

The Pennsylvania State University

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**EXPLORING ADULT BUSINESS STUDENTS' TRANSITION TO
COLLEGE THROUGH A FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR COURSE: AN
ACTION RESEARCH STUDY**

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the transitional experiences of adult business students during their return to higher education through an adapted first-year seminar course. This study addressed a gap in the literature of adult business students in the first-year seminar research and explored the importance of tailoring a first-year seminar course to adult student needs. The study participants were seven returning business students who enrolled in a special summer offering of the BSN101 Foundations of Business Administration course focused on designing a curriculum that is relevant to the adult student's needs. The study objectives were to understand the reasons for the students' return to college and to examine the participants' learning, adjustment to university life, and personal development through the course.

The findings from the study addressed four major themes. First, the primary reason adult students were returning to an undergraduate business program was for advancement in their careers. Second, the participants found that they were feeling fearful, mentioned their age, and were showing signs of low self-esteem and low self-efficacy about their ability to return to college. However, through the first-year seminar course, BSN101, the students began to feel more positively about their decision to return to college and also felt a sense of belonging with the other adult business students in the class. Third, the action research process allowed students to be actively engaged in the collaborative research project and gave them a sense of appreciation for each other's experiences, which assisted in students' learning, adjustment to university life, and personal development. Fourth, the students were having difficulty balancing life roles and often through the course mentioned times of conflict and how important support from family, employers, faculty, and administrators was in their coping with the added stress of

retuning to college. Primary recommendations are that universities should pay attention to the needs of adult students, such as extending hours for administrative offices, having an adult student advocate, introducing new students to key administrative personnel, and taking into consideration their lived experience by tailoring the first-year orientation program. This study contributes to the fields of higher education and adult education by sharing the importance of engaging students in faculty-student activities and paying attention to the participants who voiced changes to be made to universal, traditionally designed first-year seminar programs.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of an action research study focused on the transitional experiences of adult business students during their return to higher education through an adapted first-year seminar course. Chapter One includes the background to the problem, a purpose statement, guiding research questions, an overview of developmental theory (from a humanistic prospective) as the theoretical framework supporting the study, and an explanation of the assumptions and limitations of the study.

Background of the Study

Over the past few years universities have experienced an increase in enrollments of nontraditional students, also referred to as adult students or adult learners (see for example, Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Graham, Donaldson, Kasworm, & Dirkx, 2000; Kasworm, 1990, 1993, 2003a, 2005). Typically, nontraditional students are defined as 24 years of age or older and returning to school after a significant gap in their education. The traditional student is defined as under the age of 24 and attending college for the first time, seeking their undergraduate degree (Kinsella, 1998). The number of adult students has grown rapidly during the last decade (Chao & Good, 2004). Adult students make up more than 40% of the total U.S. undergraduate population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005). This entry of adult students is attributed to our global economy, competitive job market and its demands for technology, professional development, more women in the workforce, higher professional standards and certifications, and second career retirees (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Due to the increase of adult students, colleges and universities need to consider redesigning programs and services to meet the needs of these students.

Various studies have been completed on the needs of adult learners. One assessment of adult learners at a 4-year, mid-sized University (Rollins, Enderlein, & Payne, 2000) found that students felt there were barriers to enter college and requested more flexible class schedules (i.e., evening and weekend classes), along with extended hours of administration offices. Additional requests of adult students include extended library hours, assistance with financial aid, more parking, and a nontraditional student lounge (Kinsella, 1998). They would also like to have stress management and study skill programs, emotional support groups (counseling services), and financial planning (Frederick, 1997), and most requested the acknowledgement of their life experiences in the classroom (Kasworm, 1993a). Furthermore, students were found to be goal-oriented and were motivated by the relevancy of the coursework to their current position or future goals upon graduation (Graham, et al., 2000).

Scholars in the field of adult education (Brookfield, 1999; Cranton, 2006) suggest that in order to bridge the differences between the traditional and nontraditional student, class time should be used to express differences through dialogue. This can occur by having students discuss their interest in the class, opinions on working together, sharing life experiences and cultural backgrounds. Brookfield and Preskill's (2005) suggest using classroom discussion as a way of teaching provides an insightful approach of using the foundations of adult education to improve teaching in higher education. Brookfield and Preskill recommend having respect for a student's individuality and agree that learning occurs through classroom discussion and reflection. They encourage educators to critically reflect on their pedagogical assumptions and beliefs and consider adopting a student-centered approach in higher education to enhance student development and learning. Additionally, Cranton gives insight to how educators can empower

adult students to feel at ease in the classroom setting. She encourages educators to stimulate dialogue from different perspectives and recommends reducing power dynamics by, for example, not standing in front of the room and instead sitting with the group of students or asking students to use the educator's first name, if the student feels comfortable with this.

Adult students have concerns that are different from traditional students not only in the classroom, but also outside of the educational setting. At Texas A&M International University, 301 adult students were surveyed to determine what causes stress outside the classroom (Coppock, 1998). Along with students' attending full-time classes, the survey indicated that 64% of them were working full-time or part-time to support a family with an income lower than \$30,000, and 29% had school-aged children. Most notably, maintaining a proper life balance was a struggle, as 79% stated they did not take care of themselves by eating properly or exercising regularly. These students expressed difficulty in balancing their responsibilities of school, work, and family. The data from this study indicated a need for expanded services in health education and counseling for these students.

Findings from Stetson University in Florida, which surveyed adult students, showed the importance of supportive services to assist adult students on the campus (Frederick, 1997). These students indicated the following needs: a commuter lounge, social activities that would make them feel a part of college life, study groups, stress management classes, financial planning, study skills instruction, and emotional support groups (Frederick). One program that has been implemented to assist students in dealing with many of these issues at many colleges and universities across the country is the first-year seminar, or orientation course, to aid adult learners and traditional students in adjustment, development, and success.

The History and Role of First-Year Seminars

Researchers in the area of student development (Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005) along with retention theorists (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993) have found positive correlations between student involvement and student learning. Data from the second National Survey of First-Year Academic Practices indicated that 94% of United States higher education institutions offer a version of the first-year seminar (Barefoot, 1992). The content of these seminar courses vary; however, all appear to have the theme of helping the student make the transition to college and fostering student development (Anderson, Gardner, & Kuh, 2006). Many schools list that the primary function of the seminar is to assist new students with their academic and social development in order for these students to make a successful transition into college. Many varieties of the first-year seminar are offered with respect to credit hours and content. Some colleges design their introductory first-year classes to be an extension of orientation, while others are conducted for basic study skills or discipline-related material. Unfortunately, most colleges have one program for all first-year traditional students and do not take into account the life experiences of the adult students and their individual needs for the course.

The purpose of successful first-year seminars is to assist students with the transition to college by acclimating them to the institution. Other goals of the orientation course are to prepare students for the demands of a specific academic discipline, increase students' academic skills, and ultimately to aid in the retention of students (Upcraft et al., 2005). In addition, The Policy Center of the First Year of College suggests additional goals for institutions offering first-year seminar courses, such as the ability for the student to be able to self-manage, develop

personal relationships, strengthen academic skills, and participate in active learning opportunities (Swing, 2001).

A large majority of the first-year seminars are optional, one-credit classes for students and are taught in smaller class sizes of 18-25 students (Upcraft et al., 2005). Other seminars are more than one-credit and are required by the college and therefore have higher enrollments in each class section. The seminars are usually taught by academic advisors, student affairs professionals, or faculty. Many seminars are an extension of student orientation, while others are designed to assist students with basic study skills (e.g. time management), and some schools link the seminar to a specific discipline (Barefoot, 1992; Upcraft et al.). Frequently, the content includes career exploration, maintaining interpersonal relationships, identity development, health and wellness to manage stress, developing responsibility, understanding diversity and multi-cultural awareness, academic advising, writing, reasoning, and developing critical thinking skills (Swing, 2001; Upcraft et al.). More infrequently, a student's faith and spiritual dimension were mentioned as additional topics discussed (Upcraft et al.).

Problem Statement

The number of adult students who have enrolled in postsecondary education has dramatically increased in the past 35 years, creating a challenge for higher education. The problem is that first-year seminar courses are designed with the traditional aged student in mind and do not always meet the needs of the adult student (Brungard, 2008). Many of these adult students are returning to school because of transitional experiences (Kinsella, 1998). In addition, adults have more diverse life experiences than the traditional student and for that reason have different developmental and practical needs. An adapted first-year student experience is needed so that these programs are inclusive of the adult learner.

Purpose of the Research

Since many institutions design their curriculum based upon a student who has just graduated from high school (typically age 18-20), a new approach was needed to account for adult business students' experiences to aid in their transition to higher education. The purpose of this action research study was to explore the transitional experiences of adult business students during their return to higher education through an adapted first-year seminar course. The following research questions guided this study.

Guiding Research Questions

Building upon the purpose of the research, the following two questions guided the study:

1. How can we best meet the needs of adult business students?
 - 1a. What are the reasons for the adult business student deciding to attend or return to an undergraduate program?
 - 1b. What is the relationship between personal development and adjustment for adult returning business students as they complete a first-year seminar course?
2. How do adult business students experience university life, their identities, and work as they return to an undergraduate business school?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that informed this study was adult developmental theory. A facet of transformational learning theory as it relates to the literature of adult learning theory and adult development will also be addressed, because many students who return to college experience a life transition. These life transitions are often the catalyst for the students' return to higher education; this experience of transition may be transformative in nature.

A brief overview of developmental theory will be addressed; however, a more extensive review will be discussed in Chapter Two. Developmental psychology has a humanistic view that “adult education can lead to greater awareness of self through cultivating a self that is independent, rational, autonomous, coherent, and that has a sense of social responsibility” (Wilson & Hayes, 2000, p. 88). It is through self-development and reflection that students can experience a personal change, such as improved self-esteem, self-concept, discover authentic self by unmasking false assumptions, all of which are examples of transformative experiences as well. The most commonly seen theoretical models in adult development and change (as it relates to a transition) are those of Erikson, Levinson, Loevinger, and Gould (as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). These theorists are seeking to model “the ideal” mature, fully developed, psychologically healthy individual (student).

In reviewing the theoretical literature that guides the content, process, and assessment of the first-year student experience, Schlossberg’s research is valuable because it helps educators and administrators understand the transition faced by first-year students. Transition, defined by Schlossberg, Walters, and Goodman (1995), is “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). They give consideration to the individual’s perspective and note that a transition can only be defined by the individual experiencing the change. Therefore, for change to be seen as transitional, the individual must attach meaning to the experience. Transition theory is transforming through life events and reaching milestones (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Schlossberg’s transition theory (Schlossberg, et al., 1995) is primarily classified as a life-span adult development theory, which identifies the impact that change has on students of all ages. Schlossberg lists four strategies which influence the student’s ability to make a transition:

(a) situation (knowing the student individual situation), (b) self (demographics such as socioeconomic status, gender, age and psychological resources such as coping, ego development, and self-efficacy), (c) support (relationships with family, friends, and institutional support), and (d) strategies (direct action for managing stress and coping). These four strategies were be examined by the researcher during the study as they assist students with transitions and can help them successfully complete their educational goals and become involved in their environment. The college also benefits from a student successfully making a transition in the form of student retention data and from the students providing future alumni support (Evans, et al., 1998).

