enrolled in college, which support services were most important in an Act 101 student and why some eligible students chose not to participate in using program services. The findings from this study were an important contributor to the development of the new program guidelines manual.

Purpose of the Study

In 2008 the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Office of Access Initiates, developed and published a Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program (Act 101) program manual, the first of its kind since the creation of this grant program. In developing the guidelines, it was important to solicit key information from stakeholders of the program: senior institutional leaders and Act 101 program directors (previously obtained), service providers including counselors/advisors and tutors, and Act 101 students. The purpose of the present study was to explore, describe, and interpret Act 101 students' perceptions of what personal and academic challenges they encountered when first enrolling in college, which support services were most important, and why some eligible students chose not to participate in Act 101 program services.

The results of this qualitative study could aid in developing new guidelines as well as making current program staff (administrative, counselors/advisors, tutors, and mentors) and involved faculty, aware of student's perceptions of existing program services.

Research Questions

Three research questions were developed to determine current Act 101 students' perceptions of what personal and academic challenges at-risk students faced when entering college, what engaged students found to be the most important services in the program, and why some eligible students did not participate in the program,

1. What personal and academic challenges did Act 101 students encounter when they enrolled in college?

2. Which Act 101 services were deemed most important, beneficial, meaningful, or useful by Act 101 students?
3. Why were some eligible students reluctant to participate in an Act 101 program?

Significance of the Study

This research will provide a better understanding of Act 101 students' needs and which approaches should or could be adopted to encourage eligible students to participate. The type of Act 101 program services and their delivery often affect eligible students' desire to participate in the program which directly impacts student retention and persistence or determination to graduate. Additionally, this study makes the following policy, empirical and practical contributions.

Policy Contribution

The results of this research may influence the development of an Act 101 guidelines policy manual that establishes statewide policy for the type and mode of program delivery to Act 101 students.

Empirical Contribution

The results of this research may be published as part of the new program guidelines manual to aid Act 101 directors in making adjustments to their individual programs.

Practical Contribution

The results of this study will add to the existing literature on at-risk students and their retention and persistence to graduation as well as provide new study opportunities for researchers.

Research Objective

The research objective was to interpret and report current Act 101 students' perceptions of challenges at-risk students faced upon entering higher education, why some Act 101 eligible student's chose not to participate, and what engaged students find to be the most important services offered by the program. The objective was accomplished by the researcher capturing verbal comments through focus groups comprised of current Act 101 students and grouping these comments into common themes. The students' perceptions were collected, analyzed, and reported using a qualitative methodology based in the phenomenological tradition. Phenomenology is the study of human experiences examined through the detailed experiences being studied; It describes “the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Marshall and Rossman (1999) described phenomenology as “the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (p. 112). A brief overview of the theoretical perspective of phenomenology follows.

Theoretical Perspective and Framework

Theoretical Perspective

The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology based in the tradition of phenomenology as the research was conducted by focus groups in participants' natural

settings while the length of time spent gathering the study data was approximately sixty minutes per focus group. This approach provided the students an opportunity to describe their experiences in higher education and the Act 101 program. It involves studying a small number of subjects to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 1998).

The phenomenon of this study was: (a) students perceptions of challenges that at-risk students faced upon entering college, (b) why some eligible students chose not to participate in the program, and (c) what engaged students found to be the most important services the program offered. Their perceptions were based on personal experiences and feelings generated through the use of program services. By using structured focus groups the researcher sought not only to describe but also to understand and build interpretations of student perceptions and perspectives of their experiences and feelings.

Theoretical Framework

The present researcher used Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1993) as the theoretical framework of this study. The Tinto model is a complex theoretical paradigm with sociological roots. Originally developed in 1975 and further refined in 1987 and 1993, it is based on several constructs: (a) background characteristics of incoming students, (b) initial goal and institutional commitment of the student, (c) the student's intention to persist, and (d) the concept of academic and social integration.

Research Scope

The research scope consisted of 600 participants: 351 students, 88 counselors, and 161 tutors from 32 participating Act 101 institutions. Focus group sessions of

approximately one hour durations were conducted using open-ended questions related to student challenges, program services, and engagement issues. The responses collected from these focus groups are reported in the form of common themes in Chapter 4.

Limitations and Assumptions

The limitations of the study establish the boundaries inherent in the study and identify the potential weaknesses of the study (Creswell, 1994). The assumptions of the study provide the researchers' preconceptions of the investigated phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

Limitations

The following limitations are implicit in this study:

1. Only students and support staff from participating Act 101 programs located in selected Pennsylvania community colleges, four-year public and private institutions were invited to participate in this research which may produce different results than other regions of the United States because of social, school, and other unique characteristics.
2. The ability of the researcher to capture participant comments accurately and completely during the focus group sessions was hampered as the researcher had to first ask a question then listen to the responses and immediately record the responses on paper as they were being spoken.
3. Results and conclusions were summarized and interpreted only by the researcher.
4. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) approved the request of the researcher to utilize the comments derived from the focus groups in this study but this

dissertation is not a PDE publication, does not represent PDE policy, and is not endorsed by PDE.

Assumptions

The following assumptions are implicit in this study:

1. All participants provided honest, knowledgeable responses.
2. Participant perceptions were adequately communicated to the researcher and recorded correctly.
3. The researcher asserts that one hour was an adequate amount of time to conduct a focus group for a phenomenological study.

Definition of Terms

The final section of the chapter defines commonly used terms found throughout the study. Fifteen key terms were identified and defined here. They are:

At-risk student – is a low academic achiever and exhibits low self-esteem with a disproportionate number being males and minorities. They come from poverty level income and non-college educated parents. They are generally not connected to institutional activities, exhibit impulsive behavior, and have poor relationship skills. These students typically have serious family problems, drug additions, pregnancies, experience continuous failure, and school represents failure reinforcing low self-esteem (Donnelly, 1997, p. 1).

Attrition - is the percentage of students enrolled in first year who complete that year or are in the subsequent year (Norton, 2008, p. 2).

Bridge Program for at-risk students - designed to help first-year students learn how to succeed in college. The general content of these programs include: (1) an introduction to the university resources; (2) creating an environment to integrate new students into the institution; (3) academic skill workshops which focus, for example, on study skills, time management, organizational skills, and test-taking strategies; (4) help students with decision making, and goal setting in reference to choosing a major and career, which includes self assessment, both personal and academic; (5) the study of the world of work; and (6) cultural activities to broaden the scope of their understanding of other people and cultures (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994, pp. 24-25).

College Ready – refers to a student possessing the ability to effectively study, problem solve, and think critically in order to progress satisfactorily through college-level course work (Dzubak, 2007, p. 2).

Developmental - academic skills workshops, tutoring services, academic and personal counseling, learning communities and other forms of individualized instruction (Boylan, 1999, p. 36).

First-generation college student - a student from a family in which neither parent has earned attended college (Hand & Payne 2008, p. 4).

High risk - students with academic backgrounds, prior performances, and personal characteristics that make them potential candidates for academic failure or early withdrawal from college (Adelman, 1999, p. 57).

Learning communities – is an environment in which teachers and students work and learn together. It is a group of people sharing expertise, skills, knowledge, ideas,

labor, and experiences to reach an academic or work-related goal. The group may develop through common interest or by a specific design (Collins & O'Brien, 2003, p. 201).

Model - a diagram of proposed causal linkages among a set of concepts believed to be related to a specific research question(s) under investigation. Models differ from theory in that they are not usually concerned with global classes of behavior but with specific types of behavior in specific contexts (Earp & Ennett, 1991, p. 12).

Persistence- a measurable individual performance indicator; whether a student persists in accomplishing his or her stated educational goals; an indicator of student satisfaction and success (Gaither, 1999, p. 38).

Remedial or remediation – are courses designed to assist a student or a group of students overcome a learning deficiency in a given subject. The instruction is designed to improve skills found deficient through formal assessment (Collins & O'Brien, 2003, p. 302).

Retention - is the commencing student progress rate, which measured first year student load passed as a proportion of load attempted each year and the inversion of the commencing student attrition rate (Norton, 2008, p. 3)

Theory - an interrelated set of constructs (or variables) formed into propositions or hypotheses that specify the relationship among variables (typically in terms of magnitude or direction) (Creswell, 1994, p. 82).

Transition to college - is a period of time between the old and the new, before the full adoption of new norms and patterns of behavior and after the onset of separation from old ones (Tinto, 1993, p. 97).

Under-prepared student – are students who do not possess the requisite knowledge and or skills necessary to perform college-level work and who may have unrealistic beliefs about how to be successful in college (Bendotti, 2006, p. 1).

Chapter Summary

This opening chapter provided an explanation of the basic foundation for the present research. The background of the study provided a brief history of the Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program (Act 101), its focus, and value to higher education, the workforce, and economic well-being of American citizens. The problem statement pointed out that no study of Act 101 students has been conducted to determine what personal and academic challenges Act 101 students encountered when they first enrolled in college, which support services were most important in an Act 101 program and why some eligible students chose not to participate in the use of program services. The purpose of the study described how the findings would contribute to the development of program guidelines. The three research questions reflected the relationship to the overall objective of the study. The significance of the study discussed why this research was so important and how the findings would have policy, empirical and practical implications. The research objective discussed the overall objective of the study; the theoretical perspective and framework discussed the qualitative phenomenology methodology and Tinto's Model used in the study; and finally the research scope

described the participants and data collection method used in the study. This chapter concluded with the assumed limitations and assumptions made as well as key definitions.

Chapter 2, the review of the literature, provides the relationship between the theoretical foundations of the study and the relevant supporting studies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter is presented in eleven sections followed by a chapter summary. The seven sections are: (1) constructing a review of the literature, (2) Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure, (3) three studies by Tinto, (4) The Higher Education Act (Act 101), (5) centralized organization structure, (6) skills for being college ready, (7) transition to college, (8) not college ready—at-risk student, (9) retention and its importance to the at-risk student, (10) support services needed by the at-risk student, and (11) relevant role studies. This chapter concludes with a chapter summary and an introduction to chapter three.

Constructing a Review of the Literature

Constructing a review of relevant literature is a multiphase task. Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested an integrated two-stage approach by which the researcher (as he reviews and critiques previous research and other related documents) should almost simultaneously provide a theoretical framework for the research to identify “the area of knowledge that the study is intended to expand” (p. 43). Similarly, according to Maxwell (1996), the researcher “should not simply summarize some body of empirical or theoretical publications” (p. 26). It is not only important to describe what is occurring with the phenomena, but it is equally important to state why the phenomena might be occurring (Maxwell, 1996). “It is important for you to pay attention to the existing theories and research that are relevant to what you plan to study, because these are often

key sources for understanding what is going on with these phenomena” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 27).

The second source of information described by Maxwell (1996) is prior theory and research. Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested that the researcher use “whatever body of theory is appropriate” (p. 43). Maxwell (1996) defined theory as “a set of concepts and the proposed relationships among these, a structure that is intended to represent or model something about the world” (p. 29, 31). A theory links two concepts by a proposed relationship to explain what one thinks is happening and why (Maxwell, 1996). The other part of this second source of information is the use of prior research. Maxwell (1996) suggested four reasons to use prior research in preparing a review of the literature. First, reviewing prior research can show how the study might address unanswered questions and provide justification for the study. Second, it helps the researcher decide what methods to use to conduct the research based upon how other studies may have been conducted. Third, the information gathered in the review of the literature can assist the researcher in testing or modifying the theories chosen to support the study. Finally, new theories may emerge from reviewing the literature. The researcher may find contradictions in other research that can be confirmed by subsequent research (Maxwell, 1996).

The “what” and the “why” of the phenomena of the study (often referred to as the conceptual context of the study) are shaped from four sources of information. The information sources described by Maxwell (1996) include experience, prior theory and research, pilot studies and thought experiments. Experience helps to shape a person’s

insights about his or her own biases or subjectivity. Yet, it is virtually impossible to separate one's biases or subjectivity from his or her research. Peshkin encourages the researcher to embrace his or her subjectivity and not attempt to suppress it.

My subjectivity is *the* basis for the story that I am able to tell. It is a strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person *and* as a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as researcher, from topic selection clear through to the emphasis I make in my writing. Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 104) (as cited in Maxwell, 1996)

Based upon his experience with at-risk programs, the researcher personally selected the various studies and theories for review. They represent only a small subset of the available literature. However, the theories and studies chosen were, in the opinion of the researcher, those that best created a clear connecting thread or framework for the research.

The final two sources of information in developing the conceptual context of the study are pilot studies and thought experiments. Maxwell (1996) suggested that piloting the study served a similar function as prior research. During a pilot study the researcher tests his ideas or methods and explores their implications (a pilot test was conducted for this study and is described in more detail in Chapter 3). "Thought experiments draw on both theory and experience to answer 'what if' questions" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 45). While used most often in quantitative research design, Maxwell (1996) suggested that thought experiments have a place in qualitative research to test current theory for logical

problems. The literature reviewed for this study did not include studies that could be called thought experiments and, therefore, was not used as a source of information for the study.

Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure

The researcher cited most frequently in college retention literature is Vincent Tinto. Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1993) is the major interactionist model in the research literature. *Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure* is among the most widely recognized and explored in the higher education literature” (Milem & Berger, 1997). Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997) identified over 200 peer reviewed research studies and 170 graduate dissertations based on the Tinto model which was influenced by Spady (1971) who based his ideas on the work of the pioneering sociologist Emile Durkheim.

Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1993) is based on several constructs including background characteristics of incoming college students such as high school grades, SAT and/or ACT scores, educational levels of parents, family socioeconomic status and the type of courses taken by students in high school. Another construct consists of the initial goal and institutional commitment of the student. Tinto researched the level of commitment that new students held at the beginning of their college career to the completion of their degree program as well as the level of commitment they had towards the institution. A third construct of the Tinto model was based on the strength of the student’s intention to persist or what was the new student

willing to endure in order to remain in college? According to Tinto (1993), the stronger the intent to persist, the more likely the student will complete a college degree.

The center piece of the Tinto model is the concept of academic and social integration. Tinto maintained that the most crucial construct in student retention was based on the degree to which the student bonded both academically and socially to the college community. “Experiences, academic and social, which serve to integrate the individual into the life of the college, also serve to heighten attachments and therefore strengthen individual commitments both to the goal of education and to the institution” (Tinto, 2005, p. 4). The lack of academic or social integration into the college was viewed largely as the result of three main factors. One source of potential failure was the inability of the new student to adjust to rigorous academic and social demands of college life. The second potential failure was based on the possible mismatch between the new student and the social and intellectual life of the college. The third was the lack of contact between the new student and the college which could result in social withdrawal and student isolation (Tinto, 2005).

Tinto modified the attrition model in 1993 based on his continued work and the results of studies by other researchers on “the most widely recognized and tested model” (Summers, 2003, p. 66). Tinto’s modifications added the direct influence on the initial student intentions and their goal and institutional commitment by external forces (commitments) of the student. Further, Tinto postulated that the community external to the college, to the degree the student participates in it, indirectly impacts the student’s social and academic integration or directly influences the student through

external commitments.

Tinto (1993) wrote, "When those external communities are strong their actions may serve to condition, if not counter, events within the college" (p. 116).

"The model posits that, other things being equal, the lower the degree of one's social and intellectual integration into the academic and social communities of the college, the greater the likelihood of departure" (Tinto, 1993, p. 116).

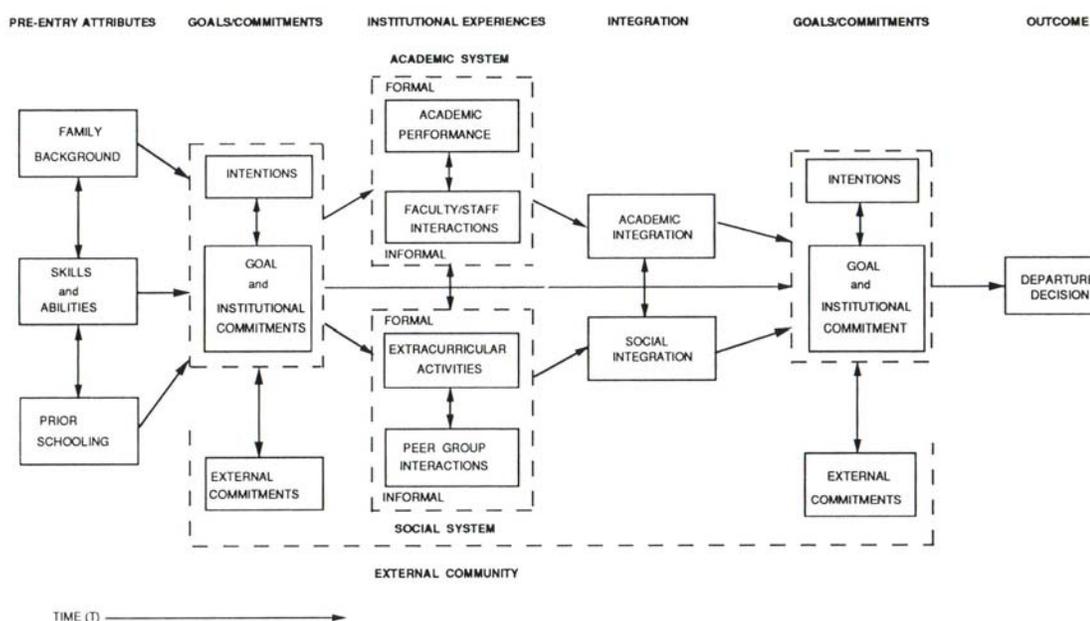


Figure 1: Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure

(Tinto, 1993, p 114) The theoretical model used for this study. Adapted from "Leaving College": Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, 2nd Edition, Vincent Tinto. Used by permission.

Three Research Studies by Tinto

This portion of the literature review includes three studies published by Vincent Tinto. These studies are relevant to the researcher's study which is focused on at-risk students' challenges, needed support services, and engagement. The studies presented in this section are: *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low Income First-*

Generation Students; Access without Support is not Opportunity; and Coordinated Studies Programs: Their Effect on Student Involvement at a Community College. Each study was analyzed and the findings are presented in seven subsections: (a) description of group studies, (b) research objective, (c) methodology, (d) analytical methods, (e) data source, (f) data, and (g) results.

Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low Income First-Generation Students
by Vincent Tinto, Ph.D. and Jennifer Engle, Ph.D.

Description of Group Studied: The group studied is first-generation, low income students which Tinto describes as doubly disadvantaged.

Research Objective: What can be done to increase the number of low-income, first generation students who enroll in and graduate from four-year institutions with bachelor's degrees?

Methodology: The study utilized mixed methods that included descriptive statistics and surveys which were utilized and conducted at various times during and after their college experience.

Analytical Methods: The data was generated from the studies using the Data Analysis System (DAS) online. The analysis compared three groups of students: students who were low income and first generation, students who were low income or first generation, and students who were neither low income nor first-generation.

Data Source: The data was drawn from three datasets from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Data: The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study examined how students and their families pay for postsecondary education. The Beginning Postsecondary Students Study was a longitudinal study that followed students who enrolled in a postsecondary institution for the first time. The Baccalaureate and Beyond study was a longitudinal study that followed students who had completed their baccalaureate degrees.

Results: The study provided five findings with connections to Tinto's model.

- Low income, first generation students face a number of challenges that make it difficult for them to be successful in college. This finding links to all the components of the model including family characteristics, skills and abilities, prior academic performance, intentions, lack of goals and focus, external commitments, and academic and social integration.
- The students disproportionately come from ethnic and racial minority backgrounds with lower levels of academic preparation. This finding relates to family background which includes first-generation attributes, poverty level subsistence, and attending inferior school systems.
- The students tend to be older, less likely to receive financial support from parents, and more likely to have multiple obligations outside college, like family and work, that limit their participation in the college experience. This finding connects to family background, skills and abilities, external commitments, and academic and social integration.
- The data shows unmet financial need (need that remains after applying all financial aid) is a major problem for low income, first generation students. As a

result, they work and borrow more with negative consequences in terms of college completion. This finding links to family background and external commitment.

- Tinto concluded these factors, some of which existed prior to enrollment while others occurred during college, lower students chances of persisting to graduation. This finding did not relate to any individual component of the model but the model as a whole.

Tinto also presented six recommendations, with connections to his model, to practitioners and policymakers.

- Improve academic preparation for college

Taking a rigorous high school curriculum including advanced mathematics, greatly increases the chances that low-income and first-generation students will attend college, particularly four-year institutions. Students also need more information and counseling about gateway courses before high school; academic support to close the gaps in prior preparation; greater access to rigorous college-preparatory courses with well-prepared teachers; and a strong college-going culture in their high schools. This recommendation connects to prior schools and skills and abilities.

- Provide additional financial aid for college

With adequate resources these students could afford to enroll in four-year institutions or attend full-time, both of which would increase their chances of earning four-year degrees. This includes providing financial aid workshops to parents and students; advising on prudent use of loans; and increases in institutional, state and

federal need based funds. This recommendation links to family background and external commitments.

- Increase transfer rates to four year colleges

There needs a greater emphasis on increasing transfer rates from two-year colleges to four-year colleges by providing: a clear vision of a pathway; developmental courses to address academic shortcomings; strong transfer advising and articulation policies; adequate financial aid counseling; and academic and social support to ensure degree completion after transfer. This recommendation relates to departure decision.

- Ease the transition to college

Colleges need to develop and implement strategies to ease transition such as: bridge and orientation programs; advising, tutoring, and mentoring by support services, faculty and peers; and special programs for at-risk students such as learning communities. This recommendation connects to academic and social integration.

- Encourage engagement on the college campus

Colleges must remove the barriers for these students to fully engage by exposing students to the college environment as early as possible, offer work-study so students stay on campus more, and focus on increasing interaction and engagement in the classroom. This recommendation links to academic and social integration.

- Promote re-entry for young and working adults

States need to help students get back on track by providing support for students to get there GED; offering college credit for experiential learning in the workplace; reaching out to students who left college with a limited number of credits

remaining to graduation; and expanding or providing additional financial aid for part-time students. This recommendation relates to external commitments.

Access Without Support is not Opportunity

by Vincent Tinto and Cathy Engstrom

Description of Group Studied: The research focused on academically under-prepared, predominately low-income students who were enrolled in 13 two-year and six four-year colleges located in 11 states within the United States. They were selected with the help of an advisory board of national experts as having effective developmental learning-community programs.

Research Objective: Research supports that low-income students are more likely to begin higher education under prepared academically than those from affluent backgrounds and are thereby less likely to complete their degree programs. Therefore, the research objective of this study was to determine how learning communities can contribute to reducing the persistence to graduation of low-income students compared to more affluent students and increase the low-income student's likeliness to complete their degree programs.

Methodology: The methodology used in the research was mixed methods that included surveys, institutional data files, data from the National Student Clearinghouse, case-study techniques, and longitudinal interviews.

Analytical Methods: The combined data was analyzed with cross-tabular and multivariate regression techniques.

Data Source: The source of the data included students, institutional data files, and the National Student Clearinghouse,

Data: Data was developed from surveys, institutional data files, data from the National Student Clearinghouse, case-study techniques, and longitudinal interviews was the data sources for this study.

Results: The study provided five findings with connections to Tinto's model.

- Access without support is not opportunity. This finding connects to the academic and social system at the institution. These systems include formal and informal performance, interactions, and activities.
- Students' access requires institutional investment in structured and carefully aligned activities directed towards their success. This finding links to academic and social integration.
- Fully implemented learning communities provide a powerful tool to promote student achievement to under prepared incoming students. This finding relates to academic and social integration.
- Learning communities require that faculty and staff change the way they work and think. This change includes collaboration, support services, accountability to the success of each student, and developing different learning environments. This finding connects to academic and social integration.
- Under prepared students must be main-streamed rather than placed in developmental-education programs. This finding links academic and social integration.

*Coordinated Studies Programs:
Their Effect on Student Involvement at a Community College
by Vincent Tinto and Pat Russo*

Description of Group Studied: A sample of first year students enrolled in the Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) at Seattle Central Community College. The program consisted of students who enrolled in a common set of thematically linked courses from different disciplines and fields.

Research Objective: The research included two objectives:

- Do Coordinated Studies programs (CSPs) make a difference in how program participation shaped first-year achievement and persistence?
- If they do, how do they make a difference?

Methodology: The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative forms of inquiry. The quantitative portion included the use of two questionnaires, one which was administered at the beginning of the first year with the second one being administered later in the first year. The qualitative portion included observations (casual conversations) and interviews (prearranged taped interviews) of program participants over the course of the year providing meaning to the students experiences.

Analytical Methods: A multi-step inductive process was used to analyze the data. The data was reviewed systematically via computer program (QUALOG) to identify emerging themes and examined to identify working hypotheses. These were then checked against the data to identify confirming and disconfirming data. Working hypotheses were modified to develop a final set of data-supported findings.

Data Source: Students and staff were the source of the data.

Data: The data was developed from questionnaires, observations, and tape recorded interviews using an open-ended semi-structured format.

Results: Longitudinal Panel Study and Participant Observation Study

The longitudinal panel study concluded four findings with connections to Tinto's model.

- Students reported greater involvement in a range of academic and social activities. This finding relates to academic and social integration.
- Students reported greater development gains over the course of the year than did students in the regular curriculum. This finding connects to the academic system and institutional commitment of the institution.
- Students also reported being substantially more involved in course activities and activities involving other students. This finding links to academic and social integration.
- Students reported more positive views of college, its students and faculty, its classes and climate, and of their own involvement in the college. This finding relates to academic and social integration.

The participant observation study concluded four findings with connections to Tinto's model.

- The CSP build supportive peer groups that provided students the opportunity to develop friendships which they found to be an important component to the difficult transition to college and helped integrate them into the college community. The friendships also provided social support networks that created encouragement to

- students to attend classes who were juggling many responsibilities. This finding connects to academic and social integration.
- The CSP served to bridge the academic-social divide that typically plague student life. The learning communities facilitated the co-existence of both without sacrificing one for the other. This finding links to academic and social integration.
 - The CSP provided an environment whereby the faculty worked together as a collaborative team in the class room. The students appreciated the contrasting ideas from the different instructor's. This approach also facilitated an environment to express the diversity of their experiences and world views. This finding relates to academic and social integration.
 - The students were able to address issues of their own learning. This finding connects to academic and social integration.

The Higher Education Act (Act 101)

The most important person in legislating Act 101 was the then Pennsylvania House Speaker K. Leroy Irvis, the leading elected African-American. Speaker Irvis was also in the important position of mediating between black student leaders, university administrators, and the governor. Supported by the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education (PBCOHE) and the Pennsylvania Association of Developmental Education (PADE), "House Bill 1213, Number 101: An Act" (see Appendix A) was passed on July 1, 1971.

Act 101 stemmed directly from the civil rights movement and from the black college and university student offensives which set the tone for equal education

advancement in the late 1960's and early 1970's. During this period, there was a lack of access and retention in higher education based on race and class. The act appeared as a social policy designed for minorities to gain access to colleges and universities.

Initially, the program was not embraced by the Commonwealth's higher education institutions which had just begun to offer other special admissions programs. The act forced a restructuring of admissions procedures and the development of ancillary services to administer to a new wave of students "deemed at-risk," made eligible by the legislation. Many administrators and academics believed that programs such as Act 101 were the cause for the erosion of academic excellence (Bloom, 1987).

According to Tinto, at-risk students don't always know what their college journey will be like with or without special program services. Research has shown that at-risk students need these program services to become academically and socially integrated into post-secondary education. The Act 101 program was created to address the special needs of at-risk students seeking an associate or baccalaureate degree (Burd, 1999; Thayer, 2000).

The Act 101 grant was designed to distribute state taxpayer funds to Pennsylvania's degree granting institutions to provide a broad range of student support services to Pennsylvania residents who were identified as at-risk at the time. The generally accepted characteristics of at-risk students were: (a) they lived in households of poverty level income, (b) were academically underprepared, (c) lacked cultural diversity, and (d) were first generation college students. The grant funds were used by the institutions to: (a) pay for support services such as intrusive counseling/advising, (b)

mentors, (c) tutoring, (d) orientations, (e) bridge programs, (f) remediation, (g) developmental, and (h) supplemental programs or courses.

The Pennsylvania participating institutions were given the latitude to design and implement a campus Act 101 program to meet the unique institutional and student needs which resulted in great diversity of programs. Tinto (2005) noted that many education innovations such as intrusive counseling/advising and tutoring centers, remedial instruction, and orientation programs were later institutionalized for regularly admitted students. Tinto also mentioned common curriculum developments such as computer literacy courses, developmental studies, freshman studies, and pre-college summer programs. Administrative services typically included academic monitoring systems, alternative admissions criteria, academic policy modification, and student tracking (Tinto, 2005).