Schlossberg's (1995) transition model was selected from many other developmental theories for a number of reasons. First, this model contains an understanding of adult business students' transition to college. Unlike many of the models that focus entirely on the undergraduate traditional aged student, Schlossberg's work can be expanded to include adult business students. Second, this model is associated with life-span adult developmental theory. Third, this model has been used in the field of higher education, psychology, and adult education, so many educators and administrators with an interest in student learning and adjustment are familiar with Schlossberg's work.

Many students experience personal growth during times of transition. The growth can be a transformative learning experience, but not all students experience the transition to college in the same way. Some may view it as a transformative experience while others may not. For some students, the transition to college is unquestionably a transformational experience (Kasworm, 2003b). As adult make life changes, these choices often lead to personal growth and development (Schlossberg, et al., 1995). While development is not always transformative,

transformation is usually always developmental (Cranton, 2006). This developmental progression may create a disorienting dilemma. As Cranton (2006) explains,

When something unexpected happens, when a person encounters something that does not fit in with his or her expectations of how things should be, based on past experience, the choices are to reject the unexpected or to question the expectation. When people critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them, and act on the revised point of view, transformative learning occurs. (p. 19)

Daloz (1999), using a psycho-developmental lens, clarifies the connection between adult development and transformative learning. Daloz views transformational learning as a life-long journey to personal development and believes that adults that are returning to higher education are going through a developmental transition and often times seek higher education to “help them make sense of lives whose fabric or meaning has gone frayed” (p. 4). While Mezirow sees transformative learning as a rational undertaking, Daloz focuses on the holistic and intuitive aspects as does Dirkx (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006). Like Mezirow, Daloz recognizes the importance of cognitive growth, while placing importance on the whole person (Merriam, et al., 2007). In order to help students make meaning of their experiences, educators can facilitate this transitional (and potentially transformational) process. Through action research, as introduced in the next section, students discussed these transformative experiences and their transition to college.

Overview of Research Design

This study used qualitative research methods, specifically an action research design, to understand the transition adult business students experience as they return to an undergraduate business program and to explore a how a first-year seminar course could better meet the needs of

adult learners. The reasons for selecting a qualitative research design will be discussed followed by the rationale for why an action research framework was chosen.

Qualitative research is unique in nature because it contains rich narrative from participant interviews, document analysis, and fieldwork (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In addition, qualitative research cannot be reduced to one-dimensional thought; understanding a participant's social world is much more complex as it is the essence of his or her reality of the lived experience. The researcher is looking at the complexity of the participant's view of the situation being studied and does not want to constrict the meaning of the experience by attempting to define categories (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative inquiry "assumes that there are multiple, changing realities" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 101) and that participants are able to express their views (Creswell) and construct knowledge (Ewert, 1991). It is within the purpose of this study for participants to use this knowledge construction for their own personal development and engagement by assisting the researcher in the design of a first-year course for adult business students. The classroom context used for this study provided opportunities to collect and analyze descriptions and reflections from the participants.

The assumptions of qualitative design include understanding the meaning-making of an individual's experience, which is inductive in nature, and themes emerge from the rich in-depth data. Qualitative research studies the personal nature of meaning-making experience. It does not generalize the participant's experiences to all human experiences and perceptions but can be applied to other contexts. The meaning is central to the study; the participant was encouraged to be an active participant in the study as the researcher sought to build rapport and credibility with the participant (Creswell, 2003).

Within the qualitative paradigm, action research is the methodology used in this study. Action research assumes that there are individual variations among people that defy categorization. The underlying belief of action research is that the researcher is cognizant of these individual differences and acknowledges the environmental influences, and how these influences, as well as cultural differences, vary greatly among individuals. The unique lived experiences of individuals are valued and assist the researcher in improving practice. It is a goal of action research that the participants experience growth and development, while becoming socially conscious individuals who want to assist with change and democracy (Quigley & Kuhne, 1997).

Action research is “designed to develop new skills or new approaches to solve problems with direct application to the classroom or other applied setting” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 122). Action research is closely tied to self-reflection and Kurt Lewin (1946), a developmental social psychologist, who is credited for his work with action research in the natural setting. The core belief of action research is that theory can often times be articulated through action (Gustavsen, 2001) and that theory alone has minimal power in generating change. Therefore, a synergistic effort of both theory and practice is required. Lewin sees action research as a way of conducting social inquiry, which has the goal to improve practice (e.g., instruction, student learning, use of materials, and curriculum) by developing individuals (student achievement). Action research is often undertaken in a school setting and is an inquiry “done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3). It is through the collaborative action and relationships with students that makes action research different from other forms of inquiry. The relationships encourage collaborative

participation for developing interventions to solve a problem with the researcher, who is passionate about the topic and values the relationships of their students/participants.

Action research was chosen as the most appropriate research methodology because it takes into the lived experience of adult business students, a collaborative approach with participants, and a continuing, systematic process of reflection and action, to aid in the transitional needs of adult business students returning to an undergraduate program through making improvements to a first-year seminar course (Herr & Anderson, 2005). It is through the process of action research that the participants and researcher constructed knowledge to make these improvements to the first-year seminar course for the adult learner.

Overview of Participant Selection, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

Participants for this study were returning adult business students at the University. Students who were interested in getting a start on their fall class schedule who enrolled in the course by contacting the Extended Studies program. The criteria for the participants to be in the adapted seminar class were:

1. Were age 24 or older;
2. Were returning to an undergraduate business program (after a 2 or more year break from college and/or 6 or more years of separation from high school);
3. Had applied and been accepted by the university as a business major or who have recently completed the change of major form (and declared business as their major) and returned it to the Dean's office;
4. Needed to take the Foundations of Business Administration course (BSN 101) as a requirement for graduation;

5. Had an interest in completing a research project with the instructor of the course and be interested in assisting the design of a first-year seminar course for future adult business students.

The one credit class was a month summer session meeting on Tuesday and Thursday from 3:00-5:00 p.m for a total of 16 credit hours. The course was taught pass/fail and the student made a request to the Dean of the College of Business and to the Extended Studies Program to enter the course. The students freely entered the course knowing its intention to have a research component with the instructor. Students paid regular tuition for the one credit course. Students were asked on the first day of class what they would like to have as part of the class content. As a group, the course content and data collection consisted of a career paper assignment, other reflective assignments, classroom discussions, on-line discussions on Blackboard, and an exit interview. Students participated in all activities in the classroom regardless of their decision to consent or not to consent to the study, so that the instructor/researcher would not know until after grades had been assigned, who had opted to or opted not to participate. So that students would not feel coerced to participate in the study, a student from the class collected all consent forms as delivered it to the Dean's Office in a sealed envelope. The instructor/researcher left the room after the consent form was explained. All of these activities are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Also to be discussed further in Chapter Three is the need for rigorous fieldwork. Rigorous fieldwork produces quality data and the credibility of the researcher is dependent upon his or her experience and credentials. As a researcher, I have had professional experience working with over 3,500 first-year business students over the past 5 years in the role of the instructor of the first-year seminars. This experience has given me the opportunity to work with

students who have just graduated from high school, transfer students, and returning adult learners.

As the researcher, I had strict procedures to follow in order to protect the welfare of the participants and complied with rules and regulations regarding research design of the Institution Research Board (IRB) at the researcher's institution and the Human Subject Committee at the University where the research took place. The University at which the study took place and the researcher's institution had given approval for the researcher to conduct the study (See Appendix A).

Significance of the Study

The literature shows that there is a need for first-year seminar programs to help students adjust to college. It is equally important to understand the needs of adult business students and to determine how a first-year seminar course could be tailored to assist in their personal development and college adjustment. There are several reasons this study was significant to the field of adult education. First, this study focused on the experiences of adult business students and their transition to college within an adult education context. Second, the action research literature (Herr & Anderson, 2005) supports the positive outcomes in the development of social skills (interpersonal relationships with others and the faculty member doing the research project), personal (critical thinking and communication), and business skills (research and understanding of program development). This research contributed to the significant advances in discipline knowledge, social issues, and the field of adult education because it is a cross-discipline study (higher education and adult education) of the adult student who returns to higher education. Third, much of the literature does not include the process of conducting an action research project to assist in understanding the adult business students' needs as they return to higher

education. Additionally, literature devoted exclusively to the adjustment of adult students to undergraduate business education is sparse. Furthermore, there are currently no qualitative research studies exploring adult business students' experiences as they return to college, and action research is not often featured within adult education journals. Therefore, this action research study is significant to adult education because it explores the experience of adult students in a first-year seminar course.

Informed by adult development theory, this study brought together the fields of higher education, student development, business education, and developmental psychology with adult education. The study is significant in that it helped to determine what could be changed within a curriculum to better meet the needs of adult learners as they enter into a discipline-specific program such as business. Since the adult study participants have decided to return to college to begin their undergraduate business education, this study provided an excellent opportunity to explore the ways in which transformative learning is a facet of developmental (transition) theory. This intersection of business education and adult development (transition) theory provides a perspective largely ignored in the field of adult education. This study contributed to the adult education field by bringing an inclusive and participatory approach to learning that can meet the needs of adult business students. In addition, having a unique class of adult learners who have made the decision to return to higher education allowed for an environment that demonstrates reflective thinking, active learning, and knowledge.

Another aspect of this study was its contribution to the practice of teaching adults in first-year business seminars and other business-discipline coursework. This qualitative study provided an in-depth analysis of data that will enable educators and administrators to make better decisions about program development. In addition to program development, through an action

research methodology, students who participated in the study were involved with other students in setting common goals and objectives, and implementing and assessing those standards to meet the needs of the adult learners.

This study had personal significance because as an educator teaching a first-year seminar course, I wanted to meet the needs of my adult business students in the classroom. Some educators have a lack of attention to student's prior experience, and I have witnessed students becoming frustrated with their business professor's "teacher centered approach," which is predominately focused on traditional, behaviorist models of teaching. This study investigated alternative ways of working with adult business students in a first-year seminar course and has teaching implications for business education.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

As a qualitative research study, there are certain assumptions based upon the theoretical and philosophical frameworks upon which it rests. There are six assumptions included in this qualitative study.

Assumptions

The first assumption of this study was that adults enrolling in an undergraduate business program had voluntarily decided to return to college. Some may be seeking professional development, while others have had a change in their lifestyle or a disorienting dilemma that prompted the return to college (e.g., job loss or divorce). Second, most adult learners were self-directed and wanted to take an active role in their learning. While adult business students were at different stages of development, it was assumed that they would be willing to participate by honestly expressing what they think and feel through self-reflection in an action research study. Third, adult business students needed individualized academic advising and appreciate an

introductory course for transitioning and acclimating learners to their major business discipline so that they were not wasting resources (time and money) on taking courses they did not need for graduation. Additionally, there was the assumption they planned to graduate.

Fourth, adult business students welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively with the researcher and other participants to determine the topics to include in the study. Fifth, through an action research study, participants got to know other adult business students and found a smaller classroom environment beneficial to learning. It was an assumption that students were able to reflect and preferred an active learning environment to a passive one.

Last, was my personal assumption that first-year seminars were designed to meet the needs of the traditional-aged college student, and often this content does not meet the needs of adult business students. More specifically, the Foundations of Business Administration (FBA) course does not fit the needs of adult business students at the University. As an option to the traditional approach to education, adult business students found the action research process enjoyable and meaningful.

Limitations

As with any study, there are also limitations to its applicability and its purpose. These limitations are listed below:

Although action research had much strength in that it is a methodology sensitive to the needs of the learners, it also had some limitations. First, action research was unpredictable. Participants were not as enthusiastic about the project half way through the semester as they were at the beginning. As with any ongoing research project, there were attendance issues. Many of the participants had struggles with juggling work hours, family schedules and childcare

in addition to other responsibilities. Yet it offered the most effective way to capture the adult business students' experience as they reflect on issues for discussion and study.

Second, I used a purposeful sample which was my class roster. This involves limitations in that I was required to give participants their grades for the semester before determining if they have consented to the study and this could have limited the study in not knowing for sure how many participants had decided to consent to the research. Until consent forms were reviewed, I did not know what data I could use from the semester until at the end of the study and therefore will not be able to begin writing Chapters Four, Five, and Six while it was current in my memory.

Third, participants who are privileged were able to afford higher education and were assumed to have come from stable economic backgrounds with support from family and friends. Therefore, the participants in this study came from a middle-to-upper socioeconomic class. In addition, there was concern that there would not be a range of racial/ethnic identities represented in the class of six students due to the lack of diversity in the College of Business.

A fourth limitation was my own inexperience with the action research process; however, there were mentors and advisors to assist in the expertise required to complete this project. In addition, I had reviewed other qualitative studies using action research and the literature that addresses the possible outcomes that may have resulted from using this methodology.

Fifth, to adhere to graduate school research deadlines as well as The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation requirements, an ending date was needed for collecting data; therefore, this put restrictions on the number of meetings and the possible topics discussed.

Lastly, while it was not necessarily a limitation, due to the nature of qualitative research, it is non-generalizable; however, it is up to the reader to determine if results can be similarly applied to other situations.

Definition of Terms

In order to more clearly understand the terms associated with the study, the following definitions are presented to provide clarity.

AACSB International stands for The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business which “represents the highest standard of achievement for business schools, worldwide. Institutions that earn accreditation confirm their commitment to quality and continuous improvement through a rigorous and comprehensive peer review” (The AACSB International, 2008). The AACSB International accreditation is the hallmark of excellence in management education, and currently only 551 business programs in the world have attained AACSB business accreditation.

Adult student has been previously referred to as “nontraditional student.” An adult student is defined as one who is enrolled in coursework in a higher education institution that did not enter the fall preceding their high school graduation. An adult student may be enrolled as a part-time or full-time student while working part-time or full-time, having dependents, a spouse/partner, and over 24 years of age when beginning the first bachelor’s degree. It is important to note that some higher education institutions classify adult students to be 25 years of age or older.

Development is referred to progressing toward adulthood by “being able to exercise increasing control over one’s life, being self-reliant, fulfilling personal potential and accepting

responsibility for one's actions (Sugarman, 1986, p. 293). It is also considered a "process of coming-to-be" (Reeves, 1999, p. 19) and involves movement toward greater competence.

First-year seminar is a program that began in 1989 (National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2007). The title of these introductory first-year seminar courses were "freshman orientation course" or "freshman seminar." Since 2000, the title of the course has been broadened to include transfer students and to progress toward the words "first-year" and away from the word "freshman." It was this change that began the new terminology of "new student seminar" or "first-year seminar." The purpose of the first-year seminar was to orient students to college and introduce them to the policies and the culture of the university.

First-year student is an alternative word for "freshman" because first-year student is inclusive to both genders, male and female, and is used to describe incoming transfer students as well as returning adult students if it is during their first or second semester at a college or university.

Foundations of Business Administration course is a one-credit interdisciplinary required business core course at a public, 4-year University in Pennsylvania designed to benefit the student's development. The course is usually taken during the student's first two semesters of enrollment at the University. Through the course, business students gain an understanding of the different functional areas in business, how they work in concert for the benefit of the organization and also have an opportunity to investigate their goals, interests, skills, and abilities so that they can make informed choices and meet their personal goals through a meaningful university experience. In addition, the students are presented with information on various campus resources including career education and resources available at the career development

center. Students are invited to join business clubs, learn about internship procedures and opportunities for future consideration, such as business etiquette dinners and networking with alumni.

Transition can be associated with an anticipated or unanticipated event that may results in changing of one's life roles, relationships, beliefs, and assumptions. Some transitions may be linear in nature while others are more circular; however it can not be assumed that all transitions are movements correlated with chronological age.

These definitions have provided a common set of understandings about their use within this study. Following these definitions is a list of assumptions and limitations about this study.

Organization of the Study

The intention of this chapter was to acquaint the reader with the framework guiding the study along with the purpose and research questions. Chapter Two will provide comprehensive review of the literature in the main areas of study, including adult learners, the first-year seminar, developmental (transition) theory, and transformative learning (as a component of adult development). The details of the action research design are described in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore transitional experiences of adult business students during their return to higher education through an adapted first-year seminar course. This chapter is organized in three sections of related literature: adult learners, adult development (transition) theory, and first-year seminars. The first section of this chapter explores adult learners' characteristics and their educational needs in the first year of returning to college and provides a foundation for the study. Particular attention will be given to adult business students in the literature. A humanistic perspective of student development is reviewed as a lens to discuss adult development (transition) theory. The second section of the chapter reviews adult development (transition) theory since the research on adult learners returning to higher education indicates that it is often times a transitional event (Aslanian, 2001; Kasworm, 2003a; Merriam, 2005; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). This forms the theoretical framework for this study. The third section explores the literature regarding the first-year seminar for purpose, content, and assessment methods. In addition, an analysis of the literature highlights the strengths as well as the limitations of existing research and provides a rationale for this study. Collectively this literature review provides a background for understanding adult learners and the transition they experience returning to higher education.

Adult Learners

Typically, adult students are defined as 24 years of age or older and returning to school after a significant gap in their education, while the traditional students are defined as under the age of 24 and attending college for the first time, seeking their undergraduate degree (Kinsella, 1998). In the adult education literature, there are six areas of interest with respect to adult students in the higher education setting. These six areas show up in the literature and are briefly

mentioned here in order to set the scene on adult students and are discussed in more detail in the section of this chapter which reviews the research literature of adult learners. These six areas include a) how the landscape of higher education is changing, b) the characteristics of adult students, c) the uniqueness of adult students' learning, d) the motivation for adults returning to higher education, e) the adult students' special needs for resources and services, and f) implications for educational institutions. This leads to a discussion of the reasons for an increase of adult learners in the classroom in the past 35 years (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002).

How the Landscape of Higher Education is Changing

Several studies document the increasing enrollments of adult students in universities (Chao & Good, 2004; Graham, Donaldson, Kasworm, & Dirkx, 2000; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Adult students make up more than 40% of the total U.S. undergraduate population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005). In the past 35 years, the college population over the age of 25 has increased. From 1970 to 1991, the number of adult students enrolled in higher education increased by 171.4% (Kasworm et al., 2002). The enrollment of adult students is attributed to our global economy, cultural and ethnic diversity, immigration, competitive job market and its demands for new skills and technology, professional development, more women in the workforce (changing norms and roles), higher professional standards and certifications, and second career retirees (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006; Merriam et al.). Due to the increase of adult students, colleges and universities need to consider redesigning programs and services to meet the needs of these students. An underlying assumption from the literature is that "colleges and universities cannot continue with business-as-usual" (Apps, 1981, p. 11) for the increasing number of adult students returning to undergraduate programs. Universities and colleges may

want to consider learning more about their adult student demographics, characteristics, and needs for special resources and services.

Characteristics of Adult Students

In the literature, there have been ten characteristics identified that are unique to adult students (Apps, 1981; Kasworm et al., 2002). The first characteristic, according to Compton et al. (2006), is that adult students are more likely to be enrolled locally in community colleges as they are seeking a vocational certificate or degree. In addition, The College Board found that a large majority of students select majors in high demand field such as business, education, and health care (Aslanian, 2001). Second, adult students have a plethora of family responsibilities. Many work full-time while attending college and are married or have dependents, while others may be assisting aging parents (Kasworm et al., 2002). Traditional students are different from adult students in that their primary role is to be a student; while the returning adult is usually a working professional or business person, a homemaker, a parent, and a volunteer within the community first and then a student (Compton et al., 2006). Therefore, a third characteristic of adults is that a large majority are enrolled part-time usually because they are trying to combine full-time employment with attending college classes (Kasworm et al., 2002). While adult students continue to be mostly part-time students, Aslanian (2001) suggests that the stereotypical age paradigm is being shifted:

Age is no longer a reliable determinant of educational behavior, as adult learners behave more like younger students – full-time status, daytime enrollment, degree seeking, on-campus attendance—and more younger students exhibit adult learning characteristics – part-time enrollment, full-time employment, living off-campus, married with children, stopping out for a semester or a year. (Butler, 2005, p. 61)

Fourth, adults are willing to enroll in online courses (Aslanian, 2001; Compton et al., 2006). Distance education is a way for students to maintain their daily schedules, while having the flexibility of completing their required coursework. Additionally, The College Board found that adult students are receptive to the idea of weekend classes and “fast-track programs” (Aslanian, 2001, p. 56). A fifth characteristic is that adult students have a higher chance of coming from a lower socio-economic background. Therefore, adult students are more likely to have greater financial concerns than those of traditional aged students because adults are less likely to receive financial aid due to their part-time enrollment. In similar studies reviewed by Kasworm et al. (2002), they found that adult undergraduates usually have an annual income of less than \$27,000.