Centralized Organizational Structure

All Act 101 programs have a centralized organizational structure. This structure places all the at-risk support services under the direction of one division, department, or program. Led by a director who is familiar with the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of at-risk students, the director will advocate ensuring the instructional, support service, physical classrooms, and equipment needs for the department are met. Funding for the department can be from the institution and/or grants as well as a combination of both, but the director is responsible for maintaining administrative support and the success of the program. This director would also coordinate the partnership between faculty and student support services. McCabe (2003) pointed out this type of centralized organizational

structure support Roueche's 1999 recommendation that at-risk services are established to treat the whole person, rather than focusing on individual skills in isolation. It also supports Boylan's 1999 assertion that support services for at-risk students should be student-centered rather than subject centered (McCabe, 2003). The effectiveness of centralized organizational structure has been demonstrated in two studies: the 1994 National Study of Developmental Education and the 1995 J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College Study of Effectiveness of Developmental Education (McCabe, 2003). The effectiveness of a centralized program is driven by the fact that the instructional and support services needed by the at-risk student are different from those required of other students and are not always compatible with those provided for all students. At-risk students are the least likely student population to seek or participate in support services necessary for their success. Because they are unlikely to seek assistance, they are more inclined to make use of services that are easily accessible, located in a single facility, and convenient to their classes, rather than those spread across campus (Higbee, Dwinell, McAdams, GoldbergBelle & Tardola, 1991). Many also believe that when an institution invests in such resources, it demonstrates the institution's commitment to the success of at-risk students. This commitment may be the first type that demonstrates to the at-risk student that someone really cares about their success. Furthermore, the institution makes it easier for these students to access support and services and to increase communication among those who are providing the services, ensuring that faculty, counselors, and students work together to enable these students to succeed.

Skills for Being College Ready

Setting the stage for success in post-secondary education starts with "being ready." One important area is a student's skill development upon entering higher education. Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) submit four areas of skill development critical to shaping college readiness: a) content knowledge and basic skills, b) core academic skills, c) non-cognitive skills and norms of performance, and d) college knowledge.

The first skill development, content knowledge and basic skills, are foundational to the understanding of academic disciplines and may be specific to a specific subject area such as English or may be non-specific such as writing and analytical thinking.

Core academic skills are critical in higher education as the significant amount and types of reading and writing required and the emphasis on analytical and thinking skills.

The third skill development, non-cognitive skills, is not readily measured by standardized tests but include a range of behaviors that reflect greater student self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control. Non-cognitive skills include study skills, work habits, time management, help-seeking behavior, and social problem-solving. Meeting the developmental demands of college requires behavioral problem-solving and coping skills that allow students to successfully manage new environments and academic and social demands of college.

The fourth area, college knowledge, moves beyond academic and behavioral skills to acknowledge the role of social capital in college access and success. College knowledge includes information and skills that allow students to successfully navigate

the complex college admissions and financial aid processes as well as develop an understanding of college norms and culture.

At-risk students do not possess many, and in some cases, none of the four main areas of skill development. This reality is what makes the need for available student support services so necessary for at-risk students.

Transition to College

For many individuals entering post-secondary education the first time, the transition signifies a time of emotional social and academic development and adjustment (Promnitz & Germain, 1996). Entering higher education is exciting but is often associated with high anxiety no matter if the student is enrolling directly after high school or enrolling later in life (Stallman, 2008). This somewhat turbulent period can make people vulnerable to problems (Rana, 2002). At-risk students incur this turbulence but must also face other issues simultaneously: (a) developing an adult identity; (b) deciding a major; (c) engaging and identifying with other students, academic and professional staff, and with the institution as an entity; (d) the pressure of part-time or full-time employment; (e) the ongoing responsibilities to family including parents as well as possible siblings, spouses, and children; (f) the need to develop and deploy skills in independent learning; (g) time to develop a new social life; (h) the need to manage financial and accommodation arrangements; (i) uncertainty about the future; (j) the impact of attending a large institution; (k) adjusting to a possible move away from home, family, school, work and their neighborhood if the college is not in their immediate area; and (l) not having an immediate support group established (Rickinson, 1998). Dealing with some or

all of these issues could have practical and psychological ramifications (Rickinson, 1998). At the same time, this period also provides an opportunity for personal growth or an opportunity to find new solutions to old situations (Rana, 2002). But while many students negotiate this transition adequately, many at-risk students do not have the capacity to do so (Rana, 2002).

Not College Ready—At-Risk Student

Pritchard and Bloushild (1970) studied the characteristics of what at-risk students encounter upon entering college and found: a) lack of academic potential, b) inadequate understanding of the work required for college success, c) failure to make studying a first priority, d) interference from family and personal relationships, e) failure to assume responsibility for learning and success, f) poor communication skills, and g) failure to select a college where they can be successful. Maxwell (1979) described at-risk students as those students whose academic skills, knowledge, and academic ability are significantly below those of the typical student in the college or curriculum in which they are enrolled. Gordon (1992) described this population as at-risk and under-prepared because of poor high school preparation or low socio-economic background. Spann and McCrimmon (1994) characterize the at-risk student as one who fails to meet the normal college entrance criteria and is unable to immediately perform adequately in college level courses and/or be accepted into a program of choice.

Other researchers have focused on the psychological and motivational needs of at-risk students. Moore and Carpenter (1985) found that students with academic or psychological weaknesses find it difficult for them to achieve their educational goals.

Spann and McCrimmon (1994) submit that these students tend to avoid what they perceive to be painful or threatening. For example, most at-risk students arrive on campus with low achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, and when given a choice, will often delay taking needed remediation courses or attempt to bypass them. Fear of failure and fear of success are very common for at-risk students. Saunders and Ervin (1984) contended that at-risk students experience motivational problems because of their lack of academic success. DeBoer (1983) contended that at-risk students may be more interested in "beating the system" than in completing the actual work. There is also a belief they should be rewarded for doing anything no matter if the quality of work is worthy of being rewarded. Thus, many at-risk students would rather drop a class in which they are having difficulty than face a struggle to recover from their poor performance. Continual frustration with lack of success in the classroom often leads to delay or even avoidance of seemingly unpleasant and unrewarding tasks. DeBoer (1983) found that at-risk students attribute success to luck, fate, or chance rather than to academic ability. Spann and VanDett (1982) contend these students are unwilling to take responsibility for their behavior.

Additional characteristics reported by Saunders and Ervin (1984) include difficulties with educational planning, an unrealistic image of the purpose of school and study, lack of career focus, high levels of anxiety in test situations, and low family values and support for higher education particularly among first generation college students. Other problems include how much to study, study conditions, reluctance to ask for

assistance, difficulty in completing academic tasks, and stress associated with academic performance.

Retention and its Importance to the At-Risk Student

Retaining at-risk students in higher education is not a new problem and has been heavily researched (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terinzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993, 1998). Much is unknown about the effects that internal and external characteristics have on retention. Tinto (1993) stated that all institutions face the same general sets of issues in seeking to insure the persistence of their at-risk students. General issues such as lack of student emotional, intellectual, and social preparation, faculty and staff interactions, academic under-preparation, college transition, family, finances, and diversity cause many institutions to struggle with retention.

Success in college is an especially relevant area of inquiry as the past two decades have witnessed the evolution of a dramatic transformation in job design and employment patterns that have dramatically affected the economic necessity of a college degree for all Americans. This reality is notably present in the manufacturing sector where America has lost significant unionized jobs to foreign competition through the globalization of capitalism that has eliminated this major source of employment opportunity and upward mobility for many workers who lack formal educational credentials (Wilson, 1977). As a result, the college degree has become an even more important prerequisite for the possibility of securing meaningful employment for many young adults in contemporary America.

The labor market in America has undergone a fundamental transformation over the past 25 to 30 years. The large loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector has created a dual labor market largely made up of marginal jobs in the retail and service sector (with low wages, inadequate or no fringe benefits, and little or no chance for career advancement) and significantly better white-collar and professional careers (with good pay, adequate benefits and career trajectories) for those with proper academic credentials (Wilson, 1997). This labor trend had resulted in the shrinking of the traditional middle-class and the frustrating inability of many younger Americans who are struggling financially to maintain the lifestyle of their parents and in many cases are unsuccessful (Newman, 1993). These changes are especially crucial for the at-risk student as they lack both the informal employment contacts and the financial cushion that traditional middle-class students often enjoy. The occupations of their parents are often either not available to them or inadequate to maintain a decent standard of living. The college degree increasingly has become the credential that determines who is better qualified to acquire the better jobs. "College graduates earn twice as much as high-school graduates and six times as much as high school dropouts" (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2002, p. 555). Attaining a college degree is especially crucial to improving the quality of life and economic condition of marginalized groups and historically oppressed individuals which is comprised of a high proportion of at-risk students. Colleges and universities have become increasingly important gatekeepers to acquiring what is, for many at-risk students, the passport to upward social mobility and the realization of the American Dream (Newman, 1993).

In a post-industrial economy, the most appropriate opportunity for upward mobility is the employment potential provided by a college credential; It is a critical element for the economic success of many disenfranchised groups. Simultaneously, the cost to attend a higher education institution is rising at an alarming rate further making it unlikely that the at-risk student will have adequate access opportunities. The at-risk students who would benefit from a higher education credential are at greatest risk of failing to acquire it because of high attrition rates. Institutional leaders are challenged to create intervention programs and to provide supports that enable at-risk students to succeed in earning a credential.

One of the research challenges is to develop effective theoretical models that are a multidimensional nature of student persistence (Giles-Gee, 1989). Another challenge is the different nature of retention programs from one college to another based on the unique nature of each school's culture, faculty, students and history. Unfortunately, increasing student persistence is rarely ever achieved by identifying a successful retention program at another college and importing the model to another institution; a successful program at one college may not be imported to another. "Programs which may work well in retaining students in one institution may not be equally effective in another" (Tinto, 1993, p.154). Each school is unique and should conduct research to determine which particular interventions work best. "To successfully address the issue of student retention at the institutional level, it may be necessary to first understand the dynamics of student persistence or withdrawal behavior that are unique to the particular institution in question" (Pascarella, 1986, p.101).

Another retention issue in higher education is the human capital approach of economic policy that views the success of economies in terms of degrees by which a labor force is educated (Yorke and Longden, 2004). In turn, a university level education of all enrolled students involves investment of substantial public and private resources (Marks, 2007). Thus, there is a cost whether or not a student completes a course of study. The consequence of a student not earning an academic credential can be interpreted as a waste of investment. Governments invest in students and colleges through grants, scholarships and guaranteed loans and expect a positive return on this investment which translates into maximizing the retention of students in courses and credential completion. From an institutional perspective, early withdrawal of students wastes recruiting and enrollment efforts (Yorke and Longden, 2004).

Retention Strategies

Strategies to enhance retention of at-risk students include recruitment and admission activities or factors, academic integration, student-faculty relations, institutional student support services, financial aid advisement, career planning and goal setting, helping students develop positive attitudes, and finally, institutional components (Tinto, 1993).

Recruitment and admission activities are critical in promoting student retention (King, 1993). The congruence between student needs, interests, and abilities and the expectations, rewards, and values of the institutions they attend directly contribute to retention (Beal, 1980; Astin, 1981; King, 1993). Recruitment and admission of at-risk students should include applicants receiving accurate information about the school, being

assigned to advisors who understand the needs of at-risk students, and requiring incoming students to complete a survival program (also known as a bridge program) that focuses on academic skill development, remedial courses, the use of the library, computer resources, and other intrusive support services as needed (Tinto, 1999).

Academic integration strategies in the first semester are very important to retention. Support services including intrusive counseling/advising, tutoring, mentoring, faculty feedback, and other services should be available throughout the first semester to support needs of at-risk students needs (Tinto, 1993). Students who enter college requiring developmental courses or possess low high school GPAs frequently contribute to lower retention levels and graduation rates (Adelman, 1999; Murtaugh, Burns, and Schuster, 1999; OIR, 1999). Early and intrusive intervention programs that structure the at-risk student experience can successfully retain students who otherwise would drop out during the first year of their college experience because of poor academic performance (Weissman, Bulakowski, and Jumisko, 1997).

Student-faculty relations also play a strategic role in promoting student academic integration (Spady, 1970; Beal & Pascarella, 1982; Tinto, 1993). This could include classroom performance feedback, engaging students in classroom debates, and/or providing assistance opportunities to students who are having difficulty with course work. Additionally, faculty could involve students in special projects, employment in a department, or involve them in a student advisory committee. Faculty may also advise student organizations, participate in a bridge or orientation program, or engage in student faculty research partnerships (Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, Von Hippel, & Lerner, 1998).

The institution should make available student support services that promote academic integration (such as reading, writing, and academic study skills) which promote student persistence (Lenning, 1982; Beal & Noel, 1980). Such activities may also include diagnostic testing, developmental instruction, tutoring, counseling and advising, and study skill programs (Beal & Noel, 1980). An early warning system based on institutional research should be developed to identify needed interventions. Aggressive and intrusive counseling should be provided to at-risk students with academic difficulty, or not attending classes, displaying other characteristics that indicate the likelihood of dropping out or failing (Wilcox, 1991).

Financial aid and personal counseling/advising are especially vital to freshmen at-risk students. Institutional financial staff should be assigned to at-risk students to assist with financial aid problems (Wilcox, 1991). Studies reveal that at-risk students who receive higher levels of personal counseling have higher retention rates (Wilson, Mason, & Ewing, 1997).

Researchers have consistently found that at-risk students who have established career plans and set academic and personal goals are more likely to persist in college (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993). Students who believe education will lead to a better job or graduate school are more likely to stay in school (Beal & Pascarella, 1982). Institutions should provide career planning and placement assistance by offering career testing and counseling, career exploration, graduate school information, job placement workshops, internships, as well as faculty contacts with employers and graduate schools (Tinto, 1993).

Students with positive attitudes about the institution and their own futures are much more likely to persist. Institutional fit and loyalty are attitudes that can and must be carefully nurtured. Bean (1990) recommends institutions use rituals, traditions, and symbols to enhance a sense of community. Measures of student social integration into an institution are also related to retention (King, 1993; Tinto, 1993).

Several institutional components can also improve retention (Alexander, 1998). First, students who must withdraw from the institution should be advised of the proper way to do so. Second, exit interviews should be conducted when possible to learn what happened and that information should be used to make institutional program adjustments. Third, institutional at-risk programs should be reviewed regularly using retention data to determine progress or lack of it. Fourth, program service data should be solicited annually from all staff that provide support to at-risk students and used to explore program changes. Fifth, learning communities and cohorts of first-time college students should be utilized to increase retention. Sixth, input from remaining students should be solicited as remaining students frequently know why their classmates are leaving (Thomas, 1990).

Finally, at-risk programs that succeed in increasing retention are generally comprehensive and coordinated (Dennis, 1998). It is virtually impossible to have an efficient retention program without involving most campus personnel (Dennis, 1998). It is imperative that faculty and administrators establish and maintain a relationship with at-risk students (Dennis, 1998). Successful programs always employ data and information management systems to effectively manage at-risk support programs (Lolli, 1991).

Retention efforts will succeed if campus leaders support the program and the entire campus community keeps focused on retaining these students rather than just enrolling them (Dennis, 1998).

Support Services Needed by At-Risk Students

At-risk students arrive at college unprepared to perform college level work for a variety of reasons; a) inadequate schooling experiences, b) competing family and work demands, c) lack of English language competency, or d) unfamiliarity with collegiate processes and practices. These students are disproportionately students of color, first generation college students from working class families with English not their primary language. They are often required to work a part or full-time job resulting in a reduced academic load and a longer period to earn credentials (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, and Gabelnick, 2004).

By entering college unprepared and with numerous other issues, these at-risk students are typically required to complete one or more remedial reading, writing, or mathematics courses. Additionally, these students must take multiple levels of subject matters to gain the required knowledge to perform in college level work. By the 1990s, almost one-third of all first year (42 percent in two-year public colleges and 20 percent in four-year public institutions) students were placed in basic skills or developmental classes in their first year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). In addition, 42 percent of faculty across all types of higher education institutions reported that most students lack the basic skills necessary to succeed in college-level work (Lindholm, Szelenyi, Hurtado, and Korn, 2005). With the lack of these basic skills and the need to

complete remediation courses, emphasis is placed on support services. These support services typically include intrusive counseling/advising, tutoring, orientations, bridge programs, academic skill workshops, supplemental instruction, mentoring, remediation, developmental instruction, cultural events, learning communities, advocacy, and faculty partnering (Tinto, 1993).

Intrusive Counseling/Advising

At-risk students enter college with significant issues that must be dealt with to allow these students to have a chance at earning a college credential. Conrath (1986) describes the most common characteristics of at-risk students entering college: (a) low self-confidence with a deep sense of personal impotency, helplessness, and lack of self-worth; (b) avoiders because school is demanding or threatening, confusing and unresponsive to their needs; (c) distrust of adults and adult institutions; (d) a limited notion of the future; (e) lack of reading, writing and mathematics skills resulting in feeling dumb, stupid, unable to pass these types of courses; (f) following the pattern of their parents who possess minimal skills, have low self-confidence, distrustful of institutions, avoidance, and possess an unknown future; (g) inadequate peer relationships; (h) impatient with routine, long-time sitting and listening and classrooms with little variety; and (i) no sense of a relationship between effort and achievement, but instead see success as a matter of luck or ease of the task.

The at-risk student's use of counseling and advising services especially during the initial entry into college is critical (Wilson, Mason, and Ewing, 1997). This is the time when students need the most help in dealing with numerous issues. This is also when

establishing relationships between the student and the counselor/advisor takes place and sets the stage for the engagement of services throughout the enrollment period. The stronger the relationship the more likely the student will persist while the weaker the relationship, the more likely the student will dropout (Turner and Berry, 2000). At-risk students prefer "one-on-one" counseling/advising services in personal and academic issues that may create a lack of focus on course work (Gallagher, Golin, and Kelleher, 1992). The "one on one" preference provides significant opportunity for a strong relationship to form which supports Turner and Berry's study. The effectiveness of student retention appears to reside not in the simple availability of student services but rather through a relationship approach where the services are seen to be an integral and positive part of the educational process which these students are expected to experience (Creamer, 1980). When services are provided in a negative fashion, i.e., when counseling and advising are required only for persons in trouble, services are considerably less effective (Creamer, 1980). Negativism resulting from a requirement rather than by choice results in stigmatizing the student as being less able or less successful than one's peers (Tinto, 1987).

The view that advising and counseling is an integral part of the college experience manifests itself on campus in several ways. On some campuses, such programs are housed in a central location. Frequently they are located in the student center or in a place which student naturally frequent. These locations are often bright, cheerful places staffed by warm, friendly, and competent persons who are visibly open to student contact which results in a well developed and maintained relationship. Effective

counseling and advising programs may be systematically linked to other student services and campus programs. Often the counseling and advising locations are part of an integral network of programs aimed at student retention and are administratively tied to both admissions and orientation programs. Through this integrated approach, student needs are addressed by institutional support services which includes a feedback loop to continually monitor student's progress. This holistic approach to the student is the focus of effective retention programs.

Tutoring

One of the more common academic assistance services for at-risk students is tutoring. Over \$1 billion a year is spent on tutoring and basic skills programs (McCabe, 2003). This amount has policy makers requiring evidence that tutoring provides positive outcomes to grade point average, persistence, and other indicators of student success (McCabe, 2003). Tutoring is a primary component of every at-risk program (Roueche & Snow, 1977) and contributes to retention of at-risk students (Boylan, Bonham, Claxton, & Bliss, 1992). Tutoring has a positive impact on persistence and graduation, final course grades, course completion rates, and student attitudes toward instruction (National Center for Developmental Education, 1984). Tutoring services include one-on-one as well as small and large group sessions and are offered routinely as well as by appointment. Institutions must make every effort to offer tutoring support for every subject and employ tutors that possess teaching skills.

Orientation Program

The length of Act 101 student orientation programs range from as little as one day to no more than one week for at-risk students with a focus on familiarizing them with the college environment. Orientations include; a) the opportunity to tour the campus; b) meet program staff, faculty, and support providers; c) learn academic policy; and d) engage in academic workshops that focus on basic skill development that will help students successfully navigate their college experience (Higbee, Dwinell, McAdams, GoldbergBelle, and Tardola, 1991). Additionally, students are provided tests such as LASSI, the Student Retention Inventory, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to evaluate the whole student and help them understand their learning styles, personality characteristics, and aptitudes (McCabe, 2003). All information gathered during an orientation is provided to the support staff as a starting point to working with the at-risk student.

Bridge Programs

Bridge programs (also known as freshman seminars or extended orientation programs) are usually conducted for four to eight weeks, most commonly in the summer, prior to the first semester of college. Students take the basic orientation program and incorporate additional components such as broad academic skill workshops (time management, organization, test taking, financial management, goal-setting, and decision-making); one to three remedial courses (English, writing, math, reading); intrusive counseling/advising and tutoring; peer and professional mentoring; and helping students adjust to college life (Boudreau and Kromrey, 1994; Stark, Harth, and Sirianni, 2001). A

multifaceted approach to retention using bridge programs, student mentors, and connection activities have shown affirmative retention results (Fidler and Godwin, 1994; Kluepfel, 1994; Koutsoubakis, 1999).

Supplemental Instruction

Supplemental instruction (SI) is an academic support service with a primary purpose to enhance student learning in academic courses, the expansion of student development through the mastery of effective academic skills, and the collaboration of the program's professionals with numerous individual faculty and academic departments (National Institute of Education, 1984). SI is effective in increasing student success primarily in undergraduate courses as measured by course grade (Congos & Schoeps, 1993). Supplemental instruction produces higher grades per course, higher semester GPA, and fewer withdrawals (Martin & Blanc, 1981; 1983). SI avoids the remedial stigma often attached to academic assistance programs because it identifies high-risk courses rather than at-risk students although most at-risk students use these services (Arendale, 1994). In some institutions, at-risk students may elect to participate in this SI while in other institutions they are required to participate. SI services routinely occur during the first week of classes and meet several times a week throughout the academic period. Additionally, SI enables at-risk students to master course content while they develop and integrate effective learning and study strategies (Anker, 1991; Blanc, DeBuhr, & Martin, 1983; Commander, Stratton, Callahan, & Smith, 1996; Maxwell, 1997).

Mentoring

Most Act 101 programs offer peer mentors (upper class students who are or have been in an Act 101 program) for at-risk students during their freshman year. Some Act 101 programs offer professional mentors (mentors who possess masters' level credentials in the social sciences and possess professional experience in advising and or counseling).

Daloz (1999) argues mentoring is a transformational process by describing higher education as a developmental journey undertaken by the student (explained the tasks incumbent upon the mentor as his or her protégé begins this journey). Daloz (1999) depicted mentoring as a process that centers on a steady dialogue between mentor and protégé in which cognitive movement is encouraged and supported. It is through this dialogue that the protégé's transformation becomes purposeful and directed. Daloz (1999) casts the mentor as a guide who has the specific tasks of: (a) engendering trust, (b) seeing the student's movement, (c) giving the student a voice, (d) introducing conflict and then providing help to overcome it, (e) emphasizing positive movement, and (f) monitoring the relationship to ensure the protégé is ready to "go it alone" after their freshman year.

Colley (2002) contends mentoring support services have a positive effect on first year retention. Piper and Piper (2000) contend the mentoring process leads to student growth and empowerment and positively impacts retention as long as the mentor remains connected to the protégé. Hicks (2002) contends that mentoring fosters positive retention in the first year for at-risk students who face an alien culture, unchartered academic and social territory, self-doubt, frustration, and separation from their families and friends.

Remediation

Many Act 101 programs offer remediation help in English, reading, writing and/or math subjects. Typically, the program uses professional tutors to teach high school type subject matter to at-risk students. Remedial help is often required by a lack of rigor in the high school curriculum (Klekotka, 2005). Remedial support is provided at the program level rather than having to enroll in remedial courses offered by the college (requiring tuition, textbooks, and fees). By offering this course material free, student saves tuition dollars for only college level courses.

Cultural Events

All Act 101 programs offer a cultural component to their programs. This component is very important as at-risk students possess significant economic and social deficiencies. Cultural events (always free of charge) include trips to Broadway musicals in New York City, the Smithsonian Institute and historical sites in Washington, D.C., plays on campus, and other cultural events. This component provides the at-risk student an opportunity to develop an understanding of cultural diversity that they never experienced.

Lind (1977) contends that at-risk students need cultural development since they came from poverty income families and environments that didn't provide cultural understanding. Lind also contends that cultural development had a positive impact on retention throughout the at-risk student's higher education experience.

Learning Communities

Many Act 101 programs utilize learning communities as part of their efforts to engage students academically with faculty as well as each other. Minkler (2002) defines learning communities as a way of deliberately structuring the curriculum so that students are more actively engaged in a sustained academic relationship with other students and faculty over a long period of time than in traditional course settings. Although learning communities are defined differently in different college settings, (Shapiro & Lavine, 1999) contend learning communities tend to share similar characteristics: (a) faculty and students are organized into small groups, (b) curriculum is structured and integrated, (c) students establish academic and social-support networks, (d) students are given a setting in which to define the expectations of college life, (e) faculty collaborates in meaningful ways, (f) faculty and students work together on specific learning outcomes, and (g) academic support services are provided.

The rationale behind Minkler's definition and Shapiro & Lavine's common characteristics is supported by Tinto (2003) who contends students who achieve greater social and academic integration are more likely to reach their goal of college graduation (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Brittenham, Cook, & Hall (2003) argue that failure to achieve social and academic integration contributes more to voluntary attrition than any other factor. The group mentality of learning communities serves to boost the confidence levels of at-risk student, thus increasing self-esteem and the potential of academic success (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). Cooperative learning moves away from the traditional lecture format and invites students to look forward to the class, to feel

respected and needed in the pursuit of knowledge, and to respect and rely upon each other in these endeavors (Minkler, 2002).

Advocacy

In Act 101 programs, advocacy plays a significant role in retaining at-risk students. The counselors/advisors advocate for the student to the Act 101 Director and in turn, the Act 101 Director advocates to administrative personnel/departments and faculty. This advocacy becomes an important component in keeping Act 101 students in the college allowing for more opportunity to graduate.

Advocacy involves academic, personal and financial support to at-risk students who arrive on campus with numerous short-comings. Academic advocacy allows students to remain in school an extra semester or longer if they don't meet the academic requirements. Personal advocacy involves program personnel providing extra support in almost any area of need. Financial advocacy involves providing extra funding for the program staff and financial aid for the students (e.g. scholarships, college work study jobs).

Faculty/Administrative Partnering

A critical component in any successful program seeking to improve student success and retention is an effective partnership between academic and administrative personnel (Himmelstein, 1992). Since at-risk students often fail to seek out available services until it is too late, a program needs to exist to identify and engage these students in the use of these services (Himmelstein, 1992). Through this partnership effort, faculty will notify administrators and support staff of at-risk students experiencing academic

difficulties in sufficient time to refer students to tutoring or other academic interventions before grades become final (Simmons, 1994).

Relevant Studies

This portion of the literature review includes thirteen studies related to (1) at-risk programs similar to Act 101, (2) support services commonly offered in Act 101 type programs, (3) reluctance to engage in support services by at-risk students, and (4) challenges experienced by at-risk students upon entering higher education (see Appendix D). Each study is identified by title and then arranged into eight subsections: (a) description of the research problem or issue that was investigated; (b) list of research questions or objectives; (c) description of the methodology used; (d) description of the approach to sampling; (e) summary of study results; (f) key limitations, assumptions of the research, or both; (g) list of issues for future investigation or research identified by the researcher; and (h) discussion of the significance of the study.

The findings from these relevant studies of at-risk students and at-risk programs included: (a) higher GPAs resulted in higher retention rates; (b) higher retention rates occurred when students were engaged in all available program services; (c) higher academic outcomes resulted when students engaged in all available program services; (d) support services made a positive difference in persistence; (e) engaged at-risk students earned degrees at an equal rate to non-at-risk students; (f) at-risk students not fully engaged in program services negatively impacted retention rates and persistence to graduation; and (g) greater use of support services reflected an increase in positive academic results. All of these findings supported Tinto's Longitudinal Model of

Institutional Departure which focuses on academic and social integration directly impacting student departure decisions. The researcher concluded that these findings consistently reflected that the availability and engagement in at-risk program support services discussed in this study had a direct positive impact on higher retention and persistence rates for the at-risk population. This conclusion supports Tinto's model that academic and social integration positively impacts student departure decisions.

Chapter Summary

At-risk research and theories presented at the program and student levels provided a basis for understanding the challenges an at-risk student faces in higher education as well as the institutions retention issues with this population. These studies and theories helped to shape an understanding of why at-risk students struggle and in many cases leave higher education. Knowing why at-risk students behave the way they do was important for understanding the challenges of what these students face in persisting in higher education. The connection between the theoretical framework and the relevant studies presented in this chapter served as a connecting link to the design and methods of the study that are described next in chapter three.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and interpret how current enrolled Act 101 students described their perceptions of their challenges and experiences upon entering college, the importance of Act 101 program services and how in their academic life, used Act 101 services. This study was conducted with participants (students, counselors, and tutors) enrolled and/or employed in 32 Pennsylvania Act 101 programs through the use of focus groups to acquire a better understanding of at-risk students challenges, fears, and needs.

In the discussion of research methodology it was important to describe both the fundamental reasons for selecting the methods as well as the mechanical procedures used to conduct the research (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Although a diversity of final written qualitative research exists, there is no one best final report format. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) claim that

you owe it to your readers to explain the process by which you collected and interpreted your data. After all, your findings are credible and fully understandable only to the extent that your techniques are open to the scrutiny of readers. (p. 142)

This chapter describes the nine-step process used to conduct qualitative research for this study (see Figure 1). The chapter begins with a discussion of why qualitative methods were most appropriate for conducting the study. Next, the process of data

collection is presented which describes the procedures for the proposal of the study, data collection documents, and how the data for this study were collected. Third, data analysis strategies and the data analysis process and procedures are described. Finally, the steps for verifying the quality of the study are discussed.

Sections	Description
I. Qualitative Research	Step 1. Rationale for Conducting Qualitative Research
	Step 2. Philosophical Assumptions Underlying Qualitative Research
	Step 3. General Characteristics of Qualitative Design
	Step 4. Rationale for Phenomenological Tradition
	Step 5. Researcher Background, Role, and Biases
	Step 6. Proposal of the Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Précis • Developing Focus Group Questions • Selecting the Research Questions • Determining Study Participants • Determining How to Study the Participants • Approvals to Conduct the Research • Piloting the Study
II. Data Collection	Step 7. Data Collection Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting Participation • Data Collection
III. Data Analysis	Step 8. Data Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Analysis Strategies • Data Analysis Process and Procedures • Triangulation
IV. Verifying the Quality of the Study	Step 9: Verifying the Quality of the Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing Trustworthiness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility • Transferability • Dependability • Confirmability

Figure 2. Process flow chart of the outline for the methodology Chapter 3.

Within each section, information and explanations explain why methodologies and techniques were selected for this research study. The final section is a summary of the chapter.

Qualitative Research

The first portion of this chapter was divided into five sections designed to explain: (a) rationale for conducting qualitative research; (b) philosophical assumptions underlying qualitative research; (c) general characteristics of qualitative design; (d) rationale for basing the study in the phenomenological tradition; and (e) researcher's background, role, and biases.

Rationale for Conducting Qualitative Research

The first step was to determine the most appropriate research methodology. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Creswell (1998) highlighted various reasons for conducting qualitative research and suggested several reasons. The first deals with the nature of the research questions. Qualitative research questions typically begin with “how” or “what” to describe what inductive logic is occurring in the topic. Inductive logic allows categories and themes to emerge from the participants rather than themes pre-conceived by the researcher (Creswell, 1994). In contrast, quantitative research seeks to question “why” using

deductive logic. Deductive logic is “wherein theories and hypotheses are tested in a cause-and-effect order. Concepts, variables, and hypotheses are chosen before the study begins and remain fixed throughout the study ... one does not venture beyond these predetermined hypotheses” (Creswell, 1994, p. 7).

Second, a qualitative study may be conducted when variables that may not be easily identifiable or theories are not available to explain participant behavior. The results of qualitative research can help to develop new theories of behavior. Although existing trainer roles (variables) were identified throughout the literature, a strong rationale still existed for choosing a qualitative approach. Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested

if the research is in an area for which theory is well developed, the study may be a significant test or expansion of the theory. The researcher may use concepts developed by previous researchers and formulate questions similar to those used in previous research...The results of the research will constitute an extension of theory that will expand the generalizations or more finely tune theoretical propositions...The contribution of such research is the expansion of previous theory. (p. 35)

Third, qualitative studies aid the researcher in presenting detailed views of the topic. Unlike quantitative research where the researcher remains distant from assessing a situation, the qualitative researcher’s stance is different. “Researchers interact with those they study ... living with or observing informants over a prolonged period of time” (Creswell, 1994, p. 6). One of the key points in Creswell’s (1998) definition of qualitative research was reporting detailed views of informants. Fourth, qualitative research involves

gaining access to a natural setting where information can be gathered to keep the findings within the context where they exist. Despite the expansive geographical dispersion and nature of the study participants, the present researcher observed the participants in a natural setting. Fifth, a qualitative approach is used because the researcher is interested in writing in a literary style. Creswell (1998) explains that “the writer brings himself or herself into the study, the personal pronoun “I” is used, or perhaps the writer engages a storytelling form of narration” (p. 18). Sixth, a qualitative study requires extensive data collection and detailed analysis of data. It is presumed that the researcher has sufficient time and resources to conduct a qualitative study (Creswell, 1998). Seventh, Creswell (1998) suggested selecting a qualitative approach because “audiences are receptive to qualitative research” (p. 18). This audience could include a graduate advisor or committee or “publication outlets with editors receptive to qualitative approaches” (Creswell, 1998, p. 18). Eighth, qualitative research emphasizes “the researcher’s role as an active learner who can tell a story from the participant’s view rather than as an expert who passes judgment on participants” (Creswell, 1998, p. 18).

Using suggestions by Creswell (1998) for conducting qualitative research, connections could be made between qualitative research and its usefulness in enriching and providing greater meaning to the at-risk student. For example, in the counseling profession, qualitative research seems to be central to the type of work that is done. It involves watching, listening, and interacting with people on their own terms. Perceptions of at-risk students are needed to capture a broader and more open-ended perspective about what they feel and think as well as interactionalist relationships that support their

journey in post secondary education. An understanding of the contextual dimensions of at-risk students may lead to new insights, validate existing perceptions or create shared knowledge and meaning to this group.

Philosophical Assumptions Underlying Qualitative Research

In addition to determining and justifying that a qualitative approach was appropriate for studying a problem, the second step was to frame the study within the philosophical perspectives of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). “Qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm or worldview, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their inquiries” (Creswell, 1998, p. 74). Guba (1992) and Creswell (1998) agree on three specific assumptions that (a) relate to the nature of reality or ontology, (b) the relationship of the researcher to that which is being researched or epistemology, and (c) the process of the research or methodology. Guba (1992) and Creswell (1998) discussed a fourth assumption, the role of values in a study or axiology, but only Creswell (1998) used the term “axiological” to describe the assumption. Guba (1992) described the role of values in a study as a practical issue that is embedded in the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. Creswell (1998) added one additional assumption, the rhetorical assumption or the need to “attend to the language and terms of qualitative inquiry” that he viewed as “one of his own concerns” (p. 76). A brief discussion of the five assumptions follows.

Ontology focuses on the nature of the multiple realities that exist in qualitative research. The existence of the realities of the researcher, the individuals participating in the study, and the readers who interpret the study must be recognized. “The qualitative

researcher needs to report these realities, rely on voices and interpretations of informants through quotes, present themes that reflect words used by the informants, and advance evidence of different perspectives on each theme” (Creswell, 1998, p. 76).

Epistemology addresses the relationship of the researcher to the research. Accordingly, the researcher must interact with the study participants either by “living with or observing informants over a prolonged period of time or actual collaboration” (Creswell, 1998, p. 76). For example, a prolonged amount of time in the field may help to decrease the amount of distance between the researcher and the study participants by creating a sense of belonging with the study participants as an “insider” rather than an “outsider” (Creswell, 1998).

The axiological assumption refers to the role of values in a study (Creswell, 1998). Each observation or interpretation made by the qualitative researcher is “guided by world images that determine which data are salient and which are not” (Vidich & Lyman, 1994, p. 25). The qualitative researcher needs to admit and actively report his or her biases regarding the observations and interpretations made during the course of the study (Creswell, 1998).

The rhetorical assumption concentrates on “literary forms of writing such as the use of metaphors, the use of the first-person ‘I’, and a focus on stories” (Creswell, 1998, p. 77). Language that is personal and narrative in nature is germane to qualitative research. Words such as understanding, discovering, and meaning are commonly found in qualitative writing (Creswell, 1998, p. 77).

The methodological assumption refers to the process of the research study. Typically, an inductive approach to developing the narrative of the study is used to demonstrate that the process is one of emerging design (Creswell, 1998). Inductive means that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, and theories from the details of the study (Creswell, 1994). For example, in a study based in the phenomenological tradition, the researcher “first details the individual statements of informants about experiences with the phenomenon before moving to meanings or clusters of meanings” (Creswell, 1998, p. 77). The previous assumptions helped to guide the design of qualitative studies are discussed in the next section.

General Characteristics of Qualitative Design

After the justification for using qualitative methodology and the philosophical assumptions were researched, the third step in the process was to determine the characteristics of qualitative research or the common strands that show why research fits the category of qualitative research (Bogden and Bilken, 1992).

Patton (1987) discussed several qualitative themes: (a) naturalistic inquiry (researchers study naturally occurring activities and processes and do not attempt to manipulate the environment for the purposes of the study); (b) inductive analysis (the researcher attempts to make sense of a situation without artificially imposing his or her own pre-existing expectations); (c) holistic perspective (researchers try to understand situations as a whole and that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts); (d) going into the field (of having direct and personal contact with the participants in their own

environments); (e) dynamic, developmental perspective (flexibility to adapt inquiry as understanding deepens); and (f) case orientation (each case is unique and individualistic).

Further, Creswell (1998) summarized several perspectives about the characteristics of qualitative research from leading authors in the field: Bogdan & Bilken, Eisner, and Merriman. One undertakes qualitative research (a) in a natural setting, (b) where the researcher is an instrument of data collection, (c) who gathers words or pictures, (d) who analyzes them inductively, (e) who focuses on the meaning of participants, and (f) who describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language (Creswell, 1998).

Although the characteristics mentioned do not represent every writer's opinion about the nature of qualitative research, it was important to describe the generally accepted characteristics as a foundation or as a backdrop to appreciate the present study.

Rationale for Phenomenological Tradition

The fourth step was to determine a tradition of inquiry. Creswell (1998) explained that the researcher needed to identify, study, and employ one or more traditions of inquiry. He further stated that the "tradition need not be 'pure' and one might mix procedures from several" (Creswell, 1998, p. 21).

Qualitative traditions are presented throughout the literature in a variety of ways. Sometimes traditions are described as the type of data collection used, or how the data is analyzed, or the overall design that may include the entire research process (Creswell, 1994). Phenomenology is a tradition frequently discussed with qualitative research design

(Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Creswell, 1994, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Moustakas, 1994).

Much of the intellectual thought surrounding phenomenology has its roots in the many social science areas but particularly in the areas of sociology and psychology.

Some philosophical positions of phenomenology include reflective/transcendental phenomenology, dialogical phenomenology, empirical phenomenology, existential phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and social phenomenology (Creswell, 1998).

Creswell's major procedural issues in using phenomenology are:

1. The researcher needs to understand the philosophical perspectives behind the approach, especially the concept of studying how people experience a phenomenon. The concept of epoch is central, where the researcher brackets his or her own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon to understand it through the voices of informants.
2. The investigator writes research questions that explore the meaning of that experience for individuals and asks individuals to describe their everyday lived experiences.
3. The investigator then collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Typically, this information is collected through long interviews...with the informants ranging in number from 5 to 25.

4. The phenomenological data analysis steps are generally similar for all psychological phenomenologist who discuss the methods...the original protocols are divided into statements...then the units (statements) are transformed into clusters of meaning...[and then] are tied together to make a general description of the experience.
5. The phenomenological reports ends with the reader understanding better the essential, invariant structure (or essence) of the experience, recognizing that a single unifying meaning of experience exists. (p. 54-55).

This approach to procedures for conducting phenomenological research is a general consensus about how to proceed, however these procedures serve as general guidelines where strict adherence to the procedures is not required. “Researchers are expected to develop plans of study suited to understanding the particular experiential phenomenon that is the object of their study” (Creswell, 1998, p. 54).

This study was based on the phenomenological perspective that “views human behavior – what people say and do – as a product of how people interpret the world” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 13). A phenomenological approach describes the meaning of the lived experiences or what people say and do, by way of shared common experiences. “It rests on an assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112).

Researcher Background, Roles, and Biases

The fifth step in the process was to identify the researcher's background, role, and biases. Creswell (1994) recommended that the researcher "include statements about past experiences of the researcher that provide familiarity with the topic, the setting, or the informants" (p. 147). As qualitative research is interpretive, Creswell (1994) suggested that the biases of the researcher are stated explicitly in the research report. Creswell (1994) contended that "such openness is considered useful and positive" (p. 147).

The researcher was an Act 101 student in 1971, the inception year of the Act 101 statewide program. He possessed the typical characteristics of an at-risk student: a) first generation college student; b) poverty level family income; c) ranked in the bottom 20% of his high school class; d) placement test results required remediation in English, math, reading and writing; e) no cultural or diversity exposure; f) deficiency in academic skills needed to be successful in college courses; g) required to work to support basic living expenses; h) expected to continue helping family back home financially; i) and possessed low self-esteem, no successes either academically or personally, and poor social skills. The Act 101 program provided the foundation and daily support needed to succeed in persisting to a degree. This foundation set the stage for the researcher to earn an Associate, Bachelor, and Masters Degree to date with current efforts being spent to complete a Doctorate degree. Additionally, through participation in Act 101, the researcher has encouraged and instilled the importance of education to his three children, all currently enrolled in college. Professionally, the researcher has accumulated over 30 years of experience in education, private industry, and state government specifically in

post-secondary education, human resource management, and training & development. In higher education, he taught in the classroom, counseled/advised students on personal and academic issues, and provided tutoring support in several subjects. He was employed in private industry with job responsibilities that included hiring, supervising and directing employees. He conducted numerous workshops for various levels of employees in organizations.

The researcher's role in the present research is primarily that of interviewer. Kvale (1996) suggested that the interviewer himself is the research instrument. "A good interviewer is an expert in the topic of the interview as well as in human interaction" (Kvale, 1996, p. 147). As a doctoral student in Workforce Education and Development, the researcher studied "training" and roles that trainers play in organizations. The researcher's participation in an Act 101 program upon entering college, employed as the statewide director of the Act 101 program for approximately four years, and doctoral preparation combined with his real life work experience provided him with the knowledge to describe and interpret the data collected in this study.

Proposal of the Study

The first step in pre-data collection was to prepare the proposal including several sub-steps within the process. Some sub-steps occurred simultaneously with other sub-steps.

The Précis

First, a proposal or précis was written to outline the purpose of the study, provide research questions, a review of the literature, proposed methodology for the study, draft

documents related to gaining access to study participants, and proposed data collection instruments. Simultaneous to preparing the proposal, the researcher determined the population and how to collect data. The proposal was presented to the doctoral committee for review and approval.

Developing Focus Group Questions

Between February 2005 and March 2006, the researcher and staff from the Office of Equal Education Opportunity within the Pennsylvania Department of Education held focus group sessions with directors from each participating Act 101 institution. The meetings were designed to develop common themes of issues challenging all Act 101 programs. Through this effort, the researcher developed a set of questions which were designed to be used in focus groups with current Act 101 students and program support staff (counselors/advisors and tutors). The themes from the focus groups were then triangulated with themes from the directors' focus groups; the resulting questions from this analysis are found in Appendix E.

Selecting the Focus Group Questions

Realizing all the questions in Appendix E could not be utilized within the scope of this dissertation, the researcher decided to select three questions that would potentially have the greatest impact to current programs and future research. The researcher decided that understanding the personal and academic challenges Act 101 students experienced upon entering college would support what services Act 101 programs should offer. This decision resulted in selecting student focus group questions one and three. Question nine

was the third question selected because if eligible students were reluctant to engage in services, these students would most likely not persist to graduation.

Determining Study Participants

The second step in the pre-data collection process of the study was to determine who would be the study participants. Based upon the purpose of the study, the population for this study was determined to be current Act 101 students attending participating Act 101 post-secondary institutions in Pennsylvania. The 32 institutions studied for this research were all available at a time that was convenient to the researcher's schedule. When study samples are selected at the convenience or ease of access of the researcher, a convenience sample exists (Fraenkel & Wallen, n.d., ¶ 3). Although the study was also based on a convenience sample, the three organizations also met the criteria of a "realistic (research) site" proposed by Marshall & Rossman (2006) where

- (a) entry is possible; (b) there is a high degree of probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest is present; (c) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; (d) the study can be conducted and reported ethically; and (e) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured. (p. 62)

Determining How to Study the Participants

The third step in the pre-data collection process of the research was to determine how to study the participants. This subsection begins with a discussion of data collection methods in qualitative research. Next, information is presented regarding the use of interviewing and the use of reviewing of documents in qualitative research.

Data collection methods in qualitative research are widely discussed in the literature (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Creswell, 1994, 1998). Although there are numerous discussions throughout the literature regarding suggested methods for collecting data in qualitative research, the three core and most frequently mentioned methods for gathering information appeared in Marshall and Rossman (2006). The three core methods for gathering information are: (a) participation in the setting, (b) direct observation, and (c) in-depth interviewing (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 105).

Participant observation “allows the researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 106). Direct observation involves copious and consistent note taking to document and describe the various actions and interactions that are observed among study participants. In-depth interviewing can be categorized into three types: (a) informal or conversational, (b) general interview guide approach, and (c) standardized open-ended interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). “Typically, qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations ... the participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participants views it, not as the researcher views it” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108).

The qualitative tradition of research can be undertaken utilizing one of five specific traditions: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or a case study (Cresswell, 1998). The phenomenology approach was implemented in several different settings including education (Tesch, 1988) and was appropriate for the present study which deals with the experience of at-risk students. Furthermore, this methodology

allows for the study of a group of individuals as compared to other approaches such as a biography or a case study involving one individual (Cresswell, 1998).

All participants in this study were either receiving or providing services in Act 101 programs thereby interacting with each other. The researcher attempted to discover what factors participants identify as influential in that process and how they understand their experience. A phenomenological approach attempts to make meaning of the events or interactions that occur to people in a given situation and to examine the process in which these individuals assign meaning to their experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The process of data analysis within the phenomenological approach also aids the goals of the study. There are numerous factors that may play a part in at-risk students' decision to persist, withdraw or just drop out from their institution. The phenomenological approach is significant in that it allows for methodological reduction to take place in the data analysis portion of the research (Cresswell, 1998). The researcher had the ability to identify themes and clusters of factors that went into the persistence decisions of the participants during the data analysis phase which, in turn, allowed for further understanding of the experience of at-risk students.

Phenomenological interviewing is a special type of in-depth interviewing, and its purpose is to describe the meaning of a phenomenon that individuals share (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In-depth focus group interviews vary in length. Creswell (1998) suggested that interviews could last up to two hours. Seidman (1998) believed there is nothing magical or absolute about this time frame ... "what is important is that the length of time be decided upon before the interview process begins" (Seidman, 1998, p. 14).

Based upon learned information about data collection methods, the researcher chose to conduct open-ended focus group interviews. Different qualitative approaches are often presented in the literature as distinct approaches with little overlap in the methodology but focus groups reflects an approach that has been conducted in the field of nursing where they are increasingly using focus groups as part of phenomenology (Bradbury-Jones, C., Sambrook, S., & Irvin, F., 2009). Open-ended focus group interviews pose questions that invite participants in the group to philosophize for the purpose of potentially gaining insights into private thoughts, opinions, and perceptions (Patton, 1987). It consists of a group of individuals who are selected and assembled by the researcher to discuss, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of research. Focus groups depend upon self-disclosure occurring between participants within a non-judgmental and non-threatening setting (Krueger and Casey 2000). The researcher ensured participation by each member of each focus group by: (a) only inviting participants who were interested and expected to share their thoughts; and (b) by requesting a comment from each participant for each question asked by the researcher. The researcher searched for quotes or observations that might be linked in some way or are examples of the same underlying idea, issue, or concept. Furthermore, a focus group is concerned with the interaction occurring between participants as with what the group thinks and feels about a topic.

According to Powell and Single (1996), a focus group uses guided, interactional discussion to generate the rich details of complex experiences and reasoning behind an individual's attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and actions. They argue that focus groups are

particularly useful when current knowledge about a subject is inadequate and elaboration is important. Powell and Single (1996) see focus groups as especially important when the subject being investigated is complex and when concurrent use of additional data is necessary for validity. Because of the complexity and as part of many mixed-methods studies, Krueger and Casey (2000) portray focus groups as useful to help the researcher conceptualize, understand, explain, and identify variables. Focus groups have clear potential when the researcher is interested in processes whereby a group jointly constructs meaning about a topic. Moreover, group synergy may foster a creative process where new thoughts, ideas and experiences are shared (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996).

Approvals to Conduct the Research

The fourth step in the pre-data collection was to gain final approval from the doctoral committee to conduct the research and approval by The Pennsylvania State University's Office of Regulatory Compliance to use human subjects in the research. The doctoral committee approved the study on January 25, 2007 and The Pennsylvania State University's Office of Regulatory Compliance approved the research on March 1, 2007. Seeking approval to use human subjects in research is a standard university policy as well as a procedure discussed in the relevant qualitative literature. For example, Creswell (1998) stated "regardless of the tradition of inquiry, permissions need to be sought from a human subject's review board, a process in which a campus committee reviews research studies for their potential harmful impact on subjects (or participants)" (p. 115).

Piloting the Study

The fifth step in the pre-data collection process was to pilot the study. Maxwell (1996) suggested that pilot studies specifically test the researcher's ideas and methods to generate an understanding of the concepts held by the people to be studied. With permission to study human subjects granted, the list of focus group questions, found in Appendix E, were pilot tested in March 2007 at three institutions: a community college, a four-year public college, and a four-year private college. The three organizations pilot tested were selected because they were convenient to the researcher's schedule. When study samples are selected at the convenience or ease of access of the researcher, a convenience sample exists (Fraenkel & Wallen, n.d., ¶ 3). Although the study was also based on a convenience sample, the three organizations also met the criteria of a "realistic (research) site" proposed by Marshall & Rossman (2006) where

(a) entry is possible; (b) there is a high degree of probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest is present; (c) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; (d) the study can be conducted and reported ethically; and (e) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured. (p. 62)

Each pilot test included approximately one-hour individual sessions with students, counselors, and tutors.

The pilot test findings concluded all three groups agreed the one-hour time allotment per session was adequate. The participants found: (a) the research to be of significant value, (b) the questions to be appropriate and easy to understand but

recommended minor word changes to some questions, (c) found key word definitions to be accurate, (d) did not find the nature of the questions too personal in a group setting, and (e) confirmed that the approach made to participate was done exactly as outlined in the researcher's approved Informed Consent Form.

Based upon the comments received from the pilot test participants, the researcher maintained all aspects of the original structure but did revise some wording in several questions. A student suggested that the researcher should ask why certain program services were important to the students. Another student stated the difference between earlier challenges they faced and current challenges they faced was unclear. The revisions from pilot number one were included in pilot test two and the revisions from tests one and two were included in pilot test three. At the conclusion of pilot test three, no further revisions were deemed necessary by the researcher.

Data Collection

The second section of this chapter describes the sixth step in the qualitative research process, data collection. The section includes the step by step process that was followed to prepare for collecting the data as well as actual data collection. This section begins with a discussion of the steps involved in the study proposal process in qualitative research. The subsections of the study proposal delineate the various activities in the pre-data collection process. Each activity is discussed in greater detail in each subsection in this section. The second part of this section describes how the data were collected and the documents used in collecting the data.

Data Collection Activities

This subsection describes step six in the research process, the activities involved in collecting data. The data collection activity includes the documents used to invite participation and concludes with a description of how the data were collected.

Inviting Participants

On March 1, 2007 an email was sent to Act 101 program directors at the 74 Act 101-approved institutions. The email described the parameters of the proposed research, groups of participants (students, counselors/advisors, and tutors), consent information (potential participants were provided voluntary participation information by the program director or assistant director), delivery of the consent information, attachments of the three sets of questions, basic logistics information, and a request for response within seven days to determine interest in research participation. Students, counselors/advisors, and tutors were selected based on their willingness to participate and their availability during the researcher's scheduled on-site visits. Within the seven day period, the researcher received 32 positive responses, 34 negative responses and eight institutions did not respond. The non-responding institutions were treated as negative responses. As this research was designed to be conducted on site, the researcher solidified visit dates and half day agenda with each Act 101 director. A second email was sent to each participating Act 101 Director confirming participation, logistics, and a proposed agenda. The email also required that the contents of all documents be shared among all the appropriate institutional personnel including senior leadership, administrative personnel, counselors, tutors, and students as well as anyone else they felt needed to be informed.

Seidman (1998) recommended that participants be made aware of all required details of the research so as to properly acknowledge consent to participate. A consent document should include the following points:

1. The form should tell the participants what they are being asked to do, by whom, and for what purpose. The participants must know the identity of and how to contact the researcher.
2. It should inform participants of any risks they might be taking in participating in the research.
3. It should indicate that participation is voluntary.
4. It should inform the participant of their rights to review the materials and withdraw from the process.
5. It should indicate whether participants' names will be used in the study and what pseudonyms will be substituted.
6. It should indicate how the results of the study will be disseminated. It should indicate if the participant will benefit in anyway (Seidman, 1998).

Although no consent form was required to be signed, the researcher reviewed the above steps with each group prior to the start of the session to ensure each person was properly informed. This process did not reveal anyone stating they were not properly informed nor did anyone choose to not participate after the review was complete.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from March 15, 2007 through June 10, 2007 from eight community colleges, nine four-year public institutions, and 15 four-year

private institutions. The participants included 351 students, 88 counselor/advisors, and 161 tutors. Binders with tabbed sections were used to store the focus group responses by institution. A separate binder was maintained for the approval information from The Pennsylvania State University's Office of Regulatory Compliance, copies of the questions, email information to the directors, response information from the directors, and consent and delivery of consent information.

Campus visits were scheduled by the mutual availability of the researcher and the participants. The individual scheduled dates with proposed agendas were agreed upon in advance by the researcher and the program director. Actual agendas were published about one week in advance of the researcher's visit.

The same questions were asked of each focus group in the same numerical sequence as indicated in Appendix A without deviations. Occasionally a participant asked the researcher to repeat a phrase or word or asked a question or requested clarification of a word or phrase. Comments were captured as they were expressed by the participants. The starting time of each interview was in accordance with the published agenda. The ending time varies due to the researcher scheduling 15-minutes extra time to each one hour session. Although it is standard practice for this type of research to not exceed the scheduled 1 hour time allowance, the researcher decided to allow for up to 15-minutes extra time for each focus group to accommodate larger focus groups. Some sessions ended earlier than the one hour allotted time while some sessions ended up to 15-minutes later than the one hour allotted time. These variations occurred primarily due to the size

of the groups with larger groups taking slightly longer and smaller groups taking slightly less time.

Data Analysis

The eighth step in the process of qualitative research was to determine how the data collected from the focus groups would be reported, managed, and analyzed. This section begins with a description of the strategies for conducting data analysis and concludes with the step by step process used to report, manage, and analyze the data.

Data Analysis Strategies

Marshall and Rossman (1999) described data analysis as “the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (p. 150). The goal of data analysis in qualitative research is to generate themes and ultimately assertions or interpretations about collected data. However, no consensus exists for prescribing one single approach to data analysis (Creswell, 1998). Several authors in the field of qualitative study have offered various approaches to analyzing qualitative data (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maxwell, 1996). As there was no preferred set of strategies for analyzing data, the present researcher selected a strategy provided by Marshall & Rossman (1999). Although various authors provided slightly different approaches to their scheme for data analysis, Marshall & Rossman (1999) presented the most logical approach in the researcher’s opinion.

Marshall & Rossman (1999) suggested a six-phase approach to data analysis: (a) organizing the data, (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns, (c) coding the data;

(d) testing the emergent understandings, (e) searching for alternative explanations, and (f) writing the report (p. 152).

In addition to deciding on an overall data analysis strategy, another decision was *when* to begin analyzing the data. Seidman's (1998) approach was to avoid any in-depth analysis of the responses until all the sessions were completed reasoning the researcher would avoid imposing meaning from one groups responses onto the next. Maxwell (1996) disagreed by referring to Seidman's approach as a "minority view" (p. 77). Maxwell (1996) believed that data analysis should begin immediately after the first session and extend through the length of the research. The present researcher decided to conduct no formal data analysis until all interviews were completed.

Data Analysis Process and Procedures

This section describes in detail the steps and activities used to analyze the data gathered in this study. Each of the six phases recommended by Marshall & Rossman (1999) is described to analyze the data for this study.

Organizing the Data

Organizing the data refers to making sense out of the data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The raw data derived from the focus group sessions were the responses of the participants. The first step in organizing the data was to read through the raw data several times. Marshall & Rossman (1999) contended that multiple readings would help to thoroughly familiarize the researcher with the data. During the readings, the researcher performed initial editing. Maxwell (1996) and Marshall & Rossman (1999) recommended that the researcher write notes and memos on what is observed and heard

in the data then develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships. The next step was to organize the data into file folders. Marshall and Rossman (1999) recommended giving careful attention to how the data are displayed. Creswell (1998) cautioned that because data in qualitative research are typically voluminous, data must be easily located; placing the data in file folders is one method of beginning the analysis process.

Categories, Themes, and Patterns

During the second phase, categories, themes, and patterns were generated. The researcher sought commonality of thoughts or comments that linked data back to the original purpose and research questions of the study. Creswell (1998) pointed out that the researcher should find comments about how individuals are experiencing the topic, call out those comments and treat each comment as having equal worth, and work to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping comments. The process of arranging the information by cutting and pasting the transcribed words into what Marshall & Rossman (1999) termed “buckets or baskets into which segments of the text are placed” (p. 154) was an integral step in classifying the information. “Classifying pertains to taking the text or qualitative information apart, looking for categories, themes, or dimensions of information” (Creswell, 1998, p. 144). Next, the student questions and responses were cut apart in the order the questions were asked; a similar approach was used for the counselors and the tutors. The sorted answers were arranged and taped on loose-leaf paper and stored in separate manila folders.

Coding the Data

The third phase, coding, is a primary categorizing strategy. The goal of coding is to break apart the data and "rearrange it [the data] into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 78-79). "As you read through your data, certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects' ways of thinking, and events repeat and stand out" (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992, p. 166). Bogdan and Bilken (1992) recommended that the researcher "search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns" (p. 166).