The sixth characteristic of adult learners, in general, is that they do extremely well with their studies and may work harder than traditional aged students (Cupp, 1991; Donaldson, Graham, Kasworm, & Dirkx, 1999; Frost, 1991; Kasworm & Blowers, 1994). Adult students perform equally as well, based on GPA, as their traditional counterparts (Donaldson et al.; Kasworm, 1990). In a study completed by Kasworm (1990), she reviewed 300 studies, and found that adult students did just as well or better than traditional aged students with respect to GPA and test measures (Donaldson et al.). Surprisingly, adult students typically enter college with lower high school ranks and high school grade point averages than traditional aged students; however, many adults do better in college and in response, report higher levels of satisfaction with their education experience than do traditional aged students (Kasworm et al., 2002).

Seventh, adult students are more likely to be re-entry students and to have had experiences at other educational institutions. In studies reviewed by Kasworm et al. (2002), they found only 10% of the adult students had never been enrolled in a previous institution after high

school. Eighth, adult students are more likely to speak another language other than English, which means the student may have difficulties with language barriers before even enrolling in higher education (Compton et al., 2006). Ninth, adult learners represent a larger subgroup of persons with disabilities than the traditional aged student. In 1999, approximately 50% of collegiate enrolled persons with disabilities were over the age of 30. Kasworm et al. (2000) explain that since college is a decision made from a major life transition “adults seek out college as an alternative after facing medical or other life crisis and subsequent disabilities” (p. 9).

Finally, adults have a higher chance of leaving the educational facility and not finishing an undergraduate degree program (NCES, 2002, as cited in Compton et al., 2006). Therefore, Schlossberg et al. (1989) state that adult learners need to feel a sense of belonging, a belief that they are important, and the ability to cope with the demands of other responsibilities by managing their energy, while mastering new skills both professionally and personally, in order to complete their degree requirements. According to Apps (1981), adults have four distinctive areas that set them apart from traditional aged students: life experience, motivation, academic behavior, and problems faced. Adults have a rich wealth of experience to which they bring to the classroom. Other scholars expand on this by saying that adults learn by applying, synthesizing, and critically reflecting their knowledge from their everyday life and work, to their new acquired academic knowledge (Kasworm & Blowers, 1994; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997; Merriam, et al., 2007).

Uniqueness of Adult Students' Learning

The literature uncovers characteristics among adult students as learners, however at the same time acknowledges the importance of maintaining the uniqueness of adult students as individuals (Kasworm, 1993a). Therefore, some institutions have begun to give credit to adults

for experiential learning through testing or a portfolio method so that students may document their prior learning (Compton et al., 2006). Other schools have adults design a learning contract or a customized educational plan with faculty. These independent studies, internships, or research projects provide a way for adult learners to be actively engaged in their learning while allowing them to complete their coursework with flexible time limits. Much of the research supports the assumption that adult students want what they are learning in the classroom to be relevant and applicable to their current day-to-day activities (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Donaldson, Flannery, & Ross-Gordon, 1993; Ross-Gordon, 2003). Ross-Gordon (2003) gives multiple suggestions for adult educators to apply to their practice, one of which is to design a curriculum that is inclusive to the student's background. It also assists in eliminating the problem of treating all adult students as a homogenous group with similar needs (Compton et al., 2006). Various universities have online resources such as a mathematics library, writing center, and/or learning assistance center (Compton et al., 2006) available to assist the adult learners and build confidence in their abilities.

The returning adult student soon realizes that completing an undergraduate program is going to take more time than what he or she originally anticipated. In general, adults take the chance to return to higher education seriously and have made sacrifices in their life to be able to accomplish their goals. Educators often have adult students in the classroom that have either recently divorced or have stressed marriages due to the tension of the student's changing lifestyle and the inability to maintain the previously assigned roles and expectations of the partner (Apps, 1981). Another factor causing difficulty for adult students is if they are the breadwinner and they reenter college, many times there is a significant change in financial support. With these

issues mentioned, adult students are still dedicated to their learning and are quite serious about accomplishing their goals (Apps).

Adult Motivations for Returning to Higher Education

There are primarily four reasons for adults deciding to return to higher education: major life transition, accomplish career goals, a combination of a life transition and planning, and socialization; however, the most commonly cited reason is a personal or major life transition (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Butler, 2005; Compton et al., 2006; Kasworm et al., 2002; Merriam et al., 2007). This time period is referred to as the *quarter-life crisis* (Butler, 2005) where adults are searching for a “new identity, desire to grow intellectually, and moving on from earlier commitments” (p. 65). The second reason adults seek education is for life planning or to accomplish their career goals. In a study completed by The College Board, 85% of adults said they were returning to college for reasons related to employment (Aslanian, 2001). Third, adults return to college for a combination of both personal transition and life planning. One author suggests that a fourth reason could be for companionship and socialization (Houle, 1961). In compiling 22 case studies, Houle found three types of adults learners: goal-oriented learner, the socializer, and the lover of learning. Cross (1982) believes that adults who return to higher education have been successful learners before and that they return to something that they had success with in the past.

Adults are more intrinsically motivated to return to school, unlike traditional students, who many times see higher education as the next logical step after high school and merely follow their parental expectations. In contrast, adults seek education for knowledge, personal growth, and to meet specific goals. Unlike traditional aged students who have begun taking college classes right after high school, some adult learners have not been in the formal classroom for

many years (Kasworm, 1993a). One disadvantage of returning to college with a break in the formal educational settings is that adult students are not familiar with the educational routine of the academic environment. For instance, many students feel overwhelmed by the admission requirements, registration processes, and have low comfort levels using academic facilities such as the library. Adult learners are apprehensive about returning to college and express self-doubt about their abilities (Kasworm, 1993a). Self-doubt can often set in with returning students where they feel awkward in the classroom and wonder if their reading, writing, and mathematic skills are at the required level to succeed in college. Another disadvantage for adult learners is not being able to just concentrate on being a student. Because of the multiple life roles of returning adult students, many struggle to find uninterrupted time in their day to complete class readings and writings. Adult students may also have difficulty with rusty study skills, unrealistic goals, low self-confidence, unsupportive family members, and the fear of reentering the educational environment (Cupp, 1991; Donaldson et al., 1999; Kasworm, 2005; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997; Sizoo, Malhotra, Bearson, & Schaffhauser, 1996).

Regardless of adult learners' multiple life roles and unique barriers (Hermon & Davis, 2004), they are generally highly motivated (Chao & Good, 2004) and have a goal-orientation toward learning (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003). Except for one study where adult women students reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation than adult male students, women also reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation than the younger (traditional aged) students (Justice & Dornan, 2001). Chao and Good's study take understanding student motivation a step further to mention the close connection between educational and career goals, adult learners' unique ability to integrate their complex lives and bring together work and classroom to learn. Additional research on adult motivation is discussed in more detail in the section on adult student literature.

Later in this literature review, adult development and transition models will be addressed, but first a discussion on adult students' needs for services and resources at the higher education institution.

Adult Students' Special Needs for Resources and Service

Many adult students spend little time on campus, outside of attending their classes (Donaldson et al., 1999; Kasworm et al., 2002). In order to make up for the lack of time they are not on campus or involved in extracurricular activities (campus clubs and activities), adults compensate through their relationships with others -- by gaining support from faculty, fellow classmates, family, and friends (Graham et al., 2000; Kasworm & Blowers, 1994). Donaldson (1999) suggests that in-class learning time and interactions with faculty have a powerful influence on an adult's campus experience:

Adults value and seek out classroom experiences that are based in relevancy, respect, adult dignity, and reciprocity of adult-to-adult relationships. The connecting classroom metaphor suggests an environment that embraces the value and worth of adults as knowledgeable learners, and which also values adult life experiences and perspectives as part of the learning process. (Graham et al., 2000, p. 12)

Other authors are in agreement by suggesting that classrooms are the center stage for adult learning (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Donaldson et al., 1991; Graham et al., 2000; Kasworm & Blowers, 1994; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997).

Many student affairs professionals try to develop campus programs for adults, such as an adult student organization, only to find that few adults attend. Additionally, this suggestion is usually given from the many studies showing a direct, positive impact on the traditional aged students if they are involved in student organizations (Astin 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 1991). Defining adult students' success from traditional age students' positive impacts does not offer support for adult students who do not have the same values and experiences (Donaldson et al., 1999). Compton et al. (2006) suggest that it is a "deficit model that implies that adult students are not prepared for higher education" (p. 75). Kasworm (1993a) urges educational institutions to examine services and activities to be certain they serve the adult population of students. In addition, she suggests that adult learners have an advocate to support this group of students. Educators or administrators serving as advocates may begin to facilitate change by beginning the process of dialog with students, examining programs and services, and reflection on changes that could be made to better meet the needs of the adult learner. The advocate would serve as the voice for the group of adult students and influences changes in institution attitudes, understanding, and policies (Kasworm et al., 2002).

Adults are also marginalized when it is time for the assessment of undergraduate student learning (Kasworm & Marienau, 1997). In some undergraduate programs, adult students have been offered more flexible, adapted, or even individualized plans of study to meet the curriculum requirements. "Increasingly, adult students assume a major role in tailoring areas of concentration, or in some cases whole programs, to address their knowledge and competence needs as workers, parents, and citizens" (Kasworm & Marienau, 1997, p. 7). It is within the purpose of this study for the first-year seminar course to intervene with the current curriculum, assess what adult students have learned and currently need from an educational institution, and serve as a voice for the first-year adult business students.

Implications for Educational Institutions

Within the literature reviewed there are many suggestions for administrators of higher education as to how they could better accommodate adult learners. First, validating adults'

experiential learning and reducing the time students need to take classes to complete a certificate or degree program will help adults see that accomplishing their educational goals is more achievable than they originally might have thought. Second, educational institutions may want to consider examining the course offerings for adult students with respect to the day of week and the times. Some adult learners are required to take time off from work to attend class times during the day. Many students prefer weekend classes and ask for student service offices such as admissions, student accounts, financial aid, and the registrar's office to be open later in the evening (Rollins, Enderlein, & Payne, 2000). A third suggestion would be for educators to give assignments that could be related to the student's work environment. Having a practical application will allow the adult learner to apply the new academic knowledge to their current knowledge base. Fourth, university or college counseling services should be introduced to adult students so that if they are having difficulty coping (emotionally, physically, culturally, vocationally, or relationally), managing stress, or adjusting, they have a place to go for support and assistance (Compton et al., 2006). Lastly, educational institutions need to continue to explore ways to meet the needs of adult students. It is important to find ways for adults to be involved on campus (with other adult learners and faculty). Faculty and administration need to be cognizant of adult student voices being heard (Compton et al., 2006; Kasworm, 1993a; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997). Donaldson (1999) recommends using action research to tackle problems associated with adult learning, which is how the topic of this study came about – how can the first-year seminar course change for adult students so that the learning and the meaning from the course is still apparent and that it is tailored more to meet their needs? Much of the adult literature focuses on how the learning environment may be improved to enhance the adult

learner's experience on campus (Apps, 1981). In the next section, adult development theory is presented as the theoretical framework informing the study.