Coding may be performed in several ways such as abbreviated key words, colored paper, colored stickers, and different colored inks. No one way of coding is recommended; it is a decision the researcher must make (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Coding for the present study incorporated recommendations by Bogdan & Bilken (1992) and Marshall & Rossman (1999). First, colored highlighting pens were used to arrange the data into logical and usable categories. Words and phrases that were repeated in the participants' responses to each question were highlighted. Then common words and phrases were transferred to a summary sheet for use in the next phase of data analysis which is testing emergent understandings. For example, the first question sought to reveal types of personal and/or academic challenges students encountered when first enrolling in college. Key words such as *very important*, *extremely important*, *vital*, *very positive*, and

very essential were highlighted and transferred to a summary page to aid the researcher in forming the understanding of data and in writing the interview results.

Testing Emergent Understandings

In the next phase, testing emergent understandings, the researcher evaluated the usefulness of the data to determine if the data was linking to the research questions. Creswell (1998) referred to this phase as interpretation or making sense of the data which is critical to the completion of the study. After coding was completed, all responses to the questions that supported the three research questions were further examined for applicability to the research questions. Marshall and Rossman (2006) challenged the researcher to “determine how useful the data are in illuminating the questions being explored and how they are central to the story that is unfolding about the social phenomenon” (p. 157).

During the fall of 2008, the researcher had six two-hour or longer meetings with Dr. Edgar Yoder, a qualitative and quantitative research methodologist and a member of the researcher's dissertation committee. The meetings were held to perform member checks or double checks on the themes and categories. Dr. Yoder and the researcher both concluded that since there were only a small number of themes and categories, NVIVO or other qualitative software was unnecessary.

Searching for Alternative Explanations

Searching for alternative explanations is the fifth phase of data analysis and occurs when the researcher literally questions the patterns and categories that seem rather apparent from the analysis thus far (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The researcher must

seek other possible meanings and perspectives to describe the phenomenon and simultaneously explain that frame of reference. All possible alternative explanations should be considered to assist the researcher in substantiating the initial argument for conducting the study. This phase helps to validate the study and provides credibility to the researcher's conclusions, explanations, or interpretations. This phase was the most interesting and revealing of the data analysis process. Virtually every researcher enters into qualitative research with certain biases (Creswell, 1998). Although it is incumbent upon the researcher to control known biases, this phase helped the researcher look at possible alternative meanings to participant responses. This phase was also included meetings with Dr. Yoder whereby the researcher and Dr. Yoder were able to consider alternate explanations as we developed and evaluated the themes and categories.

Writing the Report

The final phase of data analysis is writing the report which brought together the entire research.

Triangulation

Stringer (2004) determined triangulation to consist of using multiple sources of data collection was achieved through the convergence of findings from quantitative and qualitative data sets. Mertens (1998) concluded triangulation always includes comparisons of multiple sets for determining the consistency and quality of the evidence. Some researchers have emphasized the importance of using triangulation in the design of student attrition. "A multi-method study may provide the ideal approach to improving student retention" (Giles-Gee, 1992, p. 106). "The use of multiple strategies for gathering

information to address issues of retention is imperative to make the study believable and trustworthy (Kinnick and Ricks, 1993, p. 68). To incorporate triangulation, one could incorporate several different methods of data collection, use different theories to frame the study, or engage in methods with different individuals on the research topic. In this study the researcher asked the same questions to every focus group thereby utilizing different sources to gathering information (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The collected data was coded and developed into major themes by type of participant. The themes were then triangulated to determine consistencies and differences. The researcher triangulated from four different perspectives. First focus groups were conducted with the directors of each participating Act 101 institution, between February 2005 and March 2006, to develop common themes of issues challenging all Act 101 programs. Through this effort, the researcher developed themes resulting in developing a set of questions (Appendix E) which were designed to be used in focus groups with current Act 101 students and program support staff (counselors/advisors and tutors). Second, the director themes were then triangulated with themes developed from the students, counselors/advisors, and tutors. Third, the themes were triangulated across the different institutions. Finally, the themes were triangulated with the research conducted by Tinto and the relevant studies presented in Chapter two.

The relationship of the focus group questions to the research questions are presented in the following table. Question one was not triangulated but used as the *voice of the students*. Since only the students knew what their personal and academic challenges were upon entering college, it was not appropriate to expect

counselor/advisors or tutors to answer this question. Questions two and three were triangulated through focus groups with program counselor/advisors and tutors (see Appendix E).

Table 1

Triangulation Table: Research Question Related to Counselor and Tutor Questions

Research Questions	Appendix E – Counselor Group Questions #	Appendix E – Tutor Group Question #
2	2	2
3	5	4

Verifying the Quality of the Study

The ninth and final step in qualitative research is to demonstrate that the study is believable and accurate. This section discusses the qualitative constructs of establishing trustworthiness or credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the process for creating research questions, developing the methods for gathering data, analyzing the data, and reporting the data are decidedly different from quantitative research. Creswell (1998) viewed verification “as a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after the study is completed” (p. 194). The concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity are vital to sound quantitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1998). “All research must respond to canons of quality – criteria against

which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 191). The use of terms that would otherwise describe the quality of quantitative research is inappropriate for use in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the use of alternate terms for describing the quality of research that fit better with the qualitative paradigm.

In referring to the overall quality of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the term *trustworthiness* or the ability of the naturalistic inquirer to “persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The questions that will assist the qualitative researcher in establishing the true value of a study are (a) applicability – the extent to which the findings of a study have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents, (b) consistency – the extent to which the findings of a study would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with similar subjects in a similar context, and (c) neutrality – the extent to which the findings of a study are determined by the respondents and not by the biases, interests, or perspectives of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As qualitative researchers argued for different validation standards for judging the quality of research, Lincoln and Guba proposed four alternatives for judging the soundness of qualitative research as an alternative to the traditional quantitative-leaning criteria (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Traditional Criteria for Judging Quantitative Research	Alternative Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research
Internal validity	Credibility
External validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

Figure 3. A comparison of traditional criteria and alternative criteria for judging trustworthiness of quantitative and qualitative research. From “Research Methods Knowledge Base, Qualitative Validity,” by W. M. K. Trochim, 2006, retrieved July 1, 2009 from <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualval.php>

Marshall & Rossman (2006) explained the alternative criteria. The first construct, *credibility*, is to “demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was appropriately identified and described.” Credibility was met through allowing only current Act 101 students and support staff to participate in the study. No general population students or general college counseling and tutoring lab support staff were invited or allowed to participate. This approach insured the richness of the comments that resulted in the findings.

With the second construct, *transferability*, the researcher should argue that “findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice.” Transferability was met through the generalization of participants from one program to another program. Act 101 students could be generalized to students enrolled in the Trio Program which is the federal program that provides similar support services to at-risk and disability students. Act 101 students could also be generalized to

the Tri-State organization programs for at-risk students in which Pennsylvania participates with New Jersey and New York.

The third construct, *dependability*, means “the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study and changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting.” Dependability was met through using the same process with each focus group including: asking the same questions, in the same sequence, in similar type facilities, and in the same timeline.

The fourth construct, *confirmability*, refers to the extent that others would be able to corroborate the researcher’s documentation. Confirmability was met by maintaining a neutral and objective approach to conducting this study whereby the researcher did not impose his own values or opinions to any component of the research (pp. 201-203).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology for the present study. The nine-step process for conducting qualitative research in this study was presented. The interrelated information provided in chapters 1, 2, and 3 provided logical connections between the topic of the study, the research questions, the theoretical framework and relevant literature review, and the methodology for the study. The results of the study are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY RESULTS

Introduction

The first section of Chapter 4 presents a demographic profile of the study participants: students, tutors, and counselors. The second major section of the chapter provides a brief summary of the procedures used to collect the data for the study and the research questions. Section three presents responses from participants categorized by major themes; a general discussion follows the major themes. The fourth major section summarizes the data presented throughout the chapter 4. The model used to write Chapter 4 appears as Figure 2.

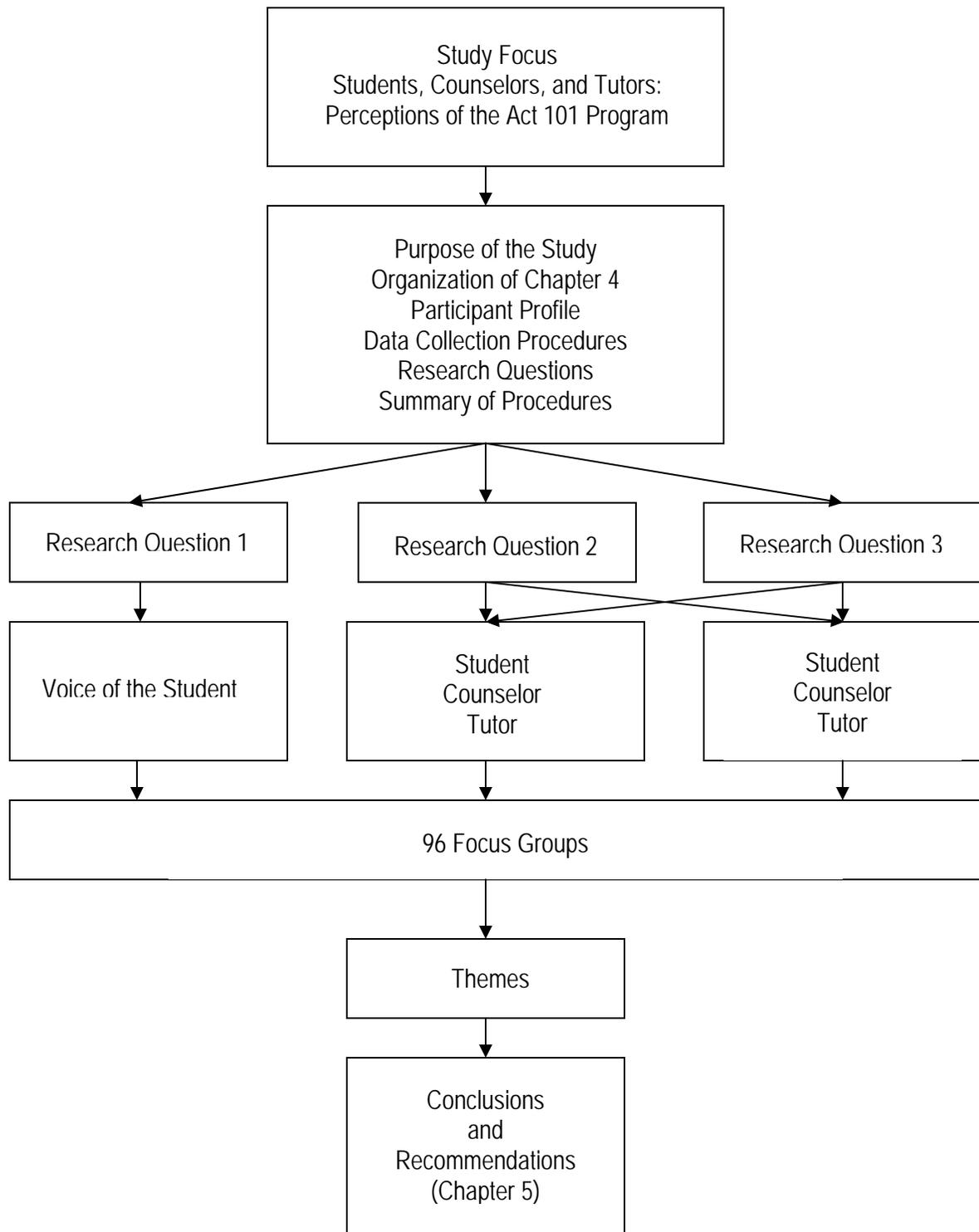


Figure 4. Process model for writing Chapter 4, the study results.

Profile of the Participants

The study participants were both male and female students, counselors, and tutors from 32 participating Act 101 programs in Pennsylvania colleges. General participant information included: a) students ages ranged from 18-60 years old; and b) counselors/advisors, and both peer (who did not possess college degrees) and professional (possessed a minimum of a bachelor degree type) tutors.

Data Collection Procedures and Research Questions

Data Collection Procedures

The data for this study were collected through individual focus groups of students, counselors, and tutors conducted on 32 college campuses. Each focus group was scheduled for one hour but the ending time varied due to the researcher scheduling 15-minutes extra time into each one hour session. Although it is standard practice for this type of research to not exceed the scheduled one hour time allowance, the researcher decided to allow for up to 15-minutes extra time for each focus group to accommodate larger focus groups. Some sessions ended earlier than the one hour allotted time while some sessions ended up to 15 minutes later than the one hour allotted time. The researcher asked the participants questions from a pre-determined list (see Appendix E). The researcher captured responses to each question on individual sheets of paper with the question as the header. Binders with tabbed sections were used to store the responses by type of participant group.

The campus visits were scheduled according to the mutual availability of the researcher and the participants. Each scheduled meeting date, with agendas, was agreed upon in advance by the researcher and each program director.

The questions were read in the same numerical sequence as indicated in Appendix E. Deviations of the questions or sequence did not occur. Occasionally a participant asked the researcher to repeat a phrase or word for their benefit or was asked a question or requested clarification of a word or phrase. Comments were captured in writing by the researcher as they were expressed by the participants.

The starting time of each interview was in according to the agreed upon agenda. There was a 15 minute buffer built onto each one hour scheduled session to allow for the session's conclusion.

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to obtain data to answer:

1. What personal and academic challenges did Act 101 students encounter when they enrolled in college?
2. Which Act 101 services were deemed most important, beneficial, meaningful, or useful by Act 101 students?
3. Why were some eligible students reluctant to participate in an Act 101 program?

Focus Group Responses

Research Question #1- Voice of the Students

What personal and academic challenges did Act 101 students encounter when they enrolled in college?

Personal Challenge Responses

The responses captured from the students focus groups culminated in three major themes: (1) personal, (2) financial, and (3) accountability. Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the themes and the students' responses.

Table 2

Personal Responses – Themes and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Overwhelmed	Disoriented to the big campus. Feeling lost. Intimidated. Pure terror.
Scared	Nervous. Not comfortable. Terrified. Afraid. Pure fear. Hyperventilating upon arriving to campus. How did I get myself into this? Lack of confidence.
Loneliness	No family or friends. Feeling alone most of the time. I want to go home. I'm so lonely.
Proud	I never thought I would get this far. Proud to get an acceptance letter.

Excited	Anxious to get started. Feeling fantastic. WOW! It's great to be here. I can do whatever I want to do!
Cultural	International Student I feel really lost being in the USA.
Age	Am I too old to go to school again? What is a student my age doing here?
Time	I do not have any time for relationships. How will work, family, and school work? School means less work and less money.
Campus size	So many people. Where is my class room? I didn't know where I was going.
Other Comments	Ready to get started. Felt unprepared. First-generation – no family support. Difficult transition from high school. Feeling all alone – no family or friends. Shy, quiet, fear of meeting new people. So many new people who look strange. My family has high expectations. Not sure what I want from college or life. Responsible – it's up to me. Raising two children at my age and school. I'm raising my grandchildren—son's in jail. Personal accountability. Now I am an adult. Ran out of orientation and went home. All my friends told me I can't do it. I am going to college and moving forward. Quit first day and went back one year later. Hopeful. Will I be motivated to go the distance? Arrived on campus right day, wrong month. Fresh start. Anxiety attack due to awe struck.

Examples are Provided to Demonstrate the Exact Context of the Quotes

The researcher is providing the exact context of quotes related to three themes: overwhelmed, proud, and age in Table 2 to provide an understanding of how the themes were developed.

Theme 1: Overwhelmed

Student 1 was attending a four-year public college in a large Pennsylvania city. The student stated he was "**disoriented to the big campus**". He was feeling *overwhelmed* with the campus size and number of buildings all located in the inter-city. He mentioned the campus sprawled about 40 blocks of the city and he couldn't find his classes, the bookstore, or even the student center to eat lunch.

Student 2 was attending a four-year private college in a large Pennsylvania city. She stated she was "**feeling lost**" in her new environment. She was from a small community in northeast Pennsylvania, which had one grocery store, one post office, and one gas station. She had never really experienced the big city environment. She felt *overwhelmed* by its pure size, volume of people and activity.

Student 3 was attending a community college in a large Pennsylvania city. She stated she felt "**intimidated**" by the new surroundings. She felt *overwhelmed* by the large population of students and activity level. The hallways and stairways of the classroom buildings were always very crowded with everyone touching each other as they walked. It reminded her of walking on the sidewalks of New York City.

Student 4 was attending a four-year private college located near a large city in Pennsylvania. She came from a small village in northeast Pennsylvania where everyone

knew each other and consisted of a 100% white population. She stated she felt "**pure terror**" when she arrived on campus. She didn't know anything about her new surroundings, observed a very diverse population including international students, and was 300 miles from home with no money in her pocket. She felt *overwhelmed* by all the issues she was facing at one time.

Theme 2: Proud

Student 1 was attending a private four-year college in western Pennsylvania. She was so happy to just be in college, any college, that she stated "**I never thought I would get this far**". She was so "*proud*" to just get the opportunity to attend a college because to her it meant she was really moving forward and attending college represented an opportunity she never thought she would achieve.

Student 2 was attending a four-year private college in eastern Pennsylvania. It was a college that was highly regarded by her high school advisor as well as fellow students and friends. She stated that she was "**proud to get an acceptance letter**" to attend. She never dreamed that a college of their stature would ever offer her admittance. She was shocked and felt very "*proud*" to accept their offer.

Theme 3: Age

Student 1 was attending a community college in western Pennsylvania. He commuted about 10 miles a day from his home. He was in his late thirties, married, had two children, worked a full-time job and had not been in a school environment since he graduated from high school. He found it challenging to work full-time, be a father, a husband, and complete all of his classroom responsibilities. He also found he didn't have

the everyday stamina he had as a teen ager when he could exist with only a few hours of sleep. He questioned "*am I too old to go to school again?*" He felt that at his *age* he shouldn't be attending college but rather his time had passed because college was for high school graduates that were single and not working.

Student 2 was attending a four-year public college in central Pennsylvania. She was in her forties, married, and working part-time with three children. Students attending the same college seemed to be between 18 and 22 years of age, not working, not married and having no children. She felt everything was coming easy for the younger students while she was struggling with every requirement. She stated "**what is a student my age doing here?**" She felt so old and academically unprepared compared to the younger students. Her grade results for assignments and tests were average to below average. She felt her *age* was the main factor has to why her struggle seemed so hard and long.

General Discussion of the Personal Theme

The researcher's comments related to the *personal theme* focused on potential failure; fear of the unknown in an overwhelming environment surrounded by a cultural and diverse population, yet excited at the newness; potential new start and independence; their concerns of whether they were academically ready for college; feelings of loneliness and thoughts of wanting to quit and go home; and the international students felt the cultural and language differences.

These students lacked social skills and had limited personal success to this point and were fearful that the college experience would be yet another failure in their lives. Students came from families and friends who provided little encouragement or positive

support, yet they were lonely for the same family and friends because they were their basis of existence. Students had continuous thoughts of quitting college and returning to their known world of crime-infested neighborhoods, poverty level subsistence, and school systems that failed them academically. They reasoned that if they failed academically in high school, then how could they possibly succeed in college which was perceived to be more difficult and with higher academic expectations.

Many students came from small towns in rural Pennsylvania that offered no cultural opportunities or exposure to diversity, attended high school in one building, and where everyone knew each other as neighbors or rode the same school bus. Some were pregnant and had one or two children before they turned 18 years old. Now, they found themselves in a new, large overwhelming environment where simple things--like locating a specific classroom building--were challenging. Students were out of their comfort zone and felt vulnerable to needing help from strangers. They were surrounded by very diverse students who saw, felt, and did things differently. Yet, just as fear was a major concern, they simultaneously felt excited, independent, and thought possibly a new start from the failures of the past would bring new opportunity for success.

International students had similar thoughts but also had to deal with language barriers. There was little to no support on many campuses to aid international students with English speaking classrooms which required that assignments be completed in English.

Table 3

Financial Responses – Themes and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Loans	Already poor Fear of too many college loans Will there enough financial aid
Immediate money	Need to work to pay bills How many hours a week can I work? Carefully manage money daily No money day to day to eat My family still counts on me for money I have to share books with friends Money to get home for holidays

General Discussion of Financial Theme

Comments relating to the *financial theme* focused on the availability and quantity of college loans; the need to work and how many hours students should work and still succeed in college; the need to share books with friends (no money to buy them); enough money for transportation to visit family during semester breaks; and how to continue helping family members financially while surviving financially day to day.

Earnings of some students from poverty level subsistence who worked most of their high school years contributed to supporting their families. After they left home to attend college, the family continued to rely on these students to work and send money home to continue supporting the family. This required students to work part-time and/or fulltime hours to help their families and themselves survive day to day. The amount of

necessary work hours further impacted their ability to perform successfully in college level courses.

Although students qualified for financial aid, some aid was in the form of grants but most of it was repayable loans. They feared not being able to pay back loans as they never qualified for loans prior to attending college. They feared dropping out, not completing their degree, and being in debt with college loans.

Students' families didn't have the financial means to help them, so they were at the mercy of federal, state, and institutional funds to support their college expenses. Many times, grants and loans were inadequate to meet student needs and required they work part-time and even full-time jobs to subsidize their expenses. Even buying textbooks became problematic and students had to find other students who were willing to share their textbooks throughout each semester.

Since most at-risk students did not have personal vehicles but rather rely on public transportation, they had to find money to buy bus or train tickets or search for a free ride home to visit their families.

Table 4

Accountability Responses – Themes and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Accountability	It's up to me to make it. It's personal now. No one to blame but me. Friends and family said I won't make it.
Independence	I no longer live at home. I am on my own now! I'm finally free. I can do anything I want. No one here to tell me what to do.

General Discussion of Accountability Theme

The *accountability theme* comments relate to students no longer able to blame others for their personal failures, pressure from friends and family members, comments about failure in college, and students no longer living at home means and having to fend for themselves. While living at home with little or no support--often in crime infested neighborhoods--students would tend to blame others for their poor choices and ultimate failures. Now, they find themselves in a new environment full of fresh opportunities and, surrounded by other students from similar backgrounds who also have comparable dreams.

Academic Challenge Responses

The academic challenges theme comments were grouped into grades and lack of communication. Tables 5 and 6 present the themes and the student's responses.

Table 5

Grades Responses – Themes and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Prideful	I will be disgraced if I drop out. My family and friends will be wrong.
Successful Performance	Can I earn good grades here? I fear probation after my first semester. GPA after first semester – I wonder? I hope college isn't much harder than high school. I wonder how hard I have to work to get good grades. I earned average grades in high school so I am scared I won't get passing grades here. I think I am ADHD but I never got checked. I learn better in class, not on the internet.

General Discussion of Grades Theme

The *grades theme* comments related to at-risk students' fear of failing to get good grades that would result in dropping out or probation status in their first year of college. They knew they weren't properly prepared academically; they were aware they were not likely to succeed in earning adequate grades (expected to persist) in college. They felt added pressures and were preoccupied with failure (poor grades) which they had experienced their entire academic lives. They didn't want to continue failing, but they felt helpless and doomed that academic failure would continue to be their destiny.

International students were faced with many issues previously discussed, and they had to learn the English language before they could start learning subject matter. They may have been academically successful in their own countries but now find themselves failing college courses.

Some students suffered learning disabilities requiring unique equipment and teaching techniques which colleges routinely don't offer. Some at-risk students had undiagnosed disabilities and medication needs that went untreated. These undiagnosed disabilities negatively impacted their ability to perform academically and in some instances, did not persist unless they were diagnosed and appropriate treatment was provided.

Table 6

Lack of Preparation Responses – Theme and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Help	<p>I am going to need help. I have been out of school for 30 years. I am scared of math, English and writing. I do not have any academic skills. This place will really challenge me intellectually. I really feel like I am not prepared to be here. I am an international student – who is competent to help me?</p>
Performance	<p>I got terrible grades in high school so I guess I won't do well here. I do not have much time to study with my job and family. My placement test results were so poor. Do they allow Individual Education Plans (IEPs) here?</p>

General Discussion of Lack of Preparation

The *lack of preparation theme* comments related to at-risk students arriving at college unprepared to perform in college courses. High schools failed them or created an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to get them through, families didn't provide academic support, and parents were working and not home to encourage academics. Placement test results reflected many students with as little as sixth grade reading, writing and math

skills. Most students were never provided the academic skills instruction in high school although skills were needed to create a solid foundation prior to college level work. Many students were out of high school for many years and needed basic academic skills instruction as well. All focus group participants felt intellectually challenged and fearful they would not be successful.

Focus Group Responses

Research Question #2- Students

Which Act 101 program services were deemed most important, beneficial, meaningful, or useful by Act 101 students?

The common themes that related to most important, beneficial, meaningful, and useful services were: *Counseling/advising*; the *Program Director*; *tutoring*; and *other services*. Tables 7, 8, 9, and 10 present the themes and the student responses.

Table 7

Counseling/Advising – Theme and Direct Quotes from Students

Theme	Direct Quotes From Students
Counselors/advisors support	They helped keep me focused on the important things. They always find a way to help. They are like a big brother or parent who is there for me every day. They constantly encourage me and are sensitive to my needs and situations I face.

General Discussion of Counseling/Advising

At-risk students arrive on campus with many needs and shortcomings and approach counselors/advisors for help academically, financially, and other needs. The

counselors/advisors become their mother/father, big brother/sister, or cheerleader, and students regularly turn to them for help. The counselor/advisors focus was on the positives and sensitivity to the student's feelings with trust and bonding occurring as these students began to experience success.

Table 8

Program Director – Theme and Direct Quotes from Students

Theme	Direct Quotes From Students
Program Director	<p>They find financial aid monies for me.</p> <p>They developed a lending library to provide books for me to use each semester.</p> <p>They advocated for me when I earned poor semester grades from going on probation.</p> <p>They advocated for me when my overall GPA went below the minimum college GPA so I could continue attending college.</p> <p>They always made sure I had a tutor for every subject and got unlimited one-on-one time at no cost.</p> <p>They provided staff in evenings and on weekends to accommodate my work and family schedules.</p>

General Discussion of the Program Director

The director of the Act 101 program provided staffing that was available and showed care and concern for the needs of every student. The director advocated for Act 101 students to stay off probation when their grade point average or semester grades went below the minimum institutional requirements; they found extra funding to help pay for books, transportation, food, day care, etc; they provided tutors for every subject and in many cases at-risk students received unlimited one-on-one tutors while the general population students were limited to a lesser amount of time or had to pay for these

services. The directors would also allocate some Act 101 funds to purchase textbooks to support a library to lend textbooks to at-risk students for a semester at a time.

Table 9

Tutoring – Theme and Direct Quotes from Students.

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Availability	Flexible hours to meet my schedule. Always a tutor available when I needed one. Never turned me away. was at least one tutor available for every subject.
Selection	I always preferred a professional tutor and they always had one available. I got to pick the tutors I liked and stuck with them.

General Discussion of Tutoring

Most Act 101 programs offer tutoring services by both peer tutors (students who have taken and passed a course with an "A" grade) and professional tutors (those with a minimum of a bachelors degree and knowledge of learning skills). Both categories of tutors provide subject matter help, but professional tutors work with the more needy at-risk students who also require different learning strategies. Tutors provide flexible hours to meet the student needs and work around class and work schedules as well as family needs. Act 101 students receive unlimited one-on-one sessions in every subject while college tutoring labs do not provide these services or charge for them. Most programs offer some or all of these services or events appearing in the *Other Themes* category only in the summer academic period and/or year round.

Table 10

Other Services Theme – Theme and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Other Services	<p>The orientation program was really helpful.</p> <p>The bridge program really got me off on the right foot.</p> <p>Supplemental instruction study groups every week really gave me the extra boost I needed.</p> <p>Mentors allowed me to have extra time available for more important activities.</p> <p>Free remedial help saved me from having to register for college remediation classes which saved me a lot of money.</p> <p>I really found that the academic skill workshops gave the starting point I needed before I started taking college level courses.</p> <p>Cultural events gave me a whole new perspective on my surroundings and students from other cultures.</p> <p>Learning communities really helped me gain confidence and building networks of other students to struggle through assignments and courses.</p> <p>The counselors, tutors and director have advocated for me in so many ways – I am so thankful.</p> <p>I really benefited from the faculty and Act 101 staff working together to keep me on track.</p>
Lending Library	<p>The lending library has allowed me to have my own book rather than having to coordinating sharing with other students.</p>

General Discussion of Other Services Theme

Most Act 101 students found orientation programs useful and helpful. It provided new incoming students a tour of the campus; the opportunity to meet Act 101 support and administrative staff; discuss personal, financial, and academic issues; and attend academic skill workshops.

Some students enrolled in a bridge program that provided the same services as the orientation program plus additional services such as: (a) intrusive counseling/advising,

(b) mentoring, (c) remediation (developmental and supplemental instruction), (d) academic skill workshops, (e) academic courses, and (f) financial aid and career counseling. All Act 101 students who attended a bridge program found it helpful which resulted in creating a foundation of early academic success and personal comfort going into the first semester of college.

Focus Group Responses

Research Question #2- Counselor/Advisors

Which Act 101 program services were deemed most important, beneficial, meaningful, or useful by Act 101 students?

The common theme comments related to most important, beneficial, meaningful, and/or useful services were *counseling/advising, tutoring and other services*. Tables 11, 12, and 13 present the themes and the student responses.

Table 11

Counseling/advising – Themes and Direct Quotes from Counselors/Advisors

Themes	Direct Quotes from Counselors/Advisors
Personal	Issues with all types of personal problems. Help with academic issues including needed support services, faculty problems and raising my GPA.
Financial	Help with finding enough financial aid to pay tuition and meet daily expenses.
Career	Career counseling to help plan my education to the workforce.
Transfer	Transfer to another school to continue on to meet my education goals.
Psychiatric	Psychiatric help needed due to extreme anxieties and medicine needs to help me through it.
Crisis	Crisis counseling to help me deal with the loss of my boyfriend and the death of a parent.

General Discussion of Counselor/Advisor Theme

At-risk students approach counselors/advisors as soon as students arrive on campus for help with feelings of low self-worth, fear of new surroundings, low self-esteem, desperation, loneliness, fear of failure, and isolation. They look to the counselor/advisor for guidance on what to do academically to succeed. Solutions may include a plan of services for each semester and/or daily/weekly reviews to monitor progress, successes, or sources of failures. The at-risk student looks to the counselor/advisor for financial advice and sources of aid and, at times, to hold them accountable for enough financial resources to stay in school. The counselor/advisor provides guidance and advice about career options including establishing a major as well as transfer issues. At times, students are directed to crisis centers for help with diagnostic needs related to mental health issues and medicinal needs.

At-risk students need someone to care for them, someone to count on to help with their day-to-day needs. First, students evaluate the counselor/advisor to determine how much help they will be able or willing to provide. If they get most of their pressing needs met, then they return. Dependence, trust, and friendship develop as the relationship matures and the counselor/advisor continues to successfully meet student's important needs. Counselors/advisors become their mother/father figure, big brother or sister, or the cheerleader they turn to for help every day. The counselor/advisors focus was on the positives and sensitivity to the students' feelings with trust and bonding occurring as these students begin to experience success.

The relationship frequently remains as long as the counselor/advisor continues to help the student with their ongoing needs. If the student gets help with some issues but not the issues for which the student feels most needy, the relationship could wither and the student typically leaves the program. If the student leaves the program but remains in school without further services, negative comments are made to other students and faculty about the importance of the program. From time to time, at-risk students may return to the counselor/advisor with problems or needs and may want to re-enter the program.

Table 12

Tutoring – Themes and Direct Quotes from Counselors/Advisors

Theme	Direct Quotes From Counselors/Advisors
Types of Available Tutoring	One on One. Small group. Walk-in to the general lab.

General Discussion of Tutoring Theme

With at-risk students arriving on campuses with serious academic deficiencies, tutors played a significant role in helping these students every day in almost in every class. Most students preferred professional tutors rather than peer tutors because the professional tutors offer a higher level of teaching strategies, maturity in approach and are generally more dependable. Students look to the tutors for daily support both in content matter and personal cheerleading; they develop friendships and trust with their tutors. The more success students have in earning passing grades or grades that exceed

their expectations, the more frequently they return for help and make positive comments about the program. Students found the tutors to offer flexible hours around class and work schedules as well as family needs. Act 101 students frequently receive unlimited one-on-one time or small group sessions in every subject while college tutoring labs would not offer these types of services, or if they did, would charge for them.

Table 13

Other Services – Themes and Direct Quotes from Counselors/Advisors

Theme	Direct Quotes From Counselors/Advisors
Other Services	Orientation program. Bridge program. Supplemental instruction. Mentoring. Remediation. Cultural events. Learning communities. Advocacy Faculty/program partnering. Lending library.

General Discussion of Other Services

The counselors/advisors concluded at-risk students found orientation programs useful and helpful. They provided opportunities for new incoming students to receive a tour of the campus; meet Act 101 support and administrative staff; discuss personal, financial, and academic issues; and attend academic skill workshops. These opportunities and activities provided a positive starting point in helping to make these students more comfortable with their worst fears and concerns.

Some students were required while others volunteered to enroll in a bridge program (attend the summer prior to the first fall semester of college) which provided the same services as the orientation program plus additional services such as: (a) intrusive counseling/advising, (b) mentoring, (c) remediation (developmental and supplemental instruction), (d) academic skill workshops, (e) academic courses; and (f) financial aid and career counseling. All Act 101 students who attended a bridge program found them helpful in creating a foundation of early academic success and personal comfortability going into their first semester of college.

Focus Group Responses

Research Question #2– Tutors

Which Act 101 program services were deemed most important, beneficial, meaningful, or useful by Act 101 students?

The comments related to most important, beneficial, meaningful, and/or useful services were *counseling/advising, tutoring and other services*. Tables 14, 15, and 16 present the themes and the student responses.

Table 14

Counseling/Advising – Themes and Direct Quotes from Tutors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Tutors
Personal	They are always there for me. They help me with all my needs some way. They seem to always come up with the answer.
Financial	They connect me to the right people in the financial aid department who help me. They inform me of private scholarships and grants. They help me with getting small loans to get by day to day.
Career	They have provided help in determining good upcoming career fields. They keep me up to date with jobs that could help me get experience for the future.

General Discussion of Counselor/Advisors Them

The tutor comments indicated the counselors/advisors were always there for the at-risk student. They seem to always find a solution to an immediate need. The counselor/advisors helped with personal issues as well as financial and career service needs. They helped the students find additional sources of funding for tuition and books as well as day to day living expenses. The counselor/advisors had small loan accounts set up to provide small amounts of money to help with food or transportation. They helped the students find local jobs to help supplement their income as well as help them plan for future job opportunities after college.

The tutor responses concluded that counseling/advising was the most important service that Act 101 students' valued. They believe students view the counselor/advisor as the key to getting their needs met and referred to them as the “gatekeeper” of the program

services. The counselors/advisors have the greatest ability to get things done and therefore are most successful in satisfying needs of at-risk students. Counselor/advisors possess significant influence with the Act 101 director, have direct relationships with faculty, admissions, financial aid, career center and all other offices at the institution in order to resolve more issues and meet more needs.

Table 15

Tutoring – Themes and Direct Quotes from Tutors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Tutors
One on One	It's great to have one on one tutoring sessions available at no cost. I always like one-on-one sessions better because they are more specific to my needs. On-on-one is the best for me because I get every answer addressed and I do not have to compete with other students for the tutor's time.
Small group	Enjoyed the group effort to gain better understanding of the subject matter. Liked the synergy of the group. Liked studying with people who had the same struggle.
Subject matter	Struggled with writing, English, reading, and math. Struggled with science, psychology and accounting. They always found a tutor for me in the subject matter I was struggling in.
Availability of services	Very flexible hours/days. Numerous tutors to pick from. Available services fulfilled the need when I needed them.

General Discussion of Tutors Theme

The students appreciated the variety of tutors available, the flexible hours (evenings and weekends), the genuine helping effort and the frequency of their

availability at personal no cost. The at-risk students also appreciated the one-on-one sessions, small group sessions, supplemental and remedial help the tutors provided whereas the college labs did not offer most of these services to general student population. More tutors are available in the subjects of writing, English, reading, math and science, where the greatest need exists for the at-risk student. Students prefer professional tutors over peer tutors because of their maturity, dependability, and instruction strategies.

Table 16

Other Services – Themes and Direct Quotes from Tutors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Tutors
Supplemental instruction	The supplemental instruction helped in going back over the material and drilling in on the important material. It provided a group opportunity to revisit material I had not gotten in class during the original presentation. It supplemented the lesson by going back over the more difficult subject matter.
Remediation	Very helpful to receive help on foundational material. Nice to get it for free rather than have to sign up for a course and pay for it. Great help in establishing foundation for college courses.
Cultural events	Nice to visit museums and arts center free of charge. Didn't know what was out there.
Learning communities	Great to work jointly with other students struggling with the same subject matter. Working in a group provided support back and forth. It was great to learn together with common challenges.
Faculty reports to keep tutors informed	The weekly reports from my teacher helped keep me focused with the tutors as what to study and go over. My tutor used my teachers' reports to structure our tutoring sessions. The reports helped me understand my weak areas.

Lending library	Helped me get books that I had no money to buy. Great idea to borrow books for a semester at a time. This service allowed extra money for transportation and lunch each day.
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General Discussion of Other Services Theme

The third theme was “other services” which included services that some students engaged in during the orientation and bridge programs. The students found the services very helpful in preparing them for their first semester of college. They also appreciated the lending library where they could borrow books from the Act 101 program for private use throughout the semester. They found the weekly / monthly faculty reports to the tutors to be very helpful in developing a tutoring plan for each subject throughout the semester.

Focus Group Responses

Research Question #3- Students

Why were some eligible students reluctant to participate in an Act 101 program?

The comments related to *reluctant to participate* captured from student focus group responses culminated into three major themes: (1) Personal, (2) Outside Perception, and (3) Program Services. Tables 17, 18, and 19 present the themes and the student responses.

Table 17

Personal – Themes and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Didn't understand real value	Lack of understanding. Lazy. Immaturity.
Personal Feelings	Fear of possible hidden agenda. Shy; not social; felt alone. Felt stupid because Act 101 student qualified for the program; this program is for losers. Bad attitude – chip on shoulder. Low self-esteem.
Personal Feelings	Afraid to admit help was needed; too independent to ask for help. Not aware of what it took to be successful in college. Uncomfortable asking for help. Being in this program meant there is something wrong with a person. Didn't find value in it. Prideful. Students felt they needed to do it on their own.
Time Constraints	No time. Easier to work at home with kids rather than be away from home. Work, family and school is enough – no time for this extra program.
Ignorance	Not aware of all the services the program offered. Not aware that program existed. Not sure I really need these types of services. Thought college was still high school and high school performance was adequate.
Past Failures /Approaches	Always got poor grades so poor grades was normal. Dropped out of everything ever started so college will probably end up the same way. Didn't want to be part of a special group again. Poor mid-tem grades, seek help only when needed. Didn't engage in services until facing grade crisis.
Peer Feedback	Current participants talked poorly of program.

General Discussion of Personal Theme

The comments related to the *personal theme* focused on immaturity, ignorance, low self-esteem, lack of success, not knowing what it would take to be successful in college, procrastination, labels/stereotypes, trust, negative comments from other program students, and pride. Additionally, the institutions may not adequately market the program and the program services causing a lack of student awareness.

Some students were in denial and didn't feel they really needed help but instead reacted when facing a crisis. They were prideful and felt they could or should succeed in college on their own and that qualifying for this program made them feel part of a special group for "stupid" people. They were unwilling to take time away from work and families because they did not know the value of the program services; some did not believe they really needed the services. Other students did not know the program existed or what services were offered and how those services could benefit them. Some students were lazy, immature and thought college was just an extension of high school where they "slid through" with minimal effort. Other students experienced personal failures that created a sense of inferiority and mistrust of issues resulting in the feeling there were hidden agendas. Some students were lazy and presumed they could slide through like they did in high school. Other students had trust issues and did not want to discuss their struggles with "strangers." Finally, others were shy and afraid to ask for help but were loners and struggled through quietly and privately.

Table 18

Outside Perception – Themes and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Embarrassment	People will think I'm dumb. Single you out to others as special or different. Would be treated differently by professor. I view this program as a disability program.
Peer pressures/opinions	Disappointment from peer group. Outside students believe this program means poor and dumb. Negative peer comments. Friends told me it was a waste of time. Socially unacceptable at stake.

General Discussion of Outside Perception Theme

Comments related to *outside perception* focused on negativity of what the program represented and how others' perceptions affected students' own perceptions. Students felt embarrassed and different than regular students. Their friends who were not part of an Act 101 program made comments that the program was a waste of time, a disability program for "stupid" people, only "stupid" and "poor" people qualify, and that it was socially unacceptable to maintain a status in their peer group. Students were also concerned that faculty instructors would view them as "dumb" are felt pity for them or single them out from the rest of their classmates as needing special help.

Table 19

Program Services – Themes and Direct Quotes from Students

Themes	Direct Quotes From Students
Awareness	Unaware of services. Didn't understand real value of services. Didn't know I qualified.
Requirement	Do not want to be required; mandatory is turnoff. Some programs required an institutional student agreement which was a turnoff.
Able to use	Services not available when I needed them. Transportation not available to use services.

General Discussion of Personal Services Theme

The comments related to *program services* focused on numerous unrelated comments. Some students were not aware of program services while others were aware but the college did not adequately market or advertise the services and the positive impact of the services on participants. Other students were turned off by mandatory requirements to participate as a condition of enrollment. In some instances, the services were not available at convenient times due to work and family obligations. In other cases, students did not have appropriate transportation to allow involvement in the services. Some programs required that an institutional student contract be signed thus binding both parties to engage in services—which scared some student.

Focus Group Responses

Research Question #3– Counselors/Advisors

Why were some eligible students reluctant to participate in an Act 101 program?

The comments related to *reluctant to participate* captured from counselor focus groups responses culminated into three major themes: (a) *Personal*; (b) *Outside Perception*; and (3) *Program Services*. Tables 20, 21, and 22 present the themes and the student responses.

Table 20

Personal – Themes and Direct Quotes from Counselors/Advisors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Counselors/Advisors
Maturity	Reality check. Independent – do not need anything or anyone. Wrong mindset – lethargic. High school mentality. Not cool to need help. Managed my school work up to now – why do I need help? Never needed counseling before – why now? Poor high school grades so what’s different? Poor follow through with commitment. Didn’t need services until disaster strikes.
Past failures	Fear. Trust issues. Do not fit in. Not healthy. The way you were raised. Pride. Low self-esteem.
Feelings	Accepting services means admitting to short-comings. Help means being inferior. Shy and reluctant to talk to counselor. Didn’t want to be part of a special group. Didn’t believe college was harder than high school.
Time constraints	Work, school and family juggling act. Transportation needed at time services are available.
Medical Issues and Language Barriers	Undiagnosed issues. Medication issues. English second language (ESL).

General Discussion of Personal Theme

Many students didn't believe this program was suited for them because they didn't think they needed the services; they never needed the services before so why do they need them now? Students felt they managed their school obligations adequately in the past and got passing grades so why add this requirement to their already limited school day. Some students perceived college as a continuation of high school which meant a person could just continue sliding through with minimal effort. Other students were tight for time with school obligations, work schedules, and family obligations. They struggled with maturity issues, and some counselor/advisors felt they needed a reality check to "wake them up." Students came to school with a new independence and a new sense of freedom, so the last thing they wanted was to be part of a program that required time and effort. Some feared the program was exposing their weaknesses, would make them feel inferior to other students in classes, or didn't want to be part of a special group where they would not be able to manage their fragile weaknesses. Some students didn't fit in with any groups and were loners fighting day-to-day to get through on their own. Some were raised to not accept help but believed that "getting through" on their own was the right approach. Some students came from poor high school that did not properly prepare them for college and they were now "stuck" with trying to make up for inadequate academic skills which contributed to low self-esteem and lethargy. Students also faced bad habits that led to poor follow through in committing to a program of this type. Finally, some students faced trust issues, undiagnosed behavioral issues, medication needs and English being problematic for foreign students.

Table 21

Outside Perception – Themes and Direct Quotes from Counselors/Advisors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Counselors/Advisors
Personal	Do not want others to know I need help. Negative family perception. Embarrassment.
Stigmatism	Dumb, stupid people are in this program. Eligibility means being poor and stupid. Qualifying means special education.

General Discussion of Outside Perception Theme

Counselors/advisors were told by students that this program was for “dummies” because to qualify the Act 101, students had to have done poorly academically and have a poverty level income. Many students found the program to be embarrassing as it represented a poorly performing group of students. Some students viewed the program as a special education program from the past where they put failing students together to try to get them through. Finally, some students stated their families were negative toward participating because it exposed the family characteristics as part as the eligibility process.

Table 22

Program Services – Themes and Direct Quotes from Counselors/Advisors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Counselors/Advisors
Value of services	Didn't understand the real value of services. Not aware of program services. Tried services but they didn't make a difference. Requested help late – didn't help.
Transportation to services	Transportation issues to receive services.
Required services	Mandatory services are not acceptable.

General Discussion of Program Services Theme

Many students did not understand how poorly they were prepared for college and that without the services this program, they could face extreme odds in persisting to graduation. Some students were not aware of the program or its services therefore they did not develop interest in enrolling in it. Numerous students who did not live on campus had not suitable transportation to get to or stay on campus to use the services when they were available. Other students did try the services but, in most individual cases, either waited too long to ask for help or failed a test or course and then blamed the program for their failure. Finally, some students were forced to enroll in the program as a condition of admission. That soured them on complying as they believed they should not be required to engage in services at an older age but rather accept services on their own terms.

Focus Group Responses

Research Question #3- Tutors

Why were some eligible students reluctant to participate in an Act 101 program?

The comments related to the *reluctant to participate* theme captured from tutor focus groups responses culminated into four major themes: (a) *Personal*, (b) *Outside Perception*, and (c) *Program Services*. Tables 23, 24, and 25 present the themes and the student responses.

Table 23

Personal – Themes and Direct Quotes from Tutors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Tutors
Maturity	Lack of maturity. Not realistic to college requirements and expectations. Do not need services until student is failing. Arrogance. Lazy. Procrastination. Not held accountable.
Skill deficiency	Lacks academic skills from high school. Not prepared – many excuses. Poor relationship with others. Lacking skills from high school. Poor study habits.
Individual feelings	Feels stupid. Wants to see if they could do it on their own. Wants to be part of general population not special group. Fear of asking for help. Do not belong – too old. Lacks confidence. Prideful. Independent – I can do it. Special education label from high school.
Past failures	Pointless – it won't make a difference. Life is normally with many crises. First failure they give up – wants it to be easy.
Time	Too hard to juggle between family, personal, school and work.

General Discussion of Personal Theme

Tutors find some students to procrastinate, act lazy, and not be in touch with what it takes to succeed in college. They come from high school unprepared to engage, immature to understand their needs, and simply not ready to work to be successful but rather make excuses for continued failures. Students lack adequate preparation from high school and know it, yet they think that since they changed atmospheres, the end results will change as well. Many students do not have social skills and do poorly in working with or socializing with others. They do not think they could commit to a program that would require time that they do not have because they are already stretched with working, family time, and school time. In many cases, these students wait until they are failing to reach out for help, and, in many cases, wait too long and fail an exam or course. They do not want to be considered part of a special group but rather one of the general population students. They are immature, arrogant, and convinced they can make it on their own even though they have not enjoyed any academic successes to date. They are prideful, yet lack confidence in some cases, and are unwilling to come to terms with their short comings. They need help but rather they wait to fail because they expect to fail and then blame the failure on others. They have poor study habits and academic skills so they are unprepared for college level work. Finally, they see this program as pointless and a waste their time but accepts college as just another crisis which they will somehow work through.

Table 24

Outside Perception – Themes and Direct Quotes from Tutors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Tutors
Embarrassed	Peer comments and jabs. Negative comments about Act 101 program from professors. Stigma – poor and dumb.
Value of Program	Too much “optional” ends up “no engagement.”

General Discussion of Outside Perception Theme

The tutors felt many students perceived the program to be negatively stigmatized by other students and faculty because students had to be academically deficient and poor to qualify. Many students were embarrassed to admit they needed the help or to be associated with an at-risk program make up of other students who were perceived in a negative way.

Table 25

Program Services – Themes and Direct Quotes from Tutors

Themes	Direct Quotes From Tutors
Tutor availability	Tutors/students scheduling issues. Preferred tutor availability not always occurs. Not all subjects have tutors available. Math and English labs on campus.
Respect	Students do not respect peer tutors. Professors do not show respect for peer tutors.
Mandatory	Mandatory service engagement resisted.
Available to Engage	Transportation issues to use services.

General Discussion of Program Services Theme

Some students refused tutoring services because they did not have respect for peer tutors. They found them to be inadequate in meeting their needs, were not flexible with appointments, and knew only a certain amount of subject matter.. Numerous professors did not show respect for peer tutors, so Act 101 students did not find value in their services. Some students found it easier to go to general college labs for help which has greater availability and more tutors from which to choose. Some Act 101 programs did not offer tutoring in every subject due to financial constraints but provided tutoring in a limited manner—in core subjects—which students judged to be inadequate. Finally, some students simply did not have transportation available when tutors were available.

Chapter Summary

The findings of the research were presented in this chapter. A summary of the procedures used to conduct the multiple site case study and the three research questions used in the study were presented. The focus group responses from students, counselors, and tutors were documented. The responses developed themes which were analyzed and discussed. The three research questions provided the framework for noting and organizing the data as well as noting the participants' responses within their respective Act 101 programs. Responses from the focus groups were used to highlight participants' perceptions of the three research questions within their respective institutions.

A summary of the study, conclusions from the findings, and recommendations are presented in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides a study summary, summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations for practitioners, lessons learned, and recommendations for future study for researchers interested in expanding this research. Chapter 5 concludes with a chapter summary.

Study Summary

The purpose of the present study was to explore, describe, and interpret Act 101 students' perceptions of what personal and academic challenges they encountered when enrolling in college, which support services were most important, and why some eligible students chose not to participate in Act 101 program services. The research questions used in the study were:

1. What personal and academic challenges did Act 101 students encounter when they enrolled in college?
2. Which Act 101 services were deemed most important, beneficial, meaningful, or useful by Act 101 students?
3. Why were some eligible students reluctant to participate in an Act 101 program?

This study was based on the phenomenological perspective that “views human behavior—what people say and do—as a product of how people interpret the world” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 13). A phenomenological approach describes the meaning of

the lived experiences or what people say and do by way of shared common experiences. “It rests on an assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112).

Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1993) was the theoretical framework for this study. The Tinto model is a complex theoretical paradigm with sociological roots. Originally developed in 1975 and further refined in 1987 and 1994, it is based on several constructs: (a) background characteristics of incoming students, (b) initial goal and institutional commitment of the student, (c) the student's intention to persist, and (d) the concept of academic and social integration.

Literature published by Tinto and studies related to Act 101-like programs, at-risk support services, student engagement, and challenges faced by at-risk students upon entering higher education was reviewed and is presented in Chapter 2 and Appendix D.

The 74 participating Act 101 programs in Pennsylvania were contacted to determine interest in participating in the study; 32 program directors, each representing a participating college, agreed to participate. The 32 Act 101 programs included 351 students, 88 counselors, and 161 tutors who contributed to the research. To preserve confidentiality, the colleges and universities were referred to in this study as community colleges, four-year public, and four-year private institutions. The identities of the institutions were known to only the researcher. The data for this study were collected from March 15, 2007 to June 10, 2007 through on-site interviews at 32 higher education institutions in Pennsylvania. The same questions, without variations, were asked of each focus group in the same numerical sequence as indicated in Appendix E (the italicized

questions in the appendix listing were used in the study). A total of 96 interviews were conducted: (a) 32 with Act 101 students, (b) 32 with Act 101 counselors, and (c) 32 with tutors providing services to Act 101 students; respondents' comments were captured by the researcher. No interviews were conducted with the Act 101 program director.

To legitimize the quality of the data and the study, the researcher utilized a two-prong strategy. First, the focus group data were collected from the Act 101 students. Second, the focus group data collected from the counselors and tutors were triangulated with the students' responses to identify similar and unique themes.

Summary of Findings

Research Question One - Voice of the Students

What personal and academic challenges did Act 101 students encounter when they enrolled in college?

Findings Drawn Directly From the Data

Personal Challenges

The research findings for personal challenges focused on three themes: personal, financial, and accountability.

The findings reflected students that felt overwhelmed in a new environment representing many unknowns. This environment included a campus of many buildings, new people, rules, expectations, demands, and another real possibility of failure. They arrived on campus lacking so many ingredients necessary for success: prior academic success, academic and social skills, high self-esteem, a support group, a cultural perspective of diverse populations. Some students viewed the opportunity with

excitement and a new found independence while others were scared, terrified and had mixed emotions.

Although these students came from different communities within Pennsylvania, the findings reflected similar challenges. They were not academically or emotionally ready for college. They came from families and neighborhoods that did not encourage a college education but rather encouraged them to stay in their own communities and accept employment in remedial, low paying jobs. In the back of their minds they clearly remembered the negative comments from friends and family members telling them they would fail. They felt a strong sense of connection to their families and when times got tough, they had the urge to quit and return home even though "going home" could mean returning to crime-infested neighborhoods and poverty level subsistence. They were lonely and didn't feel connected to anything or anybody.

The findings reflected some students coming from small towns in rural Pennsylvania that offered no cultural opportunities or exposure to diversity, attended high school in one building where everyone knew each other as neighbors or rode the same school bus. Other students came from neighborhoods located in large urban areas that were crime-infested and students had to be part of gangs to survive. Some students were pregnant and had one or two children before they turned 18 years old. Most students were out of their comfort zone and felt vulnerable to needing help from strangers. They were surrounded by very diverse students who saw, felt, and did things differently.

The findings also reflected students that lacked personal financing to attend college. Rather, they had to rely on college loans which they feared and need-based

scholarships. They had to work part-time and full-time jobs to help support their education and living costs which further endangered their opportunities to academically succeed. The findings reflected students who were embarrassed by their level of poverty further driving their self-esteem even lower. Many students found the need to share books with willing friends, attend events that offered free food, and seek other free items as opportunities arose. Some students were challenged with saving enough money for transportation to visit their family during semester breaks and some were even expected to continue helping family members financially while they, themselves, were trying to survive financially day to day.

The findings also reflected most that students could no longer blame others for their personal and academic failures. They knew they were personally responsible for college expectations and requirements since they were now living on their own and were required to make daily decisions for which they had to take ownership. While living at home, these students stated they regularly blamed others for their poor choices and ultimate failures. It was easy to do and a copout tactic to avoid personal accountability.

Academic Challenges

The research findings related to academic challenges focused on two themes: grades and lack of preparation.

The findings found students who were very fearful of failing to get good grades ultimately dropping out or ending up on probation status in their first year of college. They knew they were not properly prepared academically and believed, from their past failures, that they were unlikely to earn good grades. They didn't want to continue

failing, but they felt helpless and doomed that academic failure would continue to be their destiny.

The findings also reflected that some students suffered learning disabilities requiring unique equipment and teaching techniques which colleges routinely do not offer. Other students had undiagnosed disabilities and medication needs that went untreated which further impacted their ability to perform academically.

The findings further reflected these students arrived at college unprepared to perform in college courses. High schools failed them or created an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to get them through, families did not provide academic support, and parents were working and not at home to encourage academics. Placement test results reflected many students with as little as sixth grade reading, writing and math skills. The findings reflected some current high school graduates and some students out of school for many years lacked the foundational academic skills instruction to successfully complete college level courses.

Personal Observations by the Researcher not Directly Drawn from the Data

The researcher found many students to be embarrassed of the position they found themselves in when they first enrolled in college. They qualified for a program that reflected academic failure, poverty, and a certain level of ignorance. They viewed themselves as failures with no self-worth or self-esteem, and that had no real belief they could succeed. Many students found themselves in college, not because they knew they wanted it, but rather because they knew they did not want to be where they came from and college represented the possibility of not having to return.

They were scared most of the time because they felt like they were living on the edge. Every grade or assignment could make or break them. In the back of their minds were the constant reminders of past failures and negative comments. At the same time, this constant fear drove them to work harder and remind them that every requirement needed their absolute best effort.

The researcher also concluded that this fear forced them to accept risks such as engaging in an Act 101 program that they would not otherwise have done. Even though many students viewed the program negatively, they were so desperate not to fail, they decided to give Act 101 a try to see if it could really help them. The students it helped became the programs biggest advocates and also became the biggest users of services,

Finally, the researcher found that Act 101 students bonded together and reached out to help each other as needed. They started out as distant unknowns but grew together like a family that cared about the well-being of each other.

Research Question Two

Which Act 101 services were deemed most important, beneficial, meaningful, or useful by Act 101 students?

Findings Drawn Directly From the Data

Students

The research data from student comments resulted into four themes: counseling/advising, program director, tutoring, and other services.

The findings reflected at-risk students arriving on campus with many personal, financial and academic needs and shortcomings. They required help and guidance to find

ways to deal with these needs. Once accepting enrollment into the Act 101 program, the students relied on the program staff, especially the counselors/advisors, to provide these program services. The counselors/advisors possessed solutions as well as the connections to the right resources to be most helpful. The counselors/advisors became their day to day mother/father, big brother/sister, and/or cheerleaders. They supported the students by being focused on the positives, were sensitive to their struggles and comforted them in times of perceived failure as well as instilling in them the desire to "keep working at it" one day at a time. Over time, as students earned successes, the relationship changed from student/staff to friends.

The findings reflected that the students had the significant respect for the program director. They realized the director was directly responsible for providing the caring and supporting staff (counselors/advisors, tutors, and administrative). They also appreciated the directors' willingness to advocate for the students academically (keeping them off probation when their grades dropped), financially (finding them extra monies for tuition, books, child care, transportation, and living expenses) and personally (always willing to help no matter what the problem). The findings also reflected appreciation for the type and availability of services. They know they were getting more services than general population students were receiving such as flexible hours for unlimited tutoring services, a lending library of textbooks, and interaction with faculty.