Adult Development Theory

Adult developmental theory serves as a theoretical framework for understanding adult students' experiences as they return to college. In some cases, the adult student is experiencing a life transition, which is often the catalyst for his or her returning to undergraduate business school. Transition theory is a facet of adult development theory which will be used throughout this review of literature. Transition theory and developmental theory are not meant to be used interchangeably; multiple transition models are reviewed briefly as they relate to adult students transitioning to undergraduate school. While adult development theory informs this study and will be discussed at length, it is important to briefly outline my view of development. This is done through the lens of the humanist perspective.

A Humanist Perspective of Adult Development

In the world of adult education, the term *developmental* can mean many things. Many of the definitions are focused on a nurturing humanist approach to development and incorporate the goal of student development as helping "students become connected to the college and become aware that the college cares about them and their success" (Kadar, 2001, p. 177). Elias and Merriam (2005) describe the humanistic philosophy toward student transitions to be individual and unique so that each student may have unlimited growth, development and be valued as a person. Humanism is closely linked to human psychology, which explores how individuals seek autonomy and active participation. Individuals have the potential to solve their own problems and become fully self-actualized persons based on the Hierarchical Needs Model of Motivation by Maslow (1943). Elias and Merriam (2005) state:

The goal of humanistic education is the development of persons--- persons who are open to change and continued learning, persons who strive for self actualization and persons who can live together as fully functioning individuals. As such, the whole focus of humanistic education is upon the individual learner rather than a body of information. (p. 124)

Therefore, the students are the center of learning, being responsible for their own learning and striving for personal growth. Humanistic educators are “concerned with the development of the whole person with special emphasis upon the affective dimensions of the personality” (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 111). The philosophy also upholds the belief that individuals are “capable of making significant personal choices” (Elias & Merriam, p. 111). Since this study focuses on the adjustment, development, and learning of adult students, a discussion of adult development theory follows.

Developmental Perspectives

The theoretical framework that informs this study is adult development theory. “Adult development theory studies the systematic change within an individual or a group of individuals that results from a dynamic interaction of heredity and environment influences” (Lerner, 1998, as cited in Bee & Bjorkland, 2004, p. 14). Depending upon which journals or works are reviewed in the areas of college student development or psychology, there are many definitions of the word *development*. Reeves (1999) suggest that “implicit in the concept of development is recognition that it is a process, a coming-to-be” (p. 19) and goes on to explain the definition can be a value judgment of the society or culture. For instance, in the Western part of the world, there is a notion of individualization as the primary goal of development. Sugarman (1986) states that, “being able to exercise increasing control over one’s life, being self-reliant, fulfilling

personal potential and accepting responsibility for one's actions" is development (p. 293). Bee (1996) defines development as "progressing to higher levels of integrative functioning" (p. 15). Therefore, this causes a tension in the field due to the complexity as adults experience periods of stability and transition. Due to individual uniqueness it is unreasonable to assume a typical trajectory of development based on age alone. Therefore, it is important to view more than one application of a model or theory as it relates to adult students returning to an undergraduate program.

As there are varying definitions of development, there are also differences in the perspectives of development. The tension arises when one tries to capture the essence of adult development across a group, but yet needs to account for individual differences (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). To aid in the understanding of this dichotomy, Merriam et al. (2007) have a typology of development containing four categories: psychological development, sociocultural development, biological development, and integrative development. These categories of viewing adult development provide a theoretical lens for viewing how students grow, develop, and learn over the course of life. Adult development theories have an impact on adult education in the sense that these theories shape the practice of adult educators. Particular attention needs to be given to how an adult student's life events integratively shape their development (Caffarella & Clark, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007). Integrative development combines two or more perspectives of development and examines them holistically. With this perspective, consideration is given to both cultural and gender differences, economic status, and race. Authors such as Tisdell, Ellsworth, Ross-Gordon, Ullrich, Bryant and Guido-DiBrito, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, and Baxter-Magolda have been instrumental in the perspective on socio-cultural differences being brought to light (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). In the adult

education literature it is suggested that educators need to take into consideration the individual learner's positionality, cultural background, and previous learning experiences when working with a student because not all learners have the same prior knowledge and experiences (Caffarella & Clark, 1999; Silverman & Casazza, 2000; Tisdell, 2003).

A Psychological Developmental Perspective

For the remainder of this literature review, the focus is on psychological development since the purpose of this study is to explore adult students' transition to higher education from an individual, humanistic perspective. Psychological development examines each student's internal process of development and includes two types of models: sequential (stage theories) and transitional (life events) (Merriam et al., 2007). In Clark and Caffarella's (1999) work, psychological development is classified in three types of categories: sequential models, life events and transitions, and relational models. The additional category has been added to include the works of Gilligan (1982) and her research on the perspectives of women, as they develop throughout their life (Clark & Caffarella). Other authors (Evans et al., 1998; Merriam et al., 2007), include relation models under the sociocultural perspective of development. A sequential model that also gives consideration to transitions is Levinson's (1986) theory of sequential order, which includes six life stages: leaving the family (ages 17-21); entering the adult world (ages 21-29); settling down (ages 30-34); becoming one's own person (ages 35-39); midlife transitions (ages 40-42); and restabilization (ages 43-50). The limitation of this theory is that it is tied too directly to chronological age and not everyone falls into these linear categories. In the literature this is supported by Schlossberg, Walters, and Goodman (1995) who have a socio-cultural perspective on development and also believes Levinson is remiss on race and economic status. Sugarman (2001) and Bridges (1993) as well as many other theorists agree that developmental

theory transitions are not always sequential processes (Evans et al., 1998; Merriam, 2005; Merriam et al., 2007; Schlossberg et al., 1989), and Merriam et al. suggest being aware of the disagreement as to whether or not movement is always upward (moving toward higher levels of stages) or if it is forward or moving back in motion.

Additionally, Kohlberg (1976) and Erikson (1982) are well-known for their work with sequential psychological development theories, which follow a hierarchical sequential movement but are not correlated with chronological age. Erikson's theory has eight stages, and describes human development as continuing through the learner's development directed by his or her psychosocial foundation. There is still a tension in the literature between theorists, in the cause for movement between stages, levels, or steps. According to Schlossberg et al. (1989), one should take caution in seeing adult's life progression as linear and suggest that the progression is actually more circular in nature. Tennant (1993, 2000) believes that it is debatable as to what constitutes development, and therefore suggests that psychological development is socially constructed. Since there are societal expectations for normal development, it is complex to determine "what it means to be enlightened or developmentally more mature" (Tennant, 1993, p. 41). This is why it is important to understand adult developmental theories and to recognize that they are not necessarily adequate in describing all adult students' experiences. Tennant (1993, 2000) explains the differences between normal changes which are apart of one's life course, are changes in one's perspectives. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that every individual's (student's) transition is going to be different depending upon one's life experiences and one's socio-cultural background. Educators need to be mindful of other aspects of development than just the psychological lens to truly understand adulthood. Linking adult development to adult learning -- there is a responsibility to help students as they "attain the maximum level of

development, which in turn could encourage learners to examine their assumptions and beliefs, to facilitate critical reflection (Daloz, 1986, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 2000).

Transition Theory

Transition, defined by Schlossberg et al. (1995), is “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). The authors give consideration to the individual’s perspective and note that a transition can only be defined by the individual experiencing the change. Therefore, for change to be seen as transitional, the individual must attach meaning to the experience. Transition theory is transforming through life events and reaching milestones (Evans et al., 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). From a transition and life events approach to development, Kegan, Daloz, Bridges, Astin, Sugarman, Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering have contributed to understanding the transitions a first-year student makes into college.

The following models and theories will be explored in great detail, as they focus on how the first-year adult student makes the transition into higher education: Bridges’ (1980, 1993) Transition Model, Sugarman’s (2001) Model, Schlossberg’s (1989) Transition Theory, and Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) model.

Transition Models

To account for the physical and emotional aspects of transition, particularly those concerning unanticipated life events, Schlossberg et al. (1989) asserts, and Merriam (2005) concurs, that there are three types of events-- anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents --that hold the possibility for learning, change, development, and progression through a transition. Anticipated events are expected to occur such as completing school, getting married, and starting a career. Unanticipated events are unexpected such as losing a job, being diagnosed with a

health issue, or on a more positive note, winning the lottery. Nonevents are events that we expected to take place, but did not occur, like unfulfilled life goal or expectation. Many transition theorists have tried to make sense of an individual's experience through developing a model that explains the steps or phases the person is experiencing. It is, however, at the discretion of the individual (student) experiencing the change to determine if it is transitional experience. As a result, not all experiences of adult students are transitions nor do they become learning experiences. However, many educators and theorists see potential in transition for learning and development (Merriam, 2005).

In Bridges' (1993) model, which is discussed in the next section, phases or processes in his model do not show distinct separation; instead the boundaries have been curved, slanted, and overlapped. It appears from reviewing the literature and models that the primary difference between sequential models and transition models is that an individual (student) may be in two transitional phases at the same time, depending upon their need to revisit a previous phase.

Bridges' Model. The first transition model reviewed is unique in that it begins with an ending. Bridges (1993) explains the difference between change and transition to be "change causes transition, and transition starts with an ending" (p. 23). Bridges' model (1980, 1993) has three phases that were initially developed in his work with transition management to explain the organizational change within a company; however, the three phase internalization process is well suited for personal change since the first phase, which is change from a new situation, or as it relates to this study, begins when the student needs to let go of something or deal with a loss. Therefore this phase, or process, is called ending, losing, letting go. Specifically to the first-year students, the transition they may be experiencing is a loss of their previous identity or roles, routine relationships, and familiarity of their life before college. The second phase is the neutral

zone, evaluating new patterns of behavior --when one learns that the old habits are no longer working and Bridges (1993) suggests that this is when new patterns and “psychological realignments” (p. 5) are explored. Bridges’ neutral zone is similar to a time out or a being suspended in the unknown. An individual may stall on making commitments to reach a goal while they are exploring alternatives (Silverman & Casazza, 2000). The third and final phase is knowledge that a transition must be made in order to experience the new beginning. In this phase the student forms a new identity, values, attitudes, and purpose. The student can be in more than one phase at a time; the phases are not necessarily separate.