The findings also reflected the appreciation they felt for the tutoring services. Due to work schedules and child care responsibilities, they needed and received flexible service hours for tutoring to meet their needs. They also appreciated the availability of

both peer tutors (students who have taken and passed a course with an "A" grade) and professional tutors (those with a minimum of a bachelors degree and knowledge of learning skills). Some students wanted the professional tutors who were more skilled at learning strategies for at-risk students whereas other students preferred peer students who operated more at their level and knew first-hand their struggle. The findings also reflected the students appreciation for the availability of unlimited one-on-one tutoring sessions in every subject while college tutoring labs charges for these services.

Finally, the findings reflected a group of other services that the students mentioned and that the researcher grouped together. These services were specifically designed and made available only for the at-risk students and were otherwise not found on campus: an in-depth orientation program that typically included a tour of the campus; the opportunity to meet Act 101 support and administrative staff; the opportunity to meet financial aid college staff to discuss loans and scholarships; and in some cases to attend academic skill workshops. Some students stated they participated in bridge programs which offered them the same services as the orientation program plus additional services such as: (a) intrusive counseling/advising, (b) mentoring, (c) remediation (developmental and supplemental instruction), (d) academic skill workshops, (e) academic courses, and (f) financial aid and career counseling. Act 101 students who attended a bridge program found it helpful in creating a foundation of early academic success and personal comfort going into the first semester of college. For institutions that didn't offer the all inclusive bridge programs, they instead offered the individual components separately, based on their financial budgets, which the students found equally as valuable.

Counselors/Advisors

The research findings from counselors/advisors' comments resulted in three themes: counseling/advising, tutoring and other services.

The findings from counselors/advisors' comments reflected similarly to the comments of the students as to the most important services. The at-risk students enter the Act 101 program with feelings of low self-worth, fear of the new surroundings, low self-esteem, desperation, loneliness, fear of failure, and isolation. They have immediate academic, financial and personal issues. They approach the counselor/advisor for guidance on how to be successful academically, financially to be able to stay in school, and on a range of personal issues. The counselors/advisors concluded they are the at-risk students' best hope of success and survival. They believe they have the resources and contacts to solve the problems facing the at-risk students and therefore are their greatest resource. The at-risk student looks to the counselor/advisor for financial advice and sources of aid and, at times, to hold them accountable for enough financial resources to stay in school. The counselor/advisor provides guidance and advice about career options including establishing a major as well as transfer issues. At times, students are directed to crisis centers for help with diagnostic needs related to mental health issues and medicinal needs.

The findings reflect at-risk students as needing someone to care for them and for someone to go to for help with their day-to-day needs. Students try to gauge the counselor/advisors potential to determine how much help they may be able to get. If the students get most of their important needs met, then they keep returning. Dependence,

trust, and friendship develop as the relationship matures and the counselor/advisor continues to successfully meet student's important needs. Counselors/advisors become their mother/father figure, big brother or sister, or the cheerleader they turn to for help every day. The counselor/advisors focus was on the positives and sensitivity to the students' feelings with trust and bonding occurring as these students begin to experience success.

The relationship frequently remains as long as the counselor/advisor continues to help the student with their ongoing needs. If the student gets help with some issues but not the issues for which the student feels most needy, the relationship could wither and the student typically leaves the program. If the student leaves the program but remains in school without further services, negative comments are made to other students and faculty about the importance of the program. From time to time, at-risk students may return to the counselor/advisor with problems or needs and may want to re-enter the program and the cycle typically repeats itself.

The findings from the counselors also reflected at-risk students arriving on campus with serious academic deficiencies in which tutors played a significant role. Counselors felt most students preferred professional tutors rather than peer tutors because professional tutors offered a higher degree of teaching strategies, maturity in approach and were generally more dependable. Students look to the tutors for daily support both in content matter and personal cheerleading. They developed friendships and trust with their tutors and sought out the same tutors for each session. They would wait extra time, if necessary, to see their regular tutor rather than accepting a different one when they

needed help. The more success students have in earning passing grades or grades that exceed their expectations, the more frequently they return for help and make positive comments about the program. Students found the tutors to offer flexible hours around class and work schedules as well as family needs. Act 101 students frequently received unlimited one-on-one time or small group tutoring sessions in every subject while college tutoring labs would not offer this level of service free of charge.

The counselors/advisors concluded at-risk students found orientation programs useful and helpful. They provided opportunities for new incoming students to receive a tour of the campus; meet Act 101 support and administrative staff; discuss personal, financial, and academic issues; and attend academic skill workshops. These opportunities and activities provided a positive starting point in helping to make these students more comfortable with their worst fears and concerns.

Counselors stated some students were required, while others volunteered, to enroll in a bridge program (attend the summer prior to the first fall semester of college) which provided the same services as the orientation program plus additional services such as: (a) intrusive counseling/advising, (b) mentoring, (c) remediation (developmental and supplemental instruction), (d) academic skill workshops, (e) academic courses; and (f) financial aid and career counseling. Most Act 101 students who attended a bridge program found them helpful in creating a foundation of early academic success and personal comfortability going into their first semester of college.

Tutors

The research findings from tutors' comments resulted in three themes: counseling/advising, tutoring and other program services.

The tutors' comments and themes mirrored the counselors comments and themes. Tutors believed students viewed the counselor/advisor as the key to getting their needs met and referred to them as the “gatekeeper” of the program services. Students felt counselors/advisors have the greatest ability to get things done and therefore were the most successful in satisfying their needs. Counselor/advisors possessed significant influence with the Act 101 director, had direct relationships with faculty, admissions and financial aid departments, the career center and various other offices at the institution all of whom they could approach to help them. The counselor/advisors provided assistance with personal, financial and academic issues as well as career service needs. They helped the students find additional sources of funding for tuition and books as well as day to day living expenses. They established small loan accounts with the financial aid department to help students with short-term needs for such items as food and transportation. They helped the students find jobs to help supplement their income as well as provide career counseling for future job opportunities after college.

The findings reflected students appreciating the variety of tutors available, the flexible hours (evenings and weekends), the genuine helping effort and the frequency of their availability at personal no cost. The at-risk students also appreciated the one-on-one sessions, small group sessions, supplemental and remedial help the tutors provided. More tutors were available in the subjects of writing, English, reading, math and science,

where the greatest need existed for at-risk students. Students were offered the choice of professional or peer tutors as well.

Finally, the findings reflected a group of other services that at-risk students deemed important. They included orientation and bridge programs which the at-risk students believed to be very helpful in preparing them for their first semester of college. They also appreciated the lending library where they could borrow books from the Act 101 program for private use throughout the semester. They also found the weekly / monthly faculty reports to the tutors to be helpful in developing a tutoring plan for each subject throughout the semester.

Personal Observations from the Researcher Not Directly Drawn From the Data

The researcher found the students to have significant respect for the counselors/advisors, program director, and support staff. Their comments reflected a genuine appreciation for their continuous efforts to help them succeed in college. It was obvious they knew how hard it was for the program personnel to be there every day for them. They realized that many of the issues they were facing were difficult and challenged the Act 101 staff to find solutions. Although the program staff wasn't always successful in solving every need or issue, the students still appreciated their efforts. But it is also important to realize that the students had to stay positive with the staff because they really did not have any other options. If they chose to leave the program or not engage in the use of services, they would be eliminating the only real resource they had resulting in really being alone. They realized they had so many issues and needs that every positive bit of help was a bonus. So, to some degree, the students utilized the

support services because they represented the only hope of moving forward. Without this help, they knew their chances were that much slimmer of succeeding.

The students were also very appreciative of the tutors who they also came to rely on. They realized their help made a positive impact on their grades and persistence to graduation. Some students would blame the tutors when they did not do well in a test or assignment rather than take full responsibility for their results. It seemed that some students held the tutors responsible for their outcomes thereby becoming dependent on their availability and help to guarantee success. The tutors, on the other hand, tried to explain the successes and failures to the students as they occurred to ensure the students understood what it took to be successful.

Finally, the researcher found that Act 101 students, overtime, better understood the role of the program staff as well as their limitations. They slowly accepted total responsibility for their efforts and outcomes and realized the support they were receiving was simply that, support, but they still had accomplished challenges on their own.

Research Question Three

Why were some eligible students reluctant to participate in an Act 101 program?

Findings Drawn Directly From the Data

Students

The research findings from student comments resulted in three themes: personal, outside perception, and program services. The findings of this section were a result of current student's perceptions of why students were reluctant to participate. These perceptions were developed by current Act 101 students through conversations

with students who dropped out or what went through the minds of current students prior to or in the early stages of accepting program services.

The findings from the comments concluded that many students were immature, ignorant of the program's value and services, possessed low self-esteem, lacked of success, did not realize what it would take to be successful in college, procrastinated their responsibilities, felt labeled and stereotyped, trusted no one, heard negative comments from other program students, and struggled with their individual pride.

The findings reflected that some students were in denial and didn't feel they really needed help but instead reacted only when facing a crisis. This behavior stemmed from their lack of commitment, understanding the expectations, fully realizing they were no longer in high school and can't just slide through. Some students felt prideful and that they could or should succeed in college on their own rather than accepting services from a program that qualified you by poor academics and poverty level income. Due to not knowing the value, benefit and need of the services, students were unwilling to take time away from work and families. Some students were lazy, immature and thought college was just an extension of high school where they "slid through" with minimal effort. Other students experienced personal failures that created a sense of inferiority and mistrust of people, especially strangers, resulting in feelings of hidden agendas. Finally, others were shy and afraid to ask for help but were loners and struggled through their issues quietly and privately.

The findings also found students who were affected by negative outside comments and perceptions. Students were made to feel embarrassed and different than

regular students by outside comments. Some friends, not part of an Act 101 program, made comments that the program was a waste of time, a disability program for "stupid" people, only "stupid" and "poor" people qualify, and pressured that it was socially unacceptable to maintain a status in their peer group. Students were also concerned that faculty instructors would view them as "dumb" and felt pity for them or single them out from the rest of their classmates as needing special help.

The findings also reflected some students who did not have a clue that the program existed or what the program had to offer. Most colleges only relied on the admissions offices to market the program. It was found that even the programs that marketed their Act 101 program did not do so from an outcomes basis so the student still couldn't determine the potential value to them. Since some students were accepted into the college as a conditional admit (agreeing to participate in the Act 101 program) the findings pointed out this mandatory component was a turnoff and resulted in significant resistance. In some instances, the program services were not available at convenient times due to work and family obligations. In other instances, students did not have appropriate transportation to facilitate involvement in the services. Some programs required that an institutional student contract be signed thus binding both parties to engage in services which scared some students as well.

Counselors/Advisors

The research findings from counselors/advisors' comments resulted in three themes: personal, outside perception, and program services. The findings of this section were a result of comments made to counselors from current students, students who were

in the program but dropped out, and students who used the services and persisted to graduation.

The comments provided by the counselors were similar to the comments provided by the students. Some students believed they didn't need these program services because they did not have a history of needing or utilizing them in the past. Students felt they managed their high school obligations adequately in the past and got passing grades so why enroll in this program? Some students perceived college as a continuation of high school where students could continue sliding through with minimal effort. Other students had time constraints resulting from school obligations, work schedules, and family obligations. They struggled with maturity issues, and some counselor/advisors felt they needed a reality check to “wake them up.” Students came to school with a new independence and a new sense of freedom, so the last thing they wanted was to be part of a program that included requirements and expectations. Some feared the program was exposing their weaknesses, would make them feel even more inferior to other students or did not want to be part of a special group where they would not be able to hide their fragile weaknesses. Just by qualifying for the Act 101 program made some students feel like they were standing out to others which further lowered their self-esteem and self-worth. Some students did not fit in with any groups but were loners who chose to struggle quietly day-to-day to get through on their own. Some students were raised to not accept help and believed that “getting through” on their own was the right approach. Finally, some students faced trust issues, undiagnosed behavioral issues, and medication needs.

The research also found students who viewed the program as embarrassing since it represented a poorly performing group of students. It was viewed by some as a special education program from the past where they put failing students together to try to get them through. Finally, some students stated their families were negative toward participating because it exposed the family characteristics as part as the eligibility process.

The findings also reflected some students who really did not understand how poorly they were prepared for college and that without services from a program of this type, they could face extreme odds in persisting to graduation. Some students were not aware of the program or its services and therefore didn't develop an interest in enrolling in it. Numerous students who lived off campus did not have access to transportation that would allow them the flexibility to stay on campus to use the services when they were available. Other students tried the services but, in most cases, either waited too long to ask for help or failed a test or course and then blamed the program for their failure.

Tutors

The research findings from tutor comments resulted in three themes: personal, outside perception, and program services. The findings of this section were a result of comments made to tutors from current students, students who were in the program but dropped out, and students who used the services and persisted to graduation.

The findings from students were similar to those already mentioned by students and counselors. The findings reflected tutors comments that found some students to be lazy, procrastinate, and not in touch with what it takes to succeed in college. They came

from high school unprepared to engage, immature to understand their needs, and simply not ready to work to be successful but rather make excuses for continued failures.

Students lacked adequate preparation from high school and knew it, yet they thought since they changed atmospheres, the end results will change as well. Many students did not have adequate social skills and did poorly in working with or socializing with others. They did not think they could commit to a program that would require time they didn't have because they were already constrained by their employment, family time, and school obligations. In many cases, these students waited until they were failing to reach out for help, and, in many cases, waited too long and failed an exam or course. They did not want to be considered part of a special group but rather a "regular" student. They are immature, arrogant, and convinced they could make it on their own even though they did not earn any academic successes to date. They were prideful, yet lacked confidence and were unwilling to come to terms with their shortcomings. They needed help but rather than pursue help, they waited to fail because they expected to fail and then blame the failure on others. They possessed poor study habits and academic skills so they were unprepared for college level work. Finally, they saw this program as pointless and a waste of their time but rather accept college as just another crisis which they would somehow work through.

The tutors felt many students perceived the program to be negatively stigmatized by other students and faculty because students had to be academically deficient and possess poverty level income to qualify. Many students were embarrassed to admit they

needed the help or to be associated with an at-risk program make up of other students who were perceived in a negative way as well.

Some students were reluctant to participate in program services even though they needed tutoring which the program offered. They did not have respect for peer tutors because they found them to be inadequate in meeting their needs, were not flexible with appointments, knew only a certain amount of subject matter and did not know learning strategies. Numerous professors did not respect peer tutors, so potential Act 101 students found these perspectives as negative to joining the program. Some students found it easier to go to general college labs for help which offered greater availability and more tutors from which to choose. Some Act 101 programs did not offer tutoring in every subject due to financial constraints but provided tutoring in a limited manner—in core subjects—which students judged to be inadequate. Finally, some students simply did not have transportation available when tutor services were available so therefore the program had no value to them.

Personal Observations By the Researcher Not Directly Drawn From the Data

The researcher's personal observation was made differently for this question since the researcher was not able to directly speak to eligible students who were reluctant to participate in the use of services. Rather, the researcher's observations were generated from students reactions who were at first reluctant to participate but eventually did participate.

The researcher found these students to be mostly concerned with program value, survival, and peer perceptions. Due to their poverty level income, they had to work either

part-time or full-time which used a certain amount of time and energy each day. In addition, many students had child care and other family obligations. Finally they had academic obligations (classroom, outside assignments, and study) that required time. All of these demands on their time left little time for any new obligations such as participating in an Act 101 program. The researcher found the real key to their willingness to participate was the ability of the program personnel to accurately reflect both the short term value of earning successes and the long-term value of persisting to graduation. Additionally, the program must provide a relatively clear picture of the unlikely nature these students will persist without the services.

Many students, once enrolled in college, are faced with the day-to-day choices to survive academically, financially and personally. The researcher believes that by educating these students on what it takes to be successful, they in turn will be more willing to participate because they will be self-evaluating their skills and deficiencies. This effort will not come easy because the students come into the college with pre-determined opinions and conclusions that must be changed.

Finally, the researcher found that peer perceptions played a significant role in why students were reluctant to participate openly or at all. Even though almost all Act 101 students do not know each other at their point of entry, friendships do form quite quickly. Since many students leave their families behind, these friendships take on the form of new families and their opinions become very bit as important as the opinions of their real family. The Act 101 students respond with choices based on the feelings and perceptions of these friendships which can negatively impact their decisions ultimately affecting their

potential to persist to graduation. Again it is the researchers personal observation that this could be overcome by a more comprehensive approach to marketing the program to all students on campus so there is a more positive perception of its makeup and value.

Conclusions

The researcher's theoretical framework for this study was Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1993) which is based on several constructs. The constructs include: (a) background characteristics, skills and abilities, and prior academic results; (b) initial goal and institutional commitment of the student; and (c) strength of the student's intention to persist or what was the new student willing to endure in order to remain in college? According to Tinto (1993), the stronger the intent to persist, the more likely the student will complete a college degree. The center piece of the Tinto model is the concept of academic and social integration. Tinto maintained that student retention was based on the degree to which the student bonded both academically and socially to the college community. Further, Tinto postulated that the community external to the college, to the degree the student participates in it, indirectly impacts the student's social and academic integration or directly influences the student through external commitments. Tinto (1993) wrote, "When those external communities are strong their actions may serve to condition, if not counter, events within the college" (p. 116). "The model posits that, other things being equal, the lower the degree of one's social and intellectual integration into the academic and social communities of the college, the greater the likelihood of departure" (Tinto, 1993, p. 116).

The findings from the three studies conducted by Tinto in chapter two of at-risk students included: (a) low income, first generation college students face major challenges; (b) at-risk students enter college possessing lower levels of academic preparation; (c) external commitments and inadequate financial resources negatively impact retention; (d) academic and social integration results in higher retention; (e) at-risk support services positively impacts retention; (f) involvement in academic and social activities results in higher retention; and (g) at-risk students who were fully engaged academically and socially resulted in higher retention. These findings supported Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure which focuses on academic and social integration directly impacting student departure decisions.

The findings from the relevant studies (Appendix D) of at-risk students and at-risk programs included: (a) higher GPAs resulted in higher retention rates; (b) higher retention rates occurred when students were engaged in all available program services; (c) higher academic outcomes resulted when students engaged in all available program services; (d) support services made a positive difference in persistence; (e) engaged at-risk students earned degrees at an equal rate to non-at-risk students; (f) at-risk students not fully engaged in program services negatively impacted retention rates and persistence to graduation; and (g) greater use of support services reflected an increase in positive academic results. These findings supported Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure which focuses on academic and social integration directly impacting student departure decisions. The researcher concluded that these findings consistently reflected that the availability and engagement in at-risk program support services discussed in this

study had a direct positive impact on higher retention and persistence rates for the at-risk population. This conclusion supports Tinto's model that academic and social integration positively impacts student departure decisions.

The research findings for the three research questions posed in this study were as follows: (a) research question one included personal, financial, accountability, grades, and lack of preparation themes; (b) research question two included counseling/advising, program director, tutors, and other service themes; and (c) question three included personal, outside perceptions, and program services themes. The themes developed from the student responses were consistent with the themes developed from the counselor and tutor themes. These findings were consistent even though the type, availability, and delivery of program services differed at individual institutions as did the cultural backgrounds and residences of the students. Based on the study findings, the researcher concluded that all Act 101 programs that participated in this study shared similar challenges with at-risk students. It could further be concluded that all Act 101 programs could benefit if similar types, availability, and delivery approaches were utilized in meeting the needs of Act 101 student's. The findings of this study concurred with both the findings of the three studies conducted by Tinto and the findings from the relevant studies presented in Chapter 2. The researcher found that the participants' quotes and developed themes consistently reflected how the availability and delivery of Act 101 program support services created an overall conducive environment to academic and social integration. This integration positively impacted retention and persistence results for at-risk students in every Act 101 program that participated in this study. Finally, the

researcher concluded the issues, challenges, and struggles that the researcher faced in 1971 when he was an Act 101 student still exists and therefore nothing has changed almost 40 years later.

At the time this dissertation was published, the Governor of Pennsylvania presented his initial 2010-2011 fiscal year budget to the state legislature for consideration. This initial budget funded the line item for The Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program (Act 101) at \$2.7 million, a decrease from \$9.32 million in 2007-2008. This dramatic reduction comes at a time when current research as well as the findings in this study clearly indicate's the need for continuing these program services. Immigration, the failure of K-12 school systems, and non-traditional adult students will continue to feed colleges at-risk students. If the Pennsylvania State Legislature does discontinue funding and colleges are really concerned with retention rates and persistence to graduation, they will continue funding these types of services though their own institutional budgets. The services should continue to be offered either through their existing tutoring and counseling labs or by maintaining the Act 101 program structures that are already in place.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The research questions in this study were presented to three different types of institutions across different geographic and cultural regions of Pennsylvania. The findings may aid existing current and future Act 101 programs to better understand the challenges and needs of Act 101 students so they could better structure their program services to meet those needs. This understanding could lead to alternative strategies and

stimulate the development of new ideas to better address the retention and persistence of Act 101 students. Many colleges are using very successful strategies but have not been sufficient in sharing them with other organizations. The researcher also found that none of the colleges collected sufficient program service level data to understand the value of each service related to retention and persistence to graduation and to what degree they should be funded. This information is paramount in a time of limited financial and human resources.

The researcher recommends that institutions perform participatory evaluations. Participatory evaluations create a learning environment in which evaluation findings are processed and accumulated by end-users in the very process of their being gathered. Growth, development, and in many cases renewed hope are an immediate by-product of the process. In addition, by enhancing and supporting organizational learning and interactive support processes, participatory evaluation has the potential for strengthening educational systems. The demand for these types of evaluations are growing since most at-risk programs are financially supported by federal, state, or local legislative programs as well as foundations and other funding sources. These financial contributors are increasingly requiring data that reflects positive results thereby justifying continued current and future funding streams (Garawaym, 1995).

The researcher suggests that institutions should appropriate funds for program directors to attend and participate in workshops and conferences that focus on trends and strategies related to at-risk students.

Finally, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) approved the request of the researcher to utilize the comments derived from the focus groups in this study but this dissertation is not a PDE publication, does not represent PDE policy, and is not endorsed by PDE.

Lessons Learned

The researcher presents six lessons learned from conducting this study. First, the one-hour time limit made it difficult for larger size focus groups to present all the comments they wanted whereas the smaller groups had more opportunity to do so. Second, multiple investigators involved in focus groups as multiple members could have complementary insights that add to the richness of the data. Third, recording the participants comments would have allowed the researcher more opportunity to capture more quotes possibly resulting in more themes. Fourth, if the focus group size would have been capped at eight rather than having sizes up to sixteen, more time would have been available for each question. Fifth, if more time would have been allocated to each focus group, the data collected would have been greater and probably richer. Sixth, if the researcher would have only allowed students entering their first semester rather than any Act 101 student, the findings could have been different.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Retention for at-risk students is one of the most widely studied areas in higher education. There is an extensive body of research literature that spans more than four decades and is dedicated solely to retention of at-risk students. There has also been considerable work and debate over the merits of various theoretical models each of which

has been posited as a more accurate portrayal of the process of student retention. The result has been an ever more sophisticated understanding of the complexity of events that shape students leaving higher education and persistence to graduation.

At the same time, as the higher education environment changes from one of an abundance of resources to one of diminishing resources, there has been a heightened focus on the role of institutions and state governments to increase the rate of which students persist and graduate from both two- and four-year colleges and universities. Simultaneously, there has been a number of businesses and consulting firms that claim unique capacity to help institutions increase retention of their students. It would be appropriate to suggest that student retention as a whole has become big business for researchers, educators, and state governments.

Despite the current knowledge and efforts, student retention gains have been hard to come by. Some institutions have improved retention rates, however the national rate of student persistence and graduation disappointingly reflect little change over the past decade (NCES, 2005a). In spite of the many years of working on this issue, there is still much unknown and have yet to be explored. Additionally, there is more work to be done in transferring research and theory into effective practice.

It is therefore appropriate to ask what else is needed to further improve the effectiveness of our work in increasing student retention and enhanced institutional effectiveness. What additional research questions must we ask; what issues do we need to further explore to more effectively address the continuing problem of at-risk student attrition in higher education?

Model of Institutional Action

A model of institutional action should provide guidelines for the development of effective policies and programs so that institutions can enhance the persistence of all students. This model would describe how different institutional actions impact student persistence in varying ways and degrees in both two- and four-year institutions. The model should connect specific programs and practices for students to institutional actions that provide support for the faculty and staff directing the programs and practices. The development of such a model would require more specific research on effective practice as well as research on the impact of organizational policies and in-turn student retention.

Faculty Placement and Development

It is increasingly clear that faculty actions, especially in the classroom, are critical to institutional efforts to increase student retention, but are the faculty properly trained to teach their students? We know very little about the ways in which investments in differing types of faculty development programs impact student retention rates. Although some research has been conducted in linking faculty pedagogy to student retention and therefore (by inference) to the importance of faculty development, that linkage needs to be further explored and tested. An example is where higher education institutions continue to hire adjunct instructors who are typically less experienced, lower paid, and receive less training opportunities to teach key first-year courses. This is in spite of the fact that research findings indicate that the first year is the critical year in which decisions to stay or leave are most often made, where the foundations for effective learning are or

are not established, and where the potential returns to institutional investment in student retention and learning are likely to be greatest.

Reward Systems

Little, if any research exists that focuses on the alignment of reward systems to the goal of enhancing student retention. It is one thing to determine the importance of student retention but it is quite another to invest scarce resources to adopt an institutional faculty and staff reward systems to promote behaviors to reinforce goals. While most faculty would state publicly that it is important to retain every student, they are privately concerned with getting promoted, earning tenure status, gaining research grants, consulting, and publishing thus dealing with conflicting elements. Unless the education and retention of students is not rewarded through promotion and tenure systems, many faculty will only give lip service.

Institutionalizing Practices that Endure

Research is needed to shed light on the types of retention programs and institutional practices that lead to successful implementation of these programs in ways that ensure long-term endurance. A better understanding is needed of how some retention programs are able to endure at the center of institutional life and become institutionalized while others remain isolated and marginalized. We must know what components need to exist that ultimately triggers institutionalization.

Formative and Summative Program Assessments

Another area of exploration is the applying the results of assessments to program improvement. Research is needed to document the common elements of successful

programs in different institutional settings that ultimately lead to institutionalization over a period of time.

Transfer of At-Risk Students

Because many at-risk students begin in two-year colleges, there is a need to conduct more research on the transfer of at-risk students between two- and four-year institutions. This transfer is not just a matter of having matriculation agreements in place. Rather at-risk transfer students should be studied to develop a body of research that indicates the nature of institutional practices that enable more students to transfer to and, in turn, succeed in four-year colleges and universities.

Research Questions Segmented by Type of Institution

The research scope of this study consisted of 600 participants: 351 students, 88 counselors, and 161 tutors from 32 participating Act 101 institutions. The institutions included community colleges, four-year public and four-year private institutions. Focus group sessions of approximately one-hour duration were conducted using open-ended questions related to student challenges, program services, and engagement issues.

It could be of great value for future researchers to conduct a study using the researcher's three questions as segmented in Appendix G type of institution and compare the findings against each other. Since community colleges offer open enrollment while four-year publics and privates have selective admission standards, it is fair to conclude that differences may exist within the participant responses. The results could be analyzed and compared to the published literature to determine possible reasons with the findings being published for further research.

Chapter Summary

An overview of the study was provided in this chapter. The findings from chapter 4 of the study were presented and discussed in relation to the study's three research questions; study conclusions were also offered. The implications of the study were described while recommendations for Act 101 directors as well as for academicians and future researchers were presented.

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Appendix A

HIGHER EDUCATION EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Pennsylvania Code References

Rules implementing this act, see 22 Pa. Code § 44.1 et seq.

§ 2510-301. Short title

This act shall be known and may be cited as the “Higher Education Equal Opportunity Act.”

1971, Aug. 31, P.L. 423, No. 101, § 1, effective July 1, 1971.

Historical and Statutory Notes Title of Act:

An Act providing for Commonwealth support for institutions of higher education to furnish learning and special counseling services for undergraduate students whose cultural, economic and educational disadvantages impair their initial ability to pursue successfully higher education opportunities, and making an appropriation. 1971, Aug. 31, P.L. 423, No. 101.

Pennsylvania Code References

General provisions, see 22 Pa. Code § 32.1 et seq.

§ 2510-302. Legislative findings

The General Assembly finds and declares that because of financial, home and community environmental conditions, part-time and full-time students with substantial potential for success in college and for future leadership in the community are unable to pursue a higher education and attain their full educational capability. In order to combat effectively the forces which prevent these students from pursuing a higher education, a variety of programs and methods must be tried.

This act is designed to provide funds to institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth for the purpose of offering programs to enhance the chances of disadvantaged part-time and full-time students to achieve their educational goals. 1971, Aug. 31, P.L. 423, No. 101, § 2, effective July 1, 1971. Amended 1989, July 7, P.L. 239, No. 41, § 1, imd. effective.

Library References

Colleges and Universities 9.25(1), 9.25(2), 9.35(1).

Westlaw Topic No. 81.

C.J.S. Civil Rights §§ 122, 140.

C.J.S. Colleges and Universities §§ 29, 33 to 34, 41.

§ 2510-303. Definitions

The following words and phrases shall have the following meanings:

(1) “**Institutions of higher education**” shall mean those post secondary institutions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania authorized to award degrees.