The strength of this model is that it acknowledges the loss that an adult student is experiencing. Because the transition to college is unique for everyone, the student will have to acknowledge that he or she may have a loss of free time, income, identity, friends, time alone, and have to adjust to less sleep. Also, the student may not continue meeting the previously met expectations of his or her spouse, partner, family, and friends. One of the biggest difficulties adult students face is the ability to manage the many roles that they play.

A second strength of this model is that students can see that they must not fail to identify and prepare for the ending or loss. Concern for this model is in the neutral zone when the student is between their old and new identity. Students are in limbo between their past experiences and their life experiences. The model would benefit from additional steps explaining how progress is being made to adjust to the new identity. With respect to adult students returning to an undergraduate business program, if students are not given the support of the educational institution and the critical persons in their life, more than likely, the student may abandon the situation (drop out of the program), and jeopardize the chance for change, personal growth, and development. This is why this study seeks to explore through an adopted first-year

seminar course the skills, resources, and knowledge the adult learners needs to make a successful transition to higher education.

Sugarman's Model. Sugarman's (2001) model is like Bridges's model (1993) in that phases are not linear. Furthermore, Sugarman has formed her own seven stage model that is useful in understanding the physical and emotional aspects associated with transitions. The model's seven stages: 1) immobilisation -- where the individual is having difficulty and may be feeling overwhelmed, 2) reaction -- elation or despair being manic and depressed about the situation or minimisation -- trying to make light of the situation, 3) self-doubt -- lacking confidence on one's abilities, 4) acceptance and letting go -- cutting the tie to the past, 5) testing -- exploring new opportunities, 6) searching for meaning-- the student learns from their experiences, and lastly, 7) integration -- change has become the new normal. Depending upon the adult student's reason for returning to college, this model may be better suited for students that have experienced a serious, unanticipated life transition such as health issues, death of a loved one, or loss of a job. The complexity of such life transitions need to be emphasized -- especially if a student must accept a decrease in income. However, as soon as this issue is resolved, there may be another change; they may not have anticipated the amount of resistance from loved ones regarding their decision to return to school. Sugarman suggests that life may be one transition after another.

Chickering and Reisser's Model. One of the first theories to examine the psychosocial development of college students was that of Chickering and Reisser (1993). This theory has seven vectors and each is meant to build on one another; however, it is possible that students move through these stages at different rates and it is not always a sequential movement. Chickering and Reisser's first four of their seven vectors are: developing competence, managing

emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, and developing mature interpersonal relationships. These four vectors may be used in the classroom environment or outside of the classroom in recreational activities by sharpening critical thinking and reasoning skills, and working with others. Students learn to express themselves as adults and to control and communicate feelings in a responsible manner. Students are able to self-manage; they have begun to accept and appreciate their culture and have a good sense of their self concept, all the while maintaining a respectful relationship with families without consistently seeking approval from others. Chickering and Reisser's fifth, sixth, and seventh vectors may be observed as the student progresses through college. These additional vectors are establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity; all which corresponds with the student's transition and personal growth. Chickering and Reisser's model is valuable in recognizing how the first-year student develops in the first few years of college, but it does not take into the account the adult learner's life experiences.

Individual differences exist in coping with a transition; these variances are to be expected as mentioned in many of the models. There is a movement to reframe the life stage approaches to understanding transitions. Many theorists believe that the steps are valid for any age of adult experiencing a transition. Schlossberg et al. (1995) developed a framework that focuses on the processes that influence an individual to cope with the transition.

Schlossberg's Transition Model. Schlossberg et al. (1995) support a model of transition with three components: approaching transition (moving in), taking stock (moving through), and taking charge (moving out). These three phases are closely related to Bridges' model in that Schlossberg et al. phase of approaching transition means leaving something and beginning something new. It is at this stage where evaluation needs to take place regarding the impact the

change is having on the individual's life. Each situation is unique; for instance, it can be an anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event. Schlossberg et al. mentions that students will mourn the loss of goals, friends, and the previous structure, which is similar to Bridges' ending phase. Students have the need to become familiar with rules, procedures, norms, and expectations of their new environment (educational institution). The taking stock phase has additional set of factors: the 4Ss describe and categorize the strengths and weaknesses of individuals experiencing transitions: (a) situation (knowing the student's individual situation and what triggered the change); (b) self (personality, demographics such as socioeconomic status, gender, age and psychological resources such as coping, ego development, and self-efficacy); (c) support (relationships with family, friends, colleagues, faculty, advisor, and institutional support); and (d) strategies (direct action for managing stress and coping) (Sugarman, 2004). I examined these four strategies during my study to assist students with transitions and help them successfully complete their educational goals and become involved more in their environment. One element that this model brings to the discussion of transition models is the difficulty that educators may have when designing curriculum. Educators need to know their students and the model well enough to know if they are in the moving in, moving through, or moving on phase; adult learners will have different needs depending upon in which phase they are functioning. When developing a tailored curriculum for a first-year seminar course, enrolled adult business students who are returning to undergraduate business school will have different needs from one another. That is why it is important for the students of my study to be at the moving in stage where they are trying to learn and understand the policies and the procedures of the institution. At this stage, the need to learn the expectations of being a student and gain confidence in their decision to retuning to higher education. The adult students in the course will not have the same needs when they

progress to the moving through phase. In this stage they will need more support from faculty and the institution. The categories appear more rigid than Bridges' in that he sees his model as process that individuals may be in two stages at a time. This theory is primarily classified as a life-span adult development theory, which identifies the impact that change has on students of all ages (Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) model was selected as the primary model from many other transition theories for a number of reasons. First, this model contains an understanding of adult students' transition to college. Unlike many of the models that focus entirely on the undergraduate traditional aged student, Schlossberg's work can be expanded to include adult students. Second, this model is associated with life-span adult developmental theory. Third, this model has been used in the field of higher education, psychology, and adult education, so many educators and administrators with an interest in student development, learning, and adjustment are familiar with Schlossberg's et al.'s work.

When designing a curriculum with adult learners for a first-year seminar course, this model is important for structuring the course materials for the first few weeks (moving in) to help assist students adjust to their new environment, followed by the remainder of the course assisting students in taking stock (moving through) the transition. Due to the lack of time in a semester, Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition model will not be fully utilized by reaching the final phase of taking charge (moving out). Since this study is working with incoming first-year students, the moving out phase is what adult students will be faced with during their senior year and at their time of graduation. At this phase adult students will have to evaluate their new goals for after graduation; however, it is beyond the scope of the course and this research study.

Summary of Models

Critical issues relevant to the success of the first-year adult students are addressed by all of the models. Commonalities recognized in these models are the student's need to let go of something or make sense of an experience, need for mentoring and guidance from faculty, and the adoption of new behaviors from the additional skills learned in the new environment.

Development cannot be assumed to be similar for each adult student. Having a myopic view of student development discounts the consideration that needs to be given to the environmental factors and culture. Of the models reviewed, Schlossberg et al., Sugarman, and Bridges' convey the first-year students' experiences best because it provides three understandable steps for students returning to college and to better design the curriculum to meet their needs as they are going through the adjustment. It begins with understanding the transition in order to

comprehend the change to the student's "roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions"

(Schlossberg et al., 2005, p. 26). These models were used to examine the transition that brought individuals to school and the transition one experienced within the course. Schlossberg's et al.'s model was used within the course itself and interview questions were designed with the model.

However, a new transition model that focuses on the specificity of the circumstances faced by the adult student could be developed to enhance the understanding of the college transition.

Much of the research generalizes the students' experiences and students are not a homogenous group (Aslanian, 2001; Kasworm, 1993a). Because of student's various social and cultural background, and different learning experiences, it is necessary for higher education institutions to meet student needs in order to help transition their students (Hultberg, Plos, Hendry, & Kjellgren, 2008). Furthermore, the literature thoroughly explores their reasons for returning to campus. The literature also gives educational suggestions for working with special populations

(adult students). However, the literature does not address what the learner needs from a first-year seminar course. How can a first-year seminar course provide the opportunities for adults to adjust to the educational institution? One learning theory that addresses change, adjustment, and learning for personal growth is transformative learning theory.

Transformative Learning Theory as a Facet of Adult Development

Much of the literature found in adult development theory can also be applied to adults who are experiencing a transition, which could be transformative from their perspective. The very beginning of transformative learning came from adults returning to school (Mezirow, 1978). Transformative learning theory focuses on how adults “make meaning of their life situation and, in turn, how meaning-making impacts development” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. 26). Transformative learning theory has roots in constructivism, understanding how individuals make sense of an experience, such as a transition. The learning theory was developed initially by Mezirow (2000), who called on the social philosophy of Habermas (as cited in Ewert, 1991) in order to discuss emancipation through education, which leads to enlightenment, self-knowledge, self-reflection, and action.

Most adult students returning to an undergraduate business program have experienced some type of disorienting dilemma, which allows them to analyze their situation and critically examine their assumptions and beliefs in order to come to the decision to return to college. Therefore, many students experience personal growth during times of transition. For some students, the transition to college is unquestionably a transformational experience (Kasworm, 2003a), but not all students experience the transition to college in the same way. As adult make life changes, these choices often lead to personal growth and development (Schlossberg et al., 1995). While development is not always transformative, transformation is usually always

developmental (Cranton, 2006). The developmental progression may create a disorienting dilemma. As Cranton (2006) explains,

When something unexpected happens, when a person encounters something that does not fit in with his or her expectations of how things should be, based on past experience, the choices are to reject the unexpected or to question the expectation. When people critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them, and act on the revised point of view, transformative learning occurs. (p. 19)

Transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000) has a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret an experience; people view the world through a web of values, beliefs, and assumptions referred to as a frame of reference. Through critical self-reflection, individuals are able to see their assumptions as fluid and not fixed realities. After experiencing a disorientating dilemma, one critically examines and reflects on meaning perspectives; it is through examining points of view and habits of mind that change occurs, which can be transformational.

Most researchers believe that the experience of transformation is a voluntary and individualistic process. There are other conceptions of transformative learning theory (Taylor, 2008). They can be divided into two broad categories: the individual and the socio-cultural approaches. The lens, closely associating transformative learning with individualist tendencies, can be seen in the works of Cranton (2006) and Dirkx (2000) and is referred to as a “psychoanalytic view” (Taylor, in press) is finding a deeper understanding of oneself through Jung’s term of individuation. A psychoanalytic view is a “process of individuation, a life-long journey of coming to understand oneself through reflecting on the psychic structures (ego, shadow, persona, collective unconscious, etc.) that make up an individual’s identity” (Taylor, in

press). The psycho-developmental view is the lens which is based on natural progression of developmental theory, is that individuals progress naturally through life and this progression is cumulative and transformative. However, the lens that would best assist my understanding of first-year students would be the psycho-developmental perspective (Taylor, in press). Psycho-developmental perspective is transformative learning “viewed across the lifespan, reflecting continuous, incremental, and progressive growth” (Taylor, in press). He notes that “there is an appreciation for the role of relationships, personal contextual influences, and holistic ways of knowing” (Taylor, in press). In order to help students make meaning of their experiences, educators are to serve as mentors for the transformational process.

Daloz (1986) clarifies the connection between adult development and transformative learning. He views transformational learning as a life-long journey to personal development and believes that adults returning to higher education are going through a developmental transition and often times seek higher education to “help them make sense of lives whose fabric or meaning has gone frayed” (Daloz, p. 4). In order to help students make meaning of their experiences, educators are to serve as mentors for the transformational process. While Mezirow (2000) sees transformative learning as a rational undertaking, Daloz focuses on the holistic and intuitive. According to Merriam et al. (2007), Daloz recognizes the importance of cognitive growth, while placing importance on the whole person.

Similarly, Kegan’s (1994) theories of adult development and transformative learning are from a constructive-development approach. He has developed five increasingly complex epistemologies, which explain the construction of knowledge across an individual’s life course. The trajectories of interest are his third (single system of meaning to all human experiences) and fourth (legitimizes a variety of meaning schemes). Many universities’ curriculums and

bureaucratic institutions operate within the third trajectory (Brooks, 2000) while it is within the focus of this study to explore adult students' self-regulation, identity, autonomy, and individuation commonly referred to in Kegan's (2000) work as self-authorship. Individuals construct knowledge for themselves and their environment through interaction and life experience. Kegan writes, "Adult educators may better discern the nature of learners' particular needs for transformational learning by better understanding not only their students' present epistemologies but the epistemologies complexity of the present learning challenges they face in their lives" (p. 48). Kegan has focused on the social, physical, and psychological context, in which an individual develops and the complex way of seeing oneself and the world; he provides a creative lens of the progression of learning and engagement with respect to a student's development and transformation (Kegan).

More specifically, to understand a first-year student's development, educators need to be conscious of all factors associated with the learner. Most adult students returning to an undergraduate program have experienced some type of disorienting dilemma, which allows them to make meaning of a situation, and critically examine their assumptions and beliefs to come to the decision to return to college. Many students have experienced a disorienting dilemma leading them to make the decision to begin a degree program.

Review of Empirical Research on Adult Students and Adult Development

There is some literature in higher education that focuses solely on adult students (Quinnan, 1997) in an undergraduate program (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). In reviewing the empirical literature on adult students returning to an undergraduate program, these studies were selected by searching the words *adult student*, *adult business students*, *reentry students*, *transitions*, *first-year seminars*, and *undergraduate programs*. In looking to examine the adult

student returning to an undergraduate program, adult students returning to graduate school were excluded. There were not any dissertations that were specific to this study that addressed the adult student returning to an undergraduate business program, nor were there empirical studies on adult business students. However, there were a large number of empirical articles (approximately 40) that focused on the adult learner in the undergraduate classroom; the large majority of these were quantitative (survey design) studies.

Adult Student Literature

Donaldson and Townsend (2007) completed an in-depth analysis of the seven higher education journals between the publication years of 1990 and 2003 on how the adult student was portrayed. The authors developed a system to classifying scholarly discourse about adult students comprised of four categories: (a) acknowledged but devaluated, adult student portrayed negatively (i.e. problematic or deficient) and used models for traditional-aged students to understand adult learners; (b) accepted, traditional-aged student and adults were seen and treated as different groups; (c) embraced, adult learners are valued for the experiences and contributions they bring to the classroom; and (d) invisible, traditional-aged students were treated as the entire population and adult students were not studied. Surprisingly, of all the 3,219 articles, only 41 (1.27%) discussed adult undergraduate students, and 33 of those 41 were empirical pieces. Of the 41 articles, 18 were about adult students in the setting of a community college. Of the 41 articles, 13 (32%) acknowledged but devalued the adult learner, 19 (46%) had an accepting tone toward the adult learner, and 9 (22%) embraced the adult learner. No studies were listed in the invisible category. According to Donaldson and Townsend (2007), and contrary to the majority of literature on adult learning, Lynch and Bishop-Clark (1994) suggest that educators not treat adult students differently than traditional-aged students. Donaldson and Townsend's findings

suggest that from the two (*Journal of College Student Development* and *The NASPA Journal*) of the seven journals expected to focus on adult students, only 1% of the 1,200 articles published between 1990 and 2003 featured adult students. From reviewing the limited empirical studies, which focused on adult students, they found that the same research questions appeared and were addressed repeatedly including questions such as, “Do adults do as well academically as traditional aged students?” and “Do *nontraditional* students have different needs?” (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

Perplexed by the reinforcement of their assumptions (that the adult learner is marginalized within the literature of select student development journals) prior to completing the study, Donaldson and Townsend (2007) believed their study demonstrated the marginalization of adult students and looked for reasons to explain the lack of literature concerning adult students. They suggested the lack of literature could be due to the fact that researchers have difficulty contacting adult students because of their multiple life roles and their lack of time to participate in a study. Yet, a more probable reason is that editor review boards and reviewers are serving as gatekeepers and do not see some research on adult students as rigorous and quality work (Donaldson & Townsend).

Donaldson and Townsend’s (2007) review is important because it begins discourse on the issues in the field of adult education. The first issue is that many publications focused on higher education only publish studies completed on the traditional-aged student and their work sends a clear message about what is still needed in the field. Secondly and in the following discussion, it appears that educators and administrators are not going beyond the knowledge in the field, as much new research on adult learners appears to be an update of the already over-explored areas

such as why adults return to college, their motivation, and the services and resources they request at the university or college institution.

Much of the literature from the 1970s, 1980s, and even 1990s may no longer be relevant to the current adult learner (Broekemier, 2002). More research is needed on today's adult learners. The most common topics which have been explored are how the adult learner compares to the traditional aged students – intellectually/cognitive (Justice & Dornan, 2001; Seger, 1989), academically (Kasworm, 2003a), coping skills/style (Morris et al., 2003), achievement goal orientation – intrinsic or extrinsic (Justice & Dornan, 2001; Morris et al., 2003), and age (Faust & Courtenay, 2002; Gomez, 1987; Ross, 1985), interaction/involvement leading to personal development (Faust & Courtenay, 2002), student persistence (Sandler, 2002), and wellness (Hermon & Davis, 2004). Other research focused on the differences between men and women; women were more commonly studied (Ross, 1985). However, only one study solely focused on men struggling to balance school, work, and family (Widoff, 2000). Generally, regardless of gender, it has been found that adult students lack confidence in their abilities (Cupp, 1991; Widoff, 2000). Engagement with other students and faculty were valued by participants in Kasworm's (2005) study where they believed they had a positive, respectful relationship with faculty members. In her findings Kasworm also suggested that "positional identity meaning making" (p. 8) found three themes: student beliefs of age-expected norms for involvement, academic performance, and the notion of the ideal college student. However, she is quick to point out that there is not a "monolithic adult student identity" (Kasworm, 2005, p. 16) and that educational institutions cannot assume experiences, beliefs, and actions of one adult student are true of all.

Adult students need a strong support system as noted in Chao and Good's (2004) study, in which a participant explained the importance of support from family, friends, and his or her professor. The students' negotiated work, family responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships to re-evaluate and re-divide household responsibilities because of the desire to return to school. Adult students responded similarly during an in-depth interview that they were juggling many roles and that they needed emotional support, approval, and assistance (Redding & Dowling, 1992). In discussion of their findings, Redding and Dowling stated that "women were slowly going through a radical perspective transformation" (p. 234).

Adult students have a need for curricula to be relevant (Chao & Good, 2004; Sandler, 2002). For example, in Sandler's study, the researcher found that students in a four-year institution needed the institution to be more attuned to their stress level and academic performance to feel as they were a part of the academic life. It is suggested the curricula and support services be offered are accommodating and pertinent to all adult students. Similarly, in a study completed by Donaldson, Flannery, and Ross-Gordon (1993), student perceptions of effective teaching were studied, and researchers found six attributes highly regarded by adult learners: to be knowledgeable, to show concern for student learning, to provide clear presentation of materials, to motivate students, to emphasize relevance of class material, and to be enthusiastic. More specifically, from their general findings, they explored gender and state that significantly more adult women students than men mentioned the importance of an instructor's flexibility with respect to students making modification for student roles and life demands (Donaldson et al.). The authors suggest that faculty consider the relevance of course materials, provide a welcoming learning environment, and offer active learning opportunities.

There is evidence that adult learners experience the classroom differently than their traditional aged counterparts (Kasworm, 1993a). Much of the literature is focused on the traditional-aged student that is transitioning from high school to college (Astin et al., 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989). Career transitions can be extremely stressful for an adult student and the literature recommends understanding the transitions and what influences the student's decision to return to higher education (Schlossberg et al., 1995) and tailoring the services to better meet the needs of the adult student (Aslanian, 1989; Chao & Good, 2004).

Motivations for returning to school. There is a tension in the field regarding a true understanding of the adult student (Chao & Good, 2004); some say that educators, administrators, and researchers have not clearly identified why adults have returned to college (Chao & Good). However, many authors agree that adult learners have different motivations than traditional aged students for returning to a college or university. Many believe returning to college is caused by a "trigger event" (Aslanian, 1989), career transition, (Aslanian, 2001) marital discord, (Chao & Good), life transition (Aslanian, 2001; Chao & Good; Redding & Dowling, 1992), or a reassessment of goals and priorities (Justice & Dornan, 2001; Mezirow, 1978). While others see adults, who have decided to return to the college environment, looking to update skills (Barker, Sturdivant, & Smith, 1999), enhance personal fulfillment and growth (Bauman et al., 2004; Hermon & Davis, 2004), and explain it to be simply an intrinsic reason (joy of learning) (Chao & Good; Shields, 1993). Younger students often cite external motivations (Chao & Good). Transition, for example, in Aslanian's (1989) study of 2,000 adult students, she found that 83% of the students were coping with a change in their life, while the other 17% noted wanting personal growth, socialization with other adults, and continual learning

and development. Almost 60% listed that a career transition was the reason for their return to higher education. Of the 83% who said they were going through a transition, they said it could be attributed to a trigger event. Aslanian (1989) states, “Transitions are the reasons for learning. Triggers set the time for learning. Both are essential” (p. 7).