(2) “**Full-time student**” shall mean any bona fide resident of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who has been admitted as a full-time student to an institution of higher education and who is economically and educationally disadvantaged in accordance with criteria to be established by the State Board of Education.

(3) “**Part-time student**” shall mean any bona fide resident of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who has been admitted into a degree program as a less than full-time student, but who is enrolled in at least the equivalent of six semester credits of 225 clock hours of instruction per semester, in an institution of higher education and who is economically and educationally disadvantaged in accordance with the criteria to be established by the State Board of Education. 1971, Aug. 31, P.L. 423, No. 101, § 3, effective July 1, 1971. Amended 1989, July 7, P.L. 239, No. 41, § 1, imd. effective.

§ 2510-304. Higher education equal opportunity program

The Secretary of Education may, in conformance with such policies, standards, rules and regulations adopted by the State Board of Education, contract with institutions of higher education for the awarding of higher education equal opportunity program grants.

Programs for which such grants may be awarded shall include, but not be limited to, remedial learning services, counseling services or tutorial services. Funds provided by this act may not be used to pay tuition, room and board or other institutional costs or fees incurred by students.

1971, Aug. 31, P.L. 423, No. 101, § 4, effective July 1, 1971.

Pennsylvania Code References

Program standards and eligibility criteria for the Higher Education Equal Opportunity Act, see 22 Pa. Code § 44.1 et seq.

Library References

Colleges and Universities 6(5), 9.35(1).
Westlaw Topic No. 81.
C.J.S. Civil Rights §§ 122, 140.
C.J.S. Colleges and Universities §§ 10,
14, 29, 41.

§2510-305. Application for approval of grant

Each institution of higher education requesting a grant to provide a program, as proposed in this act, shall submit an application in such form and at such time as the Secretary of Education may require. An application for a grant shall include a description of the nature and the method by which all funds granted will be used by the applicant institution to contribute to the provision, maintenance or improvement of programs designed to accomplish the goals of this act.

1971, Aug. 31, P.L. 423, No. 101, § 5, effective July 1, 1971.

Appendix B

CHAPTER 44. PROGRAM STANDARDS AND
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR THE HIGHER
EDUCATION EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT

Sec.

- 44.1. [Scope and purpose.](#)
- 44.2. [Definitions.](#)
- 44.3. [Eligible grant applicants.](#)
- 44.4. [Eligible students.](#)
- 44.5. [Institutional commitment.](#)
- 44.6. [Responsibility of the Department.](#)
- 44.7. [Reports.](#)
- 44.8. [Implementation.](#)

Authority

The provisions of this Chapter 44 issued under sections 3 and 4 of the Higher Education Equal Opportunity Act (24 P. S. § § 2510-303 and 2510-304), unless otherwise noted.

Source

The provisions of this Chapter 44 adopted February 7, 1972, effective February 8, 1992, 22 Pa.B. 582, unless otherwise noted.

§ 44.1. Scope and purpose.

(a) This chapter provides standards and eligibility criteria for programs operated by institutions of higher education under Act 101. Guidelines for the Act 101 program issued by the Department prior to the adoption of this chapter shall cease to be effective on June 30, 1992.

(b) This chapter applies only to programs operated under Act 101.

(c) The Board's equal education opportunity policies generally applicable to institutions of higher education are in Chapter 32 (relating to equal education opportunity).

§ 44.2. Definitions.

The following words and terms, when used in this chapter, have the following meanings, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

Act 101—The Higher Education Equal Opportunity Act (24 P. S. § § 2510-301—2510-305).

Act 101 student—A student who meets the eligibility criteria of this chapter and who is enrolled in a program.

Program—A program operated under Act 101 and this chapter.

Source

The provisions of this § 44.2 amended August 11, 2000, effective August 12, 2000, 30 Pa.B. 4243. Immediately preceding text appears at serial page (225465).

§ 44.3. Eligible grant applicants.

An accredited degree-granting postsecondary institution in this Commonwealth is eligible to apply for Act 101 funds.

Cross References

This section cited in 22 Pa. Code § 44.4 (relating to eligible students).

§ 44.4. Eligible students.

(a) A bona fide domiciliary of this Commonwealth who is attending an institution which is an eligible grant applicant under § 44.3 (relating to eligible grant applicants) and who is determined to be economically and educationally disadvantaged under this section is eligible for participation in the program. To be eligible for participation, a student shall meet the following criteria. The student shall be:

(1) Economically disadvantaged by having an annual family income equal to or less than 200% of the family income level established by the United States Bureau of the Census for determining poverty status and published by the United States Department of Health and Human Services in the *Federal Register*. The annual family income to be used to recruit students who will enter the program on or after July 1 of every year beginning in 2001 will be provided to institutions by the Secretary by March 31 of the same year and will be published in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin* by April 15 of the same year. The Secretary's notification under this section will comply with this chapter and

will not be subject to the regulatory review procedures under section 5 of the Regulatory Review Act (71 P. S. § 745.5).

(2) Educationally disadvantaged by having a grade point average (GPA) predicted to be 2.0 or less (scale: A = 4.0). The prediction shall be based upon the criteria and formula regularly used by the institution to select students for admission. If an institution has not developed a formula for predicting a student's GPA, the term means a student who is judged unlikely to succeed academically at the institution.

(b) Act 101 programs serve both full-time and part-time students. Full-time means that the student is carrying at least 12 credits in a semester. Part-time means that the student is carrying at least 6 credits but less than 12 credits in a semester. A participating Act 101 institution shall serve full-time students and may serve part-time students.

Source

The provisions of this § 44.4 amended March 8, 1996, effective for the 1996-97 academic year, 26 Pa.B. 1060; amended January 17, 1997, effective for the 1997-98 academic year, 27 Pa.B. 323; amended August 11, 2000, effective August 12, 2000, 30 Pa.B. 4243. Immediately preceding text appears at serial page (225466).

Cross References

This section cited in 22 Pa. Code § 44.8 (relating to implementation).

§ 44.5. Institutional commitment.

(a) A participating 4-year institution shall plan a 2-year financial and academic commitment to all students entering the program. A participating 2-year institution shall plan a 1-year financial and academic commitment to all students entering the program. This commitment is subject to continued funding by the General Assembly. The institution shall arrange financial aid packages, based on needs, to assure that each Act 101 student receives adequate financial assistance to cover expenses. Act 101 funds will not be used for this purpose.

(b) An institution shall match a minimum of 15% of the cost for new programs and a minimum of 25% for continuing programs as part of the institution's commitment.

(c) The institution shall carefully evaluate every phase of the proposed program in terms of proposal development, recruitment, admissions, counseling, tutoring, course offerings, student personnel services, student retention, degree completion and postgraduate plans of Act 101 students, and shall, if necessary, be committed to altering institutional attitudes, methods and practices to maximize the Act 101 students' chances for a positive and productive higher education experience. The evaluation shall be conducted annually

and the results provided to the Department under § 44.6(b) (relating to responsibility of the Department).

(d) Each program shall have an advisory board. The program may be guided, but not directed, by the advisory board. The advisory board shall represent the administration, faculty, student body and community. Advisory board members from the community shall include parents and agency representatives and may include neighborhood residents. Advisory board members shall be available to participate regularly in its meetings and activities. The advisory board shall be given the services of program staff persons and be empowered to create subcommittees as needed. Its total size shall be determined by the program director and eligible institution. The advisory board shall offer advice in areas of program development, recruitment, retention, funding and supportive services affecting Act 101 students. An orientation program for the advisory board shall be implemented to assure clarity of roles and comprehension of the philosophy of the program.

Cross References

This section cited in 22 Pa. Code § 44.6 (relating to responsibility of the Department).

§ 44.6. Responsibility of the Department.

(a) The Department will implement the Act 101 program by making grants to eligible institutions and providing oversight of institution programs.

(b) The Department will receive and review the annual evaluation reports submitted by institutions participating in the Act 101 program under §§ 44.5(c) and 44.7(a) (relating to institutional commitment; and reports) and other reports as may be required by the Department. As deemed necessary, the Secretary or the Secretary's designee may issue advice and directives to institutions to facilitate program implementation. The advice and directives will be consistent with the act and this chapter.

(c) The Department will issue new guidelines for the Act 101 program consistent with this chapter. The guidelines will be issued to participating institutions in sufficient time to take effect July 1, 1992.

Cross References

This section cited in 22 Pa. Code § 44.5 (relating to institutional commitment).

§ 44.7. Reports.

(a) Annually, each institution participating in the Act 101 program shall provide the Department information on program outcomes, including, at a minimum, student

retention, degree completion and postgraduate plans of Act 101 students. The information shall be provided by the institutions at the time and in the form requested by the Secretary or the Secretary's designee.

(b) Annually, the Secretary or the Secretary's designee will report on implementation of the Act 101 program to the Council of Higher Education. When deemed advisable, the Secretary or the Secretary's designee may recommend to the Board revisions in these standards to this chapter.

Cross References

This section cited in 22 Pa. Code § 44.6 (relating to responsibility of the Department).

§ 44.8. Implementation.

Institutions of higher education which are recruiting students to enter Act 101 programs on or after July 1, 1992 shall use the eligibility criteria in § 44.4 (relating to eligible students).

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Appendix C

**HIGHER EDUCATION
EQUAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY ACT**

ACT 101

**Incorporating 22 PA code §44
Issued March 1998**

APPLICATION INFORMATION

***OFFICE OF EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY*
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF
OF EDUCATION**



Pennsylvania Department of Education

The Higher Education Equal Opportunity Act (Act 101) provides financial assistance to postsecondary institutions for serving students who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. Tutorial, counseling, and related support services are program priorities for assisting students with the skills needed to succeed in an academic environment. Act 101 is designed to supplement and/or enhance funding for activities/programs offered to disadvantaged students.

Responsibility of the Department 22 PA Code §44.6

The Department is responsible for the administration and monitoring of Act 101 programs. The Department will implement the Act by awarding grants to eligible institutions and providing oversight of institutions' programs.

The Department will compile statewide descriptive statistics via annual progress reports from each institution. The Department will assess each program's effectiveness based on achievement of its objectives. The Department will receive an internal evaluation from each institution in accordance with 22 PA Code §44.5(c) and §44.7(a), and may utilize other means of evaluations as deemed appropriate by the Department.

The Secretary or the Secretary's designee may issue advice or directives to institutions to facilitate program implementation as deemed necessary. The advice and directives will be consistent with the Act and these Guidelines.

Eligible Grant Applicants

Any accredited degree-granting postsecondary institution in the Commonwealth is eligible to apply for Act 101 funds.

Eligible Students

1. Any legal resident of this Commonwealth who is attending an institution that has an Act 101 grant and who is determined to be economically and educationally disadvantaged is eligible for participation in the program. "Economically disadvantaged" is as defined by the State Board of Education; "educationally disadvantaged" means a student whose grade point average (GPA) is predicted to be 2.0 or less (scale: A=4.0) as defined by 22 PA Code §44.4(a)(2).

2. A participating Act 101 institution shall serve full-time students and may serve part-time students. A full-time student is one who is enrolled for a minimum of 12 credits in a semester. A part-time student is one who is enrolled for a minimum of 6 credits but less than 12 credits in a semester.

Institutional Commitments

1. Participating four-year institutions shall provide a two-year financial and academic commitment to all students entering the program. Participating two-year institutions shall provide a one-year financial and academic commitment to all students entering the program. Act 101 institutions shall also be committed to implementing appropriate changes in institutional attitudes, methods and practices to maximize the Act 101 students' chances for a positive and productive higher education experience.
2. Institutions shall match a minimum of 15 percent of the cost for new programs and a minimum of 25 percent for continuing programs. Matching funds shall include the salary of the program director, and may include in-kind contributions (facilities and instructors' time) and costs for students' tuition, room and board. Federal and state financial aid for program students will not be considered part of the match, nor will federal/state grant program funds.
3. Institutions shall carefully evaluate program effectiveness based on achievement of its objectives in areas including, but not limited to, counseling, tutoring, student retention and degree completion. An evaluation instrument approved by the Department of Education will be used to monitor all facets of Act 101 programs. An internal evaluation shall be conducted once during the funding cycle and the results provided to the Department.
4. Each program shall have an advisory board. The program may be guided, but not directed, by the advisory board. The board shall be representative of the administration, faculty, student body and community. Advisory board members shall include parents and local agency representatives, and may also include other citizens of the community. The advisory board should offer advice in areas of program development, recruitment, retention, funding and support services affecting Act 101 students.

The Act 101 Program

Each Act 101 Program is responsible for design and implementation of a program that meets its unique institutional and student needs. Elements of a comprehensive program shall include, but not be limited to, recruitment, admission, financial aid, diagnostic testing, pre-college programs, counseling, tutoring, curricular modification, campus involvement, and other efforts aimed at retention and graduation.

Act 101 funds **may** be used for the following:

- Personnel for direct administration (excluding program director's salary);
- Personnel for academic and support services to Act 101 students;
- Counseling, tutoring, instruction, and related support services;
- Summer component costs, including orientation for parents and incoming students;
- Special activities such as cultural events, consultants, and in-service programs;
- Operating costs, including office supplies and educational materials;
- Equipment such as computers, photo copiers, and fax machines; all equipment shall remain the property of the Pennsylvania Department of Education;
- Communication and utility costs;
- Travel costs for Act 101 staff and students to attend meetings, conferences, and activities that are Act 101 related.

Act 101 funds **may not** be used for the following:

- Direct financial aid, student stipends, tuition, room and board;
- Modification or furnishing of campus or community facilities;
- Costs (including salaries) related to courses not specifically created for Act 101 students and approved by the program director;
- Professional training programs not related to Act 101 job functions;
- Partial or total salary of staff whose primary functions are to serve the total student population (examples: admissions, counseling, financial aid, and learning center).

E. Student Data Records

Collecting and maintaining data on students served is a vital program function. Documentation of student eligibility and financial assistance shall be included in each student's file. Academic status and quality point averages shall be updated each semester. A record of tutoring and counseling hours shall be maintained. Student records shall include information on a student's admission to the program, assessment of academic needs, and progress toward a degree.

F. Reporting Requirements

Institutions receiving Act 101 grants must report to the Department of Education on a regular basis. Due dates will be announced by the Department and may include the following:

1. Mid-year and final financial reports
2. Internal evaluation report
3. Final progress report (student data disk)
4. Special reports as required by the Department of Education

G. Budget

Each year the institution shall provide a budget of all Act 101 funds for review and approval by the Department of Education.

Transfer of funds between budget categories may be made at the discretion of the program director. Transfer of funds in excess of \$2,000 requires prior approval of the Department. An explanatory narrative must accompany the transfer request.

Any unexpended funds at termination of annual contract must be returned to the Department of Education.

H. General Grant Terms

Grant award amounts, as listed in the contract, are based on the state fiscal year (July 1 to June 30) and must be spent within that time period. Funds may not be carried over to the next fiscal year.

I. Grant Award and Funding Cycle

Proposals are accepted for three-year cycles based on meeting criteria as stipulated in the Request for Proposal (RFP). Grants are awarded annually and funding levels are determined after Act 101 funds are appropriated by the General Assembly.

Currently funded programs will be renewed for funding based on satisfactory program management and compliance with contract/guidelines. New programs will be funded based on successful proposals and available funds. If approved, new program proposals will be in effect for the remaining portion of the ongoing three-year funding cycle.

J. Program Compliance

Awards may be terminated in whole or in part if an institution fails to comply with terms and conditions of the contract and prevailing guidelines. Conditions that could precipitate the above action include, but are not limited to: mismanagement of funds; inadequate services to students; poor recordkeeping; failure to meet program objectives; misrepresentation of program facts and data.

Requests for proposal packets should be addressed to:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Office of Equal Educational Opportunity
Act 101 Program
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Effective March 1998

Appendix D

1. STUDIES RELATED TO AT-RISK PROGRAMS					
STUDY TITLE	<i>Predicting Successful College Experiences: Evidence From A First Year At-risk Retention Program</i>	<i>First Generation College Students: A Study of Appalachian Student Success</i>	<i>Assessing the Influence of Self-Efficacy, Metacognition, and Personality Traits on at-risk College Students' Academic Performance and Persistence</i>	<i>Telling Their Story: The Reflections, Perceptions and Experiences of Alumni of the Educational Opportunity Program at a Technical University</i>	<i>Fighting Attrition: One Freshman Year Program That Targets Academic Progress and Retention for At-risk Students</i>
RESEARCH PROBLEM OR ISSUE INVESTIGATED	Measure the effects of the program services related to GPA and graduation rates.	What current program services contributed to academic persistence of at-risk students?	What motivational and personality factors impacted the achievement and retention of at-risk students related to self-efficacy, metacognition, and personality traits, and their effect on GPA and retention of at-risk CSU students?	No study was conducted in this state and federally funded Equal Opportunity Program (in 37 years of service) to gather information from at-risk alumni students about which aspects of the program contributed to their success in persisting to graduation.	A self-evaluation on a Freshman Year program for at-risk students. Consisting of five components: academic advising/counseling, freshman colloquium, student mentoring program, academic skills training, and social support services.
RESEARCH QUESTION(S) OR OBJECTIVE	Three hypotheses: 1) ESSENCE students will have higher GPAs and graduation rates than non-ESSENCE students. 2) Underrepresented minority students will have lower GPAs and graduation rates than white students. 3) Women will have higher GPAs and graduation rates than men.	To determine what program services contributed to the academic persistence of the at-risk students who participated in this program to better understand what support services were most important.	What effect does self-efficacy and metacognition have on at-risk college students' academic achievement and retention? How do the three variables of self-efficacy, metacognition, and personality traits interact in influencing the academic performance and retention of at-risk college students?	How do African Americans and Hispanic engineers who were former participants in the Educational Opportunity program (EOP) at a technical university in the northeast define the role of EOP in their academic and social lives?	To determine the program's overall influence on student academic progress and retention as they relate to demographic background, student satisfaction with programming, academic grade and cumulative point averages, and retention rates.

<p>METHODOLOGY</p>	<p>Data from the university's student information computer system</p>	<p>The phenomenological approach was used seeking to find the meaning of the experience to be an Appalachian, first generation at-risk college student, focusing on factors which affect academic persistence.</p>	<p>The participants completed a demographic survey, two questionnaires and participated in interviews. ANOVA, MANOVA, standard Multiple Regression and the Pearson Correlation was conducted.</p>	<p>Fifteen qualitative interviews using open ended questions were conducted of individuals who graduated with a bachelors degree and earned a 2.7 GPA or higher.</p>	<p>Data was collected by the program, but not mentioned how in the study. Eligible freshman recruited and accepted into the program are included in the analysis and that participation in program services varied among students.</p>
<p>APPROACH TO SAMPLING</p>	<p>2,915 full-time students, degree seeking, enrolled in the fall semester immediately after graduating from high school. First year cohort during 1998-2001.</p>	<p>Nine participants who were enrolled in a program for at-risk students participated in a survey, interview and focus group.</p>	<p>The researcher used a convenience sample of 155 at-risk students who were selected through there enrollment in developmental classes.</p>	<p>It appeared that the alumni association database was utilized to determine graduation and contact information resulting in interest and participation.</p>	<p>Three cohorts of incoming accepted at-risk students from the entering classes of 93-94, 94-95, and 95-96. All entering students were part of each sample.</p>
<p>SUMMARY OF RESULTS</p>	<p>ESSENCE students did have higher GPAs than non-ESSENCE students</p> <p>At-risk students had lower GPAs and graduation rates than white students.</p> <p>Women had higher GPAs and graduation rates than men.</p>	<p>The primary factors affecting academic persistence which emerged from this study were the importance of the home culture and family, financial concerns, internal locus of control, relationships, emotional support, and communication of information.</p>	<p>Self-efficacy, metacognition and the personality trait of conscientiousness are important factors that influence at-risk students' academic achievement and retention.</p>	<p>The common themes concluded tutoring, counseling, mentoring, and academic skill development were important in the development and persistence to graduation.</p>	<p>Results substantiate the program's focus on intrusive interventions as a key program component. Students participating in the program were retained at a higher rate than comparative students not enrolled in the program. Students who have the most contacts of engagement with the support services earn the best academic outcomes.</p>

<p>LIMITATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS</p>	<p>Bias is concern since participation in ESSENCE is voluntary.</p> <p>Individual motivation and parental support could not be accounted for.</p>	<p>The limitations included: only nine students participated; only one at-risk program was included; only one university was included; and finally only students from one part of the country were included.</p>	<p>First the study used a small sample. Second, there were questions about the validity of self-report questionnaires and/or interviews. Third, the researcher used a convenience sample because they were easily accessible.</p>	<p>The limitations of the study were: it was limited to one institutional program, involved a small sample, and involved only African-American and Hispanic graduates.</p>	<p>The findings may not be generalizable to another group. The evidence indicates positive outcomes would occur but the findings only validate the level of effectiveness. The participants volunteered to participate so that the nature of the sample may have a positive relationship to the outcomes observed.</p>
<p>FUTURE RESEARCH</p>	<p>First, conduct study on ESSENCE beyond first year to determine long term effect on GPA and graduation rates. Second, evaluate individual program services to determine value of each. Third, add mentors to the program services and conduct a study as to their impact.</p>	<p>Future studies should include more students, segmented by their diverse background, from more than one institution, and from more than one type of Student Support Service program.</p>	<p>No issues for further investigation were noted in the project.</p>	<p>Future research could include focusing on EOP programs at various colleges; include more diverse populations; include currently enrolled EOP students; and examine students of predominately white institutions from EOP programs.</p>	<p>Can intervening variables explain observed outcomes? Do all sub samples experience equally positive effects? Can larger student populations adapt this program's model components to their needs? Which components of model generate the most effective results and why?</p>

<p>SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY</p>	<p>Findings improve current research by comparing first year at-risk student cohort with other students over time. The results support developing first year programs and research about specific qualities of such programs.</p> <p>Research findings reflect what features of ESSENCE can be replicated to similar at-risk programs that produce similar outcomes, and how to deliver them effectively.</p>	<p>The Appalachian study is significant because the growing numbers of current and future students attending institutions throughout the United States will possess characteristics of at-risk students. Institutional support services will need to be build to support those needs if the institution expects this group to persist to graduation.</p>	<p>The variables studied had a significant effect on student achievement and retention of at-risk students. . Second, the college could use these finding to make better admission decisions and make immediate improvements to developmental and/or remedial classes designed for at-risk students.</p>	<p>Significant because it was the first study to evaluate this thirty plus year EOP program and solicited information from graduated students who participated in the EOP program. The results could be used to provide state and federal funding sources information to sustain continuance funding.</p>	<p>The results substantiate the positive value of the program as they relate to student retention and academic progress of at-risk students. This substantiation continues to provide positive evidence to support continued federal and institutional financial support.</p>
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2. STUDIES RELATED TO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AT RISK STUDENTS		
TITLE / HEADING	<i>The Impact of Student Support Services Programs on Academic Success And Retention for At-risk Students.</i>	<i>The Effect of Specialized Orientation Programs on High-Risk Students in a South Central Texas Community College Vocational Nursing program.</i>
RESEARCH PROBLEM OR ISSUE INVESTIGATED	To determine if there is a significant difference between characteristics of students who receive at-risk support services and students who do not receive the same services. Focus of interest is the program's relationship to GPAs, retention and graduation rates.	A more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the effects of specialized orientation programs. Administrators and faculty in higher education can assist high-risk students to academic achievement.
RESEARCH QUESTION(S) OR OBJECTIVE	<p>There will be no statistically significant differences in the retention rates between freshmen and sophomores enrolled in at-risk Student Support Services and to freshmen who do not receive those services.</p> <p>There will be no statistically significant differences in the grade point averages of freshmen and sophomores enrolled in Student Support Services compared to freshman who do not receive those services.</p>	Did specialized orientation programs with a Mathematical Skills Curriculum and a Success Skills Curriculum make a difference in student attrition, GPA, and semester hours successfully completed for high-risk, first semester, vocational nursing students in a south central Texas community college?
METHODOLOGY	A quantitative research method was used to discover causes and effects of GPA averages and retention rates of at-risk students by comparing the same variables with a control group of non-at-risk students. A causal comparative design. The Fisher Exact Test was the chosen methodology.	Study was a posttest-only control group that randomly assigned research subjects to one of four treatment groups. Three active treatment groups and one passive control group. Time design was held constant for all groups, a total of 14 hours (seven hours of instruction and seven hours of treatment). At the end of the first semester, data was collected on each of the groups using information obtained from the master data bank of the registrar's office. Data analysis used SPSS 9.X package. Data used was attrition rate between semesters, mean GPA for the first semester for each group, and the mean of the semester hours successfully completed for each group during the first semester of study.
APPROACH TO SAMPLING	45 freshmen and 45 sophomores were selected for both the control and experimental groups. Computerized records maintained by the institution served as the sampling frame. Samples were matched on ACT scores, high school GPA, and first generation and low income classifications.	Students selected from all incoming students using the criteria for high-risk students. The researcher utilized the entire population of 92 high-risk students in the incoming spring class of 100 vocational nursing students.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS	Results reflected no statistically significance differences between students who participated versus students who didn't participate. GPAs for both freshmen and sophomores inside the program were higher than students who were not in the program. Results appeared to show a meaningful difference in the retention rate of students receiving the services compared to those who did not.	Results of research question one suggested that the specialized orientation program made a significant difference in decreasing attrition for students. Results of research question two indicated the group means were essentially the same so the analysis failed to reject the null hypothesis. For research question three, the null hypothesis was again rejected based on the data analysis.
LIMITATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS	The study was limited to participants of school year fall 2000-2001. All enrolled students did not participate in the study.	The findings may not be generalizable to other community colleges. There may be transferability limited to other institutions with similar histories and student demographics.
FUTURE RESEARCH	Duplicate this study in other colleges and universities of differing sizes and geographical locations. An additional study should be conducted at this university to consider other variables between the two groups.	Researchers should replicate this study in other community colleges in and outside of Texas; replicate this study in other types of degree programs and course majors.
SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY	It provided the institution with new findings of the value of the program services and how these services are making a positive difference in GPA and retention which can be used to continue support funding.	Little research has been conducted on specialized orientation interventions for high-risk nursing students in a community college. Results of study provided practitioners with a better understanding of how to structure support services for at-risk students transitioning to college.

3. Studies Related to Student Engagement for At-risk Students			
TITLE / HEADING	<i>Encouraging High-Risk Student Participation in Tutoring and Supplemental Instruction.</i>	<i>Investigating Relationships Between Participation in the Student Support Service Program, Grade Point Average, and the Persistence of Freshman Program Participants.</i>	<i>Academic Course Engagement During One Semester Forecasts College Success: Engaged Students are More Likely to Earn a Degree, do it Faster, and do it Better.</i>
RESEARCH PROBLEM OR ISSUE INVESTIGATED	Study investigated effect of high risk students' use of self-monitoring strategies and instructors' use of verbal prompts on high-risk students participating in tutoring and supplemental instruction and on their academic achievement.	Issue studied was the relationship between the grade point average, rate of persistence, and participation in the Student Support Services program (SSSP) for at-risk students.	Study focused on student engagement defined as course involvement and effort directed toward specific course components: attending lectures, completing reading assignments that relate to success in enrolled courses.
RESEARCH QUESTION(S) OR OBJECTIVE	Objectives of this study was two-fold: to determine if students' use of self-monitoring (SM) strategies and instructors use of verbal prompts would increase high-risk students' attendance in tutoring and SI; second, to determine whether students' use of SM strategies would increase high-risk students' academic achievement.	<p>What is the demographic profile of the Penn State freshmen who selected to participate in the SSSP?</p> <p>What differences exist between the predicted grade point average (PGPA) and the actual grade point average (AGPA) for SSSP participants and SSSP non-participants after one year of enrollment?</p> <p>Is there a statistically significant difference between SSSP participants and non-participants for PGPA \neq AGPA?</p> <p>What is the difference in the rate of persistence of the SSSP participants compared to SSSP non-participants after one year?</p> <p>Of the variables tested, which are statistically significant in their relationship to the actual grade point average of the SSSP participants?</p>	Objective of this study was to assess the relationship of academic course engagement related to subsequent college success over a five to six year period.

METHODOLOGY	Researcher used a post-test only control group design that involved randomly assigning subjects to experimental and control groups, administering treatments to experimental groups and administering the post-test to both groups. Students were randomly assigned to one of four groups. Three groups received different combinations of the two treatment variables and one received no treatment.	Study data was obtained from the Pennsylvania State University, Office of Student Aid. Data included five variables: grade point average, first generation college student, family income, gender, and race. The study used descriptive data analysis, t-test, Chi-square, and a regression model.	Research was survey questionnaires that were administered following the completion of four course examinations.
APPROACH TO SAMPLING	Sample was 103 conditionally admitted contract students who met the admit qualifications and were granted status based on consideration of high school courses taken and grades earned, academic rigor of the senior year experience, specific rank in class, and low English and math scores on the SAT test.	Study used 50 randomly selected SSSP participants and 56 randomly selected SSSP eligible non-participants	258 students originally enrolled in an undergraduate psychology course with 225 students remaining that participated in the study. Some students withdrew and others were not included because of not meeting the selection criteria.
SUMMARY OF RESULTS	Treatments failed to encourage greater attendance in SI or tutoring. Although SM strategies and verbal prompts produced behavior change with students and adults in a number of areas (cigarette smoking, energy conservation, and college studying), methods proved ineffective for study subjects.	Findings indicated that at-risk students in the SSSP were making greater gains in actual GPA than their SSSP eligible counterparts. A significant finding was that students who participate are persisting at a rate equal to that of students who are not enrolled in the university labeled at-risk.	Study concluded that academically engaged students were indeed more likely to attain a degree and do it faster. Highly academically engaged students were 1.5 times more likely to graduate and required approximately one semester less to do so.
LIMITATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS	Study sample represented a limited range of student performance as evidenced by the limited variables of high school ranking, SAT scores, and conditional admission status.	Study does not measure how much the SSSP participants actually used the SSSP services due to the unavailability of that particular data.	Participant samples were not narrow or homogeneous; students came from academic curriculums (arts and sciences, general studies, professional schools. Findings could be generalized; not for a specific group. Study was "absence of data" on the possible outcomes of the students who left the university. Missing data may underestimate the overall degree attainment and these results may not fully generalize to college students in general.

<p>FUTURE RESEARCH</p>	<p>Additional research should be conducted on high risk students' motivation, self-discipline, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and feelings of over-confidence to describe the complexity of their behavior. Additional research should also be conducted on what variables would work to get high risk students to voluntarily engage in the use of support services. Further research should be conducted on which variable get the best return for resources spent since all institutions face limited financial budgets. Finally, additional research should be conducted on how to require mandatory use of support services as part of maintaining enrollment in the institution.</p>	<p>A more in-depth study needs to be conducted to realize the full-impact of the SSSP has on the rate of persistence for participants. Future research should include the level and type of support service each participant engages in as well. Finally, a study using longitudinal data tracking a cohort from time of entry for 4-6 years would provide much greater insight as to the programs overall value.</p>	<p>None were provided.</p>
<p>SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY</p>	<p>The researcher felt the importance of this study was that high-risk students need support services mandated with students being held accountable by contract.</p>	<p>The significance of the study is that it provides some sense of value for the institutional and governmental funding that is spent. The findings can also be used to expand future research using other variables and data to better determine what services are of more value per dollar spent.</p>	<p>The findings of the study underscore the consistent predictive character of academic course engagement in forecasting college success measured in several ways. Although college success to some degree relates to previously acquired skills and academic ability, such as those measured by college admission examination scores, what students do in college and the degree to which they become involved also impacts success. The results of this study support this engagement perspective and demonstrate that students become active and effective causal agents who determine their college outcomes and can experience a degree of success not captured by measures of previous success or measures of academic potential. College success is then somewhat contingent upon what students ultimately do.</p>

4. Studies Related to At-risk Students' Challenges Upon Entering Higher Education			
TITLE / HEADING	<i>Coping With Conflict: Self-Authorship, Coping and Adaptation to College in First Year, High-Risk Students.</i>	<i>Comparing the Determinants of Persistence for First-Generation and Continuing-Generation Students</i>	<i>The Gap Between Educational Aspirations and Attainment for First-Generation College Students and the Role of Parental Involvement.</i>
RESEARCH PROBLEM OR ISSUE INVESTIGATED	To solicit comments from high-risk students related to how they have adapted to and coped with these challenges in their first year upon entering higher education.	Persistence of first-generation students is particularly challenging, both academically and culturally (Choy, 2001). Few studies had been conducted on first-to-second year persistence of first generation college students at four-year institutions, and very few studies have provided opportunities to explore possible differences in how various factors affect the persistence of first-generation and continuing education students. This study could lead to targeted programs and policies to promote the success of first generation college students.	To use longitudinal data to determine if parental involvement had a significant influence on the educational aspirations of first-generation college students as compared to the educational aspirations of non-first generation college students.
RESEARCH QUESTION(S) OR OBJECTIVE	To investigate coping patterns of entering high-risk college students and how their orientation is related to their coping strategies and ultimate degree of adaptation to their college environment.	What are the determinants of first-to-second year persistence for first generation and continuing-generation students who begin at four-year institutions?	(1) Does parental involvement influence the educational aspirations of first-generation students as compared to non-first-generation students? (2) Do the educational aspirations of first-generation students differ from their actual educational attainment? (3) Is there a difference in educational attainment for first-generation students by gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status?
METHODOLOGY	An exploratory qualitative study of first-year, high-risk college students. Grounded theory was employed because it allowed for investigation into participants individual stories as well as shared patterns in self-authorship, coping, and adaptation. Each student participated in two one-hour interviews. The interviews focused on the researcher presenting the same questions to each participant to determine what type of	To examine the relationships between the variables, logistic regression methods were used. Statistical analysis was conducted using SAS-PC version 8 and AM Statistical Software Beta version 0.06.00.	The research methodology was the student survey data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study distributed by the Nation Center for Education, a division of the U.S. Department of Education. The survey consisted of over 6,000 variables and included surveys for students, teachers, parents, and school administrators in a series of data collection waves. Surveys were administered in 1988,

	experiences the student had prior to college and how the student was using these experiences to cope with their transition to higher education.		1990, 1992, 1994 and 2000 with a clustered, stratified national probability sample of 24, 599 students from across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Certain variables from the results of these surveys were used in this research.
APPROACH TO SAMPLING	Participants were recruited from support programs (Act 101 type) designed to help high-risk students transition to university life at a large, public Midwestern university. The 27 participants were all volunteers and first-year students.	Data from a national sample - Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey - BPS: 96/01 – was used to study persistence behaviors of first generation and continuing-generation students separately. Survey was designed by the National Center for Education Statistics specifically to collect data related to persistence in and completion of post-secondary education programs and the effects of post-secondary education on individuals. With an initial population of over 10,000 beginning post-secondary students, the study examined the results of 1,167 first generation students and 3,017 continuing generation students.	1,879 students with first-generation status working toward degrees at four- and two-year colleges or universities were chosen. To provide a comparison group sample size of students who had at least one parent who earned a bachelor degree was selected randomly from the 2000 survey. Only participants who responded to all survey waves were selected.
SUMMARY OF RESULTS	Making the decision to enter college was an important crossroads. These students were facing overwhelming challenges that called into question their internal foundations. These students struggled with who they are, where they came from, and who they could be. In the end, they used past experiences, college support programs similar to Act 101, and other survival techniques to transition to higher education. The study findings further support that high-risk students may not be able to handle college coursework, individual interactions with these students, from at-risk support service providers,	Findings for first-generation students supports the contention that first-generation students are oppressed based on race, class, and gender suggesting that a student of race (other than white), low income, and female, persistence becomes more problematic. Lower income levels result in lower persistence rates suggesting that lower-income, first-generation students are not only disadvantaged by their parents' lack of experience with and information about college, but also by other social and economic characteristics that constrain their educational opportunities. Students will persist further if attending a larger university,	Results for non-first-generation students showed that parental involvement was clearly the best predictor. For first-generation students, results show that parental involvement was not the main predictor but rather student's perceptions of the importance of good grades was slightly more important. For both groups, parental involvement was strong and therefore, this finding supports prior research that parental involvement is a viable predictor of postsecondary aspirations. Although parental involvement emerged as a sound predictor, much of the variance was

	<p>should seek to empower them to make decisions to be successful in the face of the challenges they bring to college. Finally, it's not the individual support services that will make a significant difference but rather the entire package, working on the whole person simultaneously, that will make the greatest impact on the retention of these students.</p>	<p>suggesting that larger institutions have more resources to support the needs of this student. The two groups make choices based on different beliefs thereby differentiating what students see and value about college.</p> <p>The findings for both groups concluded that there was a positive relationship of persistence to academic performance suggesting the higher the GPA, the more likely the student will persist. The study concluded students with high educational aspirations were more likely to persist than others. The more work-study aid a student received, the more likely they were to persist suggesting that this aid supports both monetary needs and social contact. Both groups satisfaction with social lives had a positive correlation to persist.</p>	<p>unexplained. The researcher felt these gaps in variance could be attributed to several factors. First, the manner in which the parental involvement was operationalized many not have been inclusive enough of other factors that make a difference in student aspirations. Second, the study results may have shown that the importance of student perceptions about academics outweighs any lack or abundance of parental involvement.</p>
<p>LIMITATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS</p>	<p>The researcher identifies six limitations in this study. First, the participants came from one predominantly white, Midwestern university. Second, they lacked diversity and cultural background. Third, they came from a university-sponsored support services program for high-risk students. Fourth, the timing of the interviews, their first semester of college, may have affected the findings. Sixth, this study failed to explicitly address the role of institutional racism in these students' development in college.</p>	<p>The researcher presented three limitations. First, the study included only four-year institutions. Second, this study did not take into account students' major field of study which could have impacted the results of the variables studied. Third, no financial variable was used which could have further impacted the conclusions of the first-generation student since published research suggests the negative impact of poverty level students on persistence in any institution of higher education.</p>	<p>(1) All first-generation students included in the sample were determined by parents' education. Students who identified as first-generation may have had an older sibling who already experienced college and provided cultural and social capital to their sisters or brothers. (2) Races of people who were sampled were not proportional to each other's sample size and generalization would be impossible since some sample sizes were very small. (3) Although each sample size in number were equal for first and non-first generation students, the samples were not balance by geography or gender.</p>

<p>FUTURE RESEARCH</p>	<p>Should include more than one institution, a mix of different students representing different cultural backgrounds, more variables to determine which services have the greatest impact, and a longitudinal study following a cohort from entry to four or five years later.</p>	<p>First, other variables related to first generation students who possess similar attributes as at-risk students should be studied. Second, other types and sizes of institutions should be studied to compare results and further develop common themes.</p>	<p>(1) Future studies should consider combining the variables of parental involvement and good grades since individually, they accounted for 12.4% of the variance. (2) Future studies should include school-based parental involvement measures which would assess parent behaviors. (3) Researchers should expand students' perceptions of good grades variable to include actual grades and academic performance. (4) Interactions of gender and race as predictors of academic success should be explored.</p>
<p>SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY</p>	<p>Multiple implications for practice. Although classroom experiences made the participants aware of skills or knowledge they did not have, many participants were unwilling to give up or believe they lacked the ability to be successful. It seems important to both advising and instruction situations to build on students' recognition of the gaps in their knowledge and their resilience in the face of this recognition. This study also has important implications for the construction and reformation of support programs designed to help high-risk students be successful in college. These students are overwhelmed by expectations upon entering college and have no real understanding of what it will take to succeed. They need constant guidance and support as well as academic skill development to give them a reasonable chance to persist.</p>	<p>The significance of this study was to further enhance the understanding of persistence of first-generation students in four year institutions. It also provided other researchers with other valuable topics to research. Finally, it provided a different perspective between the groups which will allow for different types of support services for each group rather than one size fits all.</p>	<p>Using longitudinal data, this study has assisted practitioners in identifying and defining the holistic needs of first-generation college students throughout their transitions, especially since past studies have focused more on the development of aspirations rather than on the achievement of aspirations. This study examined whether family influences are crucial in first-generation students decision-making. Understanding the pre-college and college educational aspirations of first-generation students in the context of family involvement is important for creating success opportunities before they begin to think about college and during the college experience. This study aided practitioners in developing strategies for working with at-risk students being retained in colleges and universities.</p>

APPENDIX E

Student Focus Group Questions.

1. *The core services of the Act 101 Program are counseling, tutoring, remediation, and cultural activities. Which one(s) are most important to you and why?*
2. What other services have you been engaged in or feel would be beneficial to your Act 101 experience that are not referred to in question #1?
3. *What type of personal and/or academic challenges did you face when you first enrolled in college that you would feel comfortable in sharing with us today?*
4. What type of personal and/or academic challenges do you now face since you have been enrolled in college that you would feel comfortable with sharing with us today?
5. Have any of the students in this focus group ever attended the Statewide Leadership Conference? If so, what are your thoughts about your experience?
6. Have any students in this focus group provided and/or received tutoring or mentoring services to or from any other Act 101 students? If so, what were your experiences/thoughts?
7. How has the Act 101 program assisted you with your college journey to date? Provide some examples.
8. In what cultural activities have you participated in and what value do you feel you received from engaging in them?
9. *Some students in various Act 101 programs statewide have been reluctant to engage in Act 101 services, yet they are enrolled in the program. Can you provide any insight into why some students resist engaging somewhat or at all in the use of these services?*
10. Did any of the group members attend a summer program prior to entering into the first semester of college classes? If so, what value do you consider this summer participation brought to you in preparing you for your first college semester of work?
11. How do you define “being successful” in college and/or life? In what ways, if any has the Act 101 Program supported achieving this feeling of “being successful” to this point in your journey?

12. Are there any suggestions/comments you want to provide to me that I didn't provide a question or opportunity for you to discuss that you believe would add value to the Act 101 Program?

Counselor Focus Group Questions.

1. What types of counseling services does your Act 101 program offer Act 101 students?
2. *What services, from the ones you offer, does the Act 101 students need the most, in your opinion and why do you think so?*
3. How does Act 101 get services they need that your Act 101 program doesn't offer?
4. What type of needs does the Act 101 student present needing and what do you see as the probable systematic cause?
5. *Do you have students who resist engagement of counseling services and if so, what do you think are potential root causes?*
6. What techniques do you use to engage students in the use of counseling services? Which ones are most effective and why?
7. What other thoughts or concerns do you want to share with me today that you believe I need to know that should be considered in the upcoming change effort or for any other use?

Tutor Focus Group Questions.

1. What subjects do you provide tutoring services to Act 101 Students?
2. *What program services do Act 101 students seem to need the most?*
3. Are there any subjects that students have needed that were not available? If so, what subjects?
4. *Have you incurred any difficulty in getting Act 101 students engaged in program services and if so, why do you think they refuse services?.*

5. What type of tutoring delivery, in your opinion, does the Act 101 student prefer?
6. What other thoughts would you like to share with me that the questions above have not addressed, either partially or completely, that would be of benefit for me to know for the betterment of the Act 101 Program?

Note: The italicized questions were used to gather the data for this study. The other questions were asked for future research.

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Types and Number of Institutions Compared to Students, Counselors/Advisors, and
Tutors

Types and Number of Institutions Compared to Students, Counselors/Advisors, and Tutors				
Institution Type	Number of Institutions	Students	Counselors/Advisors	Tutors
Community Colleges (CC)	8	79	22	44
Public Four-Year Institutions (PU4)	9	111	28	48
Private Four-Year Institutions (PR4)	15	161	38	69
Totals	32	351	88	161

APPENDIX G.

Research Question 1				
What type of personal and / or academic challenges did you face when you first enrolled in college?				
Personal Challenge				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	Other Comments Related to Variables
Scared of Many Loans	X	X	X	Scared of Many Loans = Already Poor
Overwhelmed	X	X	X	Overwhelmed = disoriented = lost = cried = intimidated = pure terror
Scared to Death	X	X	X	Scared to death= nervous = not comfortable = terrified = afraid
Great Fear of Failure	X	X	X	Great Fear of Failure = Lack of confidence
Feeling all alone - no family/friends	X	X	X	Feeling all alone - no family/friends = Feeling alone & I want to go home
Proud I got this far	X	X	X	Proud I got this far = Proud of acceptance to college
Excited	X	X	X	Excited = anxious to get started
Lost; didn't know where I was going	X	X	X	
Ready to get started	X	X	X	
Felt unprepared	X	X	X	
First generation - No family support	X	X	X	
Transition from high school to college	X	X	X	
Feeling all alone - no family/friends	X	X	X	
Shy - very quiet - Fear of meeting new people	X	X	X	
So many new people = people looked strange	X	X	X	
Confident to make it	X	X		Confident to make it = Can do whatever I want to do

<i>Cultural intimidation</i>	X	X		Cultural Intimidation = Foreign student - really lost
<i>Will I fit?</i>		X	X	
<i>Am I doing the right thing?</i>		X	X	
<i>How did I get myself into this?</i>	X		X	How did I get into this? = Felt like running back home
<i>Can't find classroom</i>	X		X	
<i>High Family Expectation</i>	X		X	
<i>Am I too old for this stuff?</i>	X			Am I too old for this stuff? - what is a student my age doing here?
<i>No time for relationships</i>	X			No time for relationships = Personal relationships get more complicated
<i>Feeling unsuccessful</i>	X			
<i>Hard to balance work, family & school</i>	X			
<i>School means less work and less money</i>	X			
<i>Not sure what I want from college & life</i>	X			
<i>Responsible - it's up to me</i>	X			
<i>Raising two children at my age; son and daughter-in-law in jail</i>	X			
<i>Serious business now</i>	X			
<i>Size of campus - WOW!</i>		X		Size of campus -WOW = "So many people" = Big Place
<i>New independence</i>		X		New independence = finally free
<i>Personal accountability</i>		X		
<i>Now I am an adult</i>		X		
<i>Ran out of orientation and went home</i>		X		
<i>My friends told me I can't do it. I am going to college and moving forward</i>		X		
<i>Drove home - Quit & went back 1 year later</i>			X	
<i>Hopeful</i>			X	
<i>Will I be motivated to go the distance</i>			X	
<i>On campus 30 days too early</i>			X	
<i>Fresh Start</i>			X	
<i>Anxiety attack = awe struck</i>			X	

Research Question 1				
Academic Challenge				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	
Can I do the academic work required in college?	X	X	X	
I'm definitely going to need help	X	X	X	
What will I ultimately major in?	X	X	X	
ESL	X	X	X	
I'm scared of math, English and writing	X	X	X	
<i>Poor academic skills to survive - HELP!</i>	X	X		
<i>High School work load lighter than college</i>	X	X		
<i>Do I belong here?</i>		X	X	
I don't want to fail anymore!	X			
Not in a classroom for 22 years	X			
I'm worried about getting a good jump start - GPA	X			
From IEP to regular class room	X			
Learning disability	X			
Being offered admission is my greatest accomplishment		X		
Hope I'm not on probation in the first semester		X		
Disgrace to family if I flunk out		X		
Intellectually challenged			X	
Time to break bad habits			X	

Research Question 2				
Which services (counseling/advising, tutoring, and remediation) being offered by all Act 101 programs statewide are most important to you?				
(Q1 - Appendix 1) - Students				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	
Counseling	X	X	X	
Tutoring	X	X	X	
Remediation	X	X		

Research Question 2				
Which services (counseling/advising, tutoring, and remediation) being offered by all Act 101 programs statewide are most important to the student?				
(Q2 - Appendix 2) - Counselors				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	Other Comments Related to Variables
Academic Counseling	X	X	X	
Financial Counseling	X	X	X	Financial Counseling = financial aid, loans, and pay bills
Personal Counseling	X	X	X	Personal counseling = relationship building skills, juggling obligations, crisis, children, roommates, emotional support, shoulder to cry on, self esteem, lack of confidence, & magical thinking
Career Counseling	X	X	X	Career counseling = establish or change major & internships
Behavioral Counseling	X			
Transfer Counseling	X			
Psychiatric Support		X		

Research Question 2				
Which services (counseling/advising, tutoring, and remediation) being offered by all Act 101 programs statewide are most important to the student?				
Tutors				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	Other Comments Related to Variables
Hard Sciences	X	X	X	Hard Sciences = Chemistry, Biology
Social Science	X	X	X	Social Sciences = Psychology & Sociology
Math	X	X	X	
English / Writing	X	X	X	
Accounting	X	X	X	
Reading	X	X	X	
Study Skills	X	X		
Foreign Language		X	X	
IT	X			

Research Question 3				
Why have some students in various statewide Act 101 programs been reluctant to engage in the use of Act 101 services? - Students				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	Other Comments Related to Variables
Not sure it's for me	X	X	X	Not sure it's for me = Not willing to admit I need services
No time	X	X	X	No time = elderly care = hard to juggle family, friends, work and school= too much on plate = time constraints = better things to do = Juggling = children responsibility = 3 jobs
Pride	X	X	X	Pride = I didn't want others to know I was in such a program = Admitting I need help = feeling inferior = stubborn = proud
Lack of maturity	X	X	X	Lack of maturity = insecure = non-committal
Afraid to admit to themselves they need help	X	X	X	Afraid = fear = scared
Too independent to ask for help	X	X	X	Too independent to ask for help = too structured
Lazy	X	X	X	Lazy = no motivation = procrastination = don't care enough
Embarrassment	X	X	X	
Not aware of all program services	X	X	X	
Didn't understand real value	X	X	X	
I felt I needed to do it on my own	X	X	X	
Counseling means there is something wrong with me	X	X	X	
Single you out as special or deficient	X	X	X	
Disappointment from peer group	X	X	X	
Would be treated differently by professors	X	X	X	
Fear of counselors hidden agenda	X	X	X	
Not aware of what it takes to be successful	X	X	X	

Qualifying means poor and dumb	X	X	X	
<i>Shy - not a social person - felt alone</i>		X	X	shy = anti-social = back of class type person
<i>Not ready for anything - just existing</i>		X	X	
<i>Don't want to be required</i>	X		X	Don't want to be required = Mandatory is a turn-off = No go if made to do it - Make me & I won't
Negative peer comments	X			Negative peer comments = special education = social stigma = labeled
Felt stupid because I qualified for program	X			Felt stupid because I qualified for the job = deficit = stupid = charity case
View Act 101 as disability program	X			
Easier to work at home with kids	X			
Didn't engage in services until I was failing	X			
Always got poor grades so poor grades is normal	X			
Didn't know I qualified		X		
Dropped out of everything I start - never stay		X		
Low self-esteem		X		
My friends told me it was a waste of time - I can do it		X		
Crisis first then help			X	
Services not available when needed			X	
Thought I was still in high school and what I did was enough			X	
Bad attitude - chip on my shoulder			X	
Wanted to only be part of main stream not special group			X	
Social acceptability at stake			X	
Transportation Issues			X	
Uncomfortable asking for help			X	
Mandatory is a turnoff				

Research Question 3				
Why have some students in various statewide Act 101 programs been reluctant to engage in the use of Act 101 services? – Counselors				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	Other Comments Related to Variables
Time constraints	X	X	X	Time constraints = lack of time = significant family obligations = too busy = too much juggling = caring for elderly parents and/or grand parents
Pride	X	X	X	Pride = labeled = shame = false pride = embarrassed = ego
Reality check	X	X	X	Reality check = false sense of security
Stigma	X	X	X	Stigma = negative label = Peer pressure = fear of being negatively viewed = program eligible = Tagged
Maturity	X	X	X	Maturity = Transition of thinking
Low self esteem	X	X	X	
Don't need until disaster strikes	X	X	X	
Don't understand real value of program services	X	X	X	
Never needed counseling before – why now?	X	X	X	
Managed my school work up to now – why do I need help?	X	X	X	
Not really aware of all program services	X	X	X	
Probable eligibility means being poor and stupid	X	X	X	
Independent – don't need anything or anyone	X	X	X	
Fear	X	X	X	
Wrong mindset = lethargic	X	X	X	
Poor high school grades so what's different?	X	X		Poor High school grades = poor experience from high school
Transportation issues	X	X		

High school mentality	X	X		
Embarrassment	X	X		
ESL student	X	X		
Not being considered a general population student		X	X	Not being a general population = treated less than others
Mandatory services is not acceptable		X	X	
Poor follow through with commitment		X	X	
Qualifying for services means special education	X		X	Qualifying for Services means special education = bad rap = poor and stupid = less than perfect
"Not cool" to need help	X		X	
Didn't believe college was harder than high school	X		X	
Accepting services means admitting short comings	X			Accepting services means admitting short comings = means special education = Negatively judged = IEP from past = too many support services from past = fresh start
Wrong mindset	X			
Trust issues		X		Trust issues = Not willing to discuss issues to others = personal disclosure
Don't fit in		X		
Tried help but it didn't make a difference		X		
Requested help late and help didn't really help		X		
Undiagnosed issues			X	Undiagnosed issues = Not needed = poor assessment skills
Don't want others to know I need help			X	Don't want others to know you need help = Help means you aren't perfect
Not healthy			X	
Help means being inferior			X	
Negative family perception			X	
Shy and reluctant to talk to counselor			X	

The way you were raised			X	
Medication issues			X	

Research Question 3				
What techniques do you use to engage students in the use of Act 101 services? Counselors				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	Other Comments Related to Variables
Students feeding students	X	X	X	Students feeding students = word of mouth
Use events to develop relationships	X	X	X	Use events to develop relationships = trust
Personal outreach efforts	X	X	X	Personal Outreach = recruitment efforts
Genuine interest in helping students	X	X	X	Genuine interest in helping students = caring = empathy = listen and understand issues = be sincere
Solve their problems and they come back	X	X	X	
Summer program / orientation	X	X	X	
Mentoring programs	X	X	X	
Broad service hours - make availability	X	X	X	
Constant encouragement	X	X		
Make them feel they belong	X	X		
Cultural events		X	X	
Mentors / Peer advisors		X	X	
Student contracts		X	X	
Tutoring sessions feeds counseling sessions		X	X	
Early registration		X	X	
Lending library		X	X	
Individual Student Plan		X	X	
Mandatory involvement = conditional admit		X	X	
Make services mandatory / required	X		X	

Counselor personality	X			Counselor personality = passion
Recognize students upon contact	X			
Counselor reputation	X			
Referrals	X			
Regularly scheduled advisement sessions		X		Regularly scheduled advisement sessions = Being available = being visible and approachable
Instructor encouragement		X		
Parental pressure for good grades			X	
Despair brings them to survive			X	
Tutoring and counseling labs			X	

Research Question 3				
Why have some students in various statewide Act 101 programs been reluctant to engage in the use of Act 101 services? - Tutors				
Variables	CC	PU4	PR4	Other Comments Related to Variables
Lazy	X	X	X	Lazy = lack of commitment = poor work ethic = Student will only do what syllabus says
Stigma related to services	X	X	X	Stigma related to services = Labeled
Feels stupid	X	X	X	Feels stupid = dumb
Procrastination	X	X	X	Procrastination = starts project too late - tutor can't perform magic
Not realistic to college requirements / expectations	X	X	X	Not realistic to college requirements / expectations = High school created false sense of accomplishment = Students too busy looking for short cuts = Poor high school curriculum
ESL	X	X	X	ESL = Stigmatism for foreign students
Lacks confidence	X	X	X	

Too hard to juggle between personal, family, school & work	X	X	X	
Don't need until the student is failing	X	X	X	
First generation - no family support	X	X	X	
Embarrassed	X	X	X	
Math & English labs on campus	X	X	X	
Pride	X	X	X	
Peer pressure / perceptions	X	X	X	
Poor study habits	X	X	X	
Special education label from high school	X	X	X	
Not all subjects have tutors available	X	X	X	
Poor relationships with others	X	X	X	
Not prepared - many excuses	X	X		
Prefers to be part of general population rather than Act 101		X	X	Prefers to be part of general population rather than Act 101 = "Old School" person who believes just work harder - forget Act 101
Immaturity		X	X	Immaturity = foolish to accept services
Arrogance		X	X	Arrogance = Floating with no direction
Negative comments about Act 101 Program from professors		X	X	
Professor don't show respect for peer tutors		X	X	
Wants to see if I can do it on my own		X	X	
Not held accountable	X		X	Not held accountable = without mandatory - no teeth
Fear of asking for help	X		X	
Tutors / student scheduling issues	X			Don't find value in services = Denial for need of services
Lacks academic skills	X			Lacks academic skills = lack of time management skills = can't juggle everything = poor planning
Pointless - it won't make a difference	X			
Preferred tutor availability	X			
Peer tutor not respected	X			

Mandatory service engagement	X			
Life is normally with many crisis'	X			
Too much optional ends up being no engagement	X			
Don't belong - too old	X			
Lacking skills from high school	X			
Independent - I can do it!	X			
First failure they give up - wants it to be easy	X			
Transportation issues	X			

VITA

William Joseph Augustine earned an Associate of Arts degree with a major in Business from Harrisburg Area Community College, Harrisburg, Pa. in 1976. In 1978, he earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree with a major in accounting from Penn State Harrisburg, Middletown, Pa. In 1992 he earned a Master of Business Administration degree with advanced studies in management from Kutztown University, Kutztown, Pa.

He currently is employed as the liaison for The School Leadership and Teacher Quality Department for the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. He is responsible for supporting the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership Program for senior K-12 Leadership staff. Prior to his current position, Augustine was the statewide Director of the Act 101 Program, a 36 year old program designed for at-risk students being serviced in 74 Pennsylvania institutions. Prior to that position, he was the co-director of the Malcolm Baldrige Quality program for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). This program was designed to provide leadership skills to junior and senior leaders employed in all PennDOT facilities.

He was also a national Baldrige examiner for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) from 2001 to 2003.

He has been an adjunct instructor for Wilson College, Penn State York, Duquesne University, and Harrisburg Area Community College teaching courses such as accounting, entrepreneurship, marketing, human resources, and management.

He is a honorably discharged veteran of the United States Air Force serving during the Vietnam War period working primarily at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base Medical Center, Fairborn, Ohio.

Augustine's full-time professional experience also includes owning and operating a retail store and property management operation as well as being employed for over twenty years in management positions in retail, financial management, public accounting, distribution, and wholesale businesses for various corporate America firms.

Augustine has contributed financially and personally to numerous charitable organizations over the past 30 years in the Harrisburg, Pa. area. The majority of his efforts have been connected to the Harrisburg CYO basketball league in both a parish and league capacity.

He also is an active member of the Elk's Lodge and the Hershey Italian Club.