The literature suggests those adults are more motivated than traditional aged students to succeed in college. For example, one study (Broekemier, 2002) compared motivation responses from adult students at four-year and two-year institutions. Regardless of enrollment (two-year or four-year school), the findings suggest that students rated getting a better job (with another employer) was the primary reason for returning. Job advancement with current employer, gaining general knowledge, and enhancing self-esteem all had a part in motivating them to return to school. Broekemier mentions various reasons adults return to higher education, which include developing personal relationships, a similar finding of Aslanian’s (1989) study, professional enhancement of skills, subject or program interest, increase financial status, dissatisfaction with oneself for not obtaining a college education, beginning a new career, and wanting to learn. He also looked at choice criteria and students responded that they wanted the school to have their desired program of study, convenient times for classes and location, affordability of the program, and faculty highly regarded as for quality instruction.

Another example of adult student motivation is seen in Bye, Pushkar, and Conway’s (2007) work which found that nontraditional students perceived themselves to have higher levels of intrinsic motivation with respect to their learning than traditional aged students; in turn, this may lead to students being better able to cope, and persevere to successfully complete their educational goals. The authors define intrinsic motivation to be when a student shows autonomy and self-directedness compared to extrinsic motivation which is simply a means to an end (Bye

et al.). Their finding is consistent with the finding of Justice and Dornan's (2001) study, which intrinsic motivation was the only finding to be different between adult and traditional aged students.

Since most adult students are intrinsically motivated to learn and are interested in relating curricula to their real life, co-researching was suggested by Bye et al. (2007), to promote active learning, autonomy, and to make learning more meaningful. Many authors are suggesting using a method like action research to work with adult students (Bye et al.; Graham & Donaldson, 1999).

Gender differences of the adult learner. Gender differences have been a focus of the literature on adult learners in higher education. Many studies focus on women who were reentering higher education and the difficulty of balancing full-time employment and full-time schooling (Mezirow, 1978; Redding & Dowling, 1992). One exception was a study of returning men (Widoff, 2000). Men stated that they were struggling to juggle finances, employment, responsibilities, and family. They expressed apprehension about returning to school, due to the monetary sacrifices and the ability to balance all areas of their lives. Many felt the need to be the breadwinner, and this role had been "temporary diminished" (Widoff, 2000, p. 31); they had self-doubt about their academic abilities, concerns about rusty skills (Sizoo et al., 1996) and the ability to meet the expectations in the classroom. Just as women have stated, men expressed being the predominant caretaker of their children, the need to be able to care for a child and complete class work at the same time, and the unrelenting struggle to manage the employee role and the student role. They reported missing time with their families, but saw their return to college as something that would someday make their children proud (Widoff). One of the most

well-known studies in adult education is Mezirow's study of women retuning to higher education. Mezirow (1978) interviewed women who were in re-entry programs and found:

That a disturbing event was often external in origin – the death of a husband, a divorce, the loss of a job, a change of city residence, retirement, an empty nest, a remarriage, the near fatal accident of an only child, or jealousy of a friend who launched a new career successfully. (p. 12)

Only one study focused on the adult business student. In 2003, Sizoo, Malhotra, and Bearson used the framework from a previous proceeding by the group of researchers, Sizoo et al. (1996), to suggest ways educators can minimize the anxiety of adult women business students. According to Sizoo et al. (1996), women business students (under the age of 25 and over the age of 25) make up half of the enrollments and more specifically, adult female business students make up 70% of part-time students who are over the age of 25. The study suggested that adult women business students are more motivated than their male counterparts, and the 2003 study indicated that adult female students experience high levels of anxiety, which can have negative effects on their success. The researchers administered *The Learning and Study Strategies' Inventory* (LASSI) to 196 adult business students enrolled at liberal arts colleges. Respondents were measured on attitude, motivation, time management, anxiety, concentration, information processing, selecting main ideas, use of study aids, self testing, and test strategies. Adult men and women had the lowest scores of anxiety and use of study aids. The only difference between adult women business students and adult men business students was on one scale – motivation.

The literature in adult education has grown significantly in recent years to emphasize life-span development (Apps, 1981) because the reality is that college students “will always be in transition” (Laanan, 2006, p. 5). Therefore, higher education institutions must continue to find

ways to meet the needs of all student populations by designing programs and services to “foster personal, intellectual, and psychosocial development” (Laanan, p. 5). Simply having a set of desired outcomes for incoming first-year students, whether traditional, transfer, or adult, and expecting a common experience, is not given the students the orientation they need. Currently this is how the first-year seminar course is modeled—on the traditional student needs. This model does not take into account the student’s vast different experiences and needs; it is the intention of my study to design a first-year seminar course with adult students to better meet their transition needs.

Program needs. Various studies have been completed on the needs and requests of the adult student as well as the resources that would help facilitate an adjustment to college. In the past two decades, universities and colleges have become increasingly aware of their growing adult population of students and have been completing research on the perceptions of student’s requests for services and programs. Adult students have concerns that are different from traditional students not only in the classroom, but also outside of the educational setting. In order to better assist adult learners in the educational environment, which is often designed for the traditional aged student, many researchers have examined what educational institutions could do with respect to resources and services. At Texas A&M International University, 301 adult students were surveyed to determine what causes stress outside the classroom (Coppock, 1998). Along with students’ attending full-time classes, the survey indicated that 64% of them were working full-time or part-time to support a family with an income lower than \$30,000, and 29% had school-aged children. Most notably, maintaining a proper life balance was a struggle, as 79% stated they did not take care of themselves by eating properly or exercising regularly. These students expressed difficulty in balancing their responsibilities of school, work, and family. The

data from this study indicated a need for expanded services in health education and counseling for these students.

Findings from Stetson University in Florida, which surveyed adult students, showed the importance of supportive services to assist adult students on the campus (Frederick, 1997). These students indicated the following needs: a commuter lounge, social activities that would make them feel a part of college life, study groups, stress management classes, financial planning, study skills instruction, and emotional support groups (Frederick). One program that has been implemented to assist students in dealing with many of these issues at many colleges and universities across the country is the first-year seminar, or orientation course, to aid adult learners and traditional students in adjustment, development, and success.

Suggestions have been made in the findings of numerous studies to introduce counseling services to adult students (Bauman et al., 2004; O'Connor, 1994) in order to facilitate the adjustment to higher education. O'Connor found that adult students financed a large percentage of their educational experiences. This suggests that knowing about the resources of the Financial Aid Office on campus may be helpful in securing adult student grants, scholarships, or loans.

Since many of the students are managing multiple life roles, many authors have suggested the need for increased hours for universities services, increase night classes and offering "general education and upper-division course" (O'Connor, p. 86) during evenings and on the weekends. These suggestions were similar to the Coppock (1998) study, Rollins, Enderlein, and Payne (2000), Brown and Linnemann (1995), and the study conducted by Frederick (1997) in which adults asked for increased hours for the library, bookstore, financial aid assistance, tutoring assistance, and computer labs. Also the focus group of students requested more understanding from faculty regarding their lives outside of the classroom, reduction in

university fees, since they are unable to participate, and less contact with graduate assistants and more contact with the faculty member (O'Connor, 1994).

To assist adult learners with their multiple roles, many educational institutions have considered providing child care for enrolled students. In a study completed by Johnson, Schwartz, and Bower (2000), they found that child care was the greatest concern and source of stress for adult women who were returning to take classes at a community college. One suggestion coming from the study was to have on-campus childcare available to adult students. Additionally, the orientation program was also mentioned as to how it could better suit the needs of the women; it was suggested that there be one specific for adult women students. This suggestion could be expanded to adult students regardless of gender and could have a different type of orientation tailored to meet the needs of this group of students.

The underlying belief is that educational institutions need to understand adult student characteristic, motivations, and needs, and therefore intervene by designing program to assist them with a successful transition and adjustment (Kasworm, 1990). However, according to O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) the transition to higher education has a large amount of literature, but the research on adult students' transition has been less investigated.

Participation and involvement. Participation and involvement was another popular area of focus within the literature. Participation and involvement can be time spent in the classroom, at the library, in the computer lab, group meetings for projects, student organizations (clubs), community volunteering (service learning), and on-campus events and activities. Vast differences exist among adult students and traditional aged students regarding campus involvement and participation in student clubs (Apps, 1981; Kasworm, 1990; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Many authors suggest that treating an adult learner like a traditional-aged student is doing

them a disservice (Barker et al., 1999) and call for educators to make changes. Some authors have made a call for action research as a part of campus involvement (Graham & Donaldson, 1999) and for a two-way communication and involvement between adult students, faculty members and university administration in order to better assist adult students with the transition to college (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

Understanding a student's past educational experiences (historical context) and their current experiences in higher education is important (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). In order to understand student experiences, O'Donnell and Tobbell interviewed students in the United Kingdom who had enrolled in a university program called *An Introduction to University Study for Mature Students*. Three themes emerged from their study: "peripheral participation, academic practices, and belonging" (O'Donnell & Tobbell, p. 317). Since the course was held at a different location, away from the university's main campus, this frustrated students. In addition, they were not able to access the university services (i.e., library and the café) because they were not given full access with an id card. Their second finding related to academic practices was how the open dialogue between students and the less formal relationships between students and faculty enabled interaction and learning. All participants spoke of feeling a sense of belonging, either to the university or the entry level course itself; some felt very comfortable in the university environment, while other participants stated that they were beginning to feel a sense of belonging. According to the research on adult persistence, the student feeling a connection to the university is an important factor in whether or not they will succeed at reaching their educational goals (Kasworm, 1993a; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Similar to Kasworm's (2005) study, students expressed the idea of being an ideal or proper student. This notion seems to be related to the peripheral participation and feeling like they probably would never be the

ideal student (O'Donnell & Tobbell). While other participants from the study said that their age made them feel differently from other students. It is implicit in the studies that educators have to be able to bridge the differences between students in the classroom especially if it is an intergenerational classroom environment.

In a study completed within the context of intergenerational classroom, Faust and Courtenay (2002) found that adult students were more likely to participate in the classroom than the traditional aged student and that the instructor's influence (i.e., teaching style and personality) were factors that influenced participation. Additionally, feeling comfortable in the classroom gave students in the study a sense of support and connectiveness. There was a consensus that this support positively impacts on student behavior in the classroom (Faust & Courtenay). Classroom involvement can lead to the successful development of adult students; however, in this study, age was not a factor in student development. This is important for retention purposes because in the first-year of college there is a 26.8% withdraw rate at four-year institutions (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). Similarly, Arnold, Kuh, Vesper, and Schuh (1993) found that relationships with faculty and interaction with other students were important factors related to student learning.

Adult students do not always interact in a similar manner in the classroom and are not involved in the same way as traditional aged students. While adult students are as less involved in or not involved at all with on-campus programs, Graham and Donaldson (1999) suggest that adults are much more involved with caring for family and have less time to participate in campus activities due to the family requirements, full-time jobs, and other sources competing for their time (Graham & Donaldson). Graham and Donaldson suggest that educators along with educational institutions find a way to gain student involvement. They urge "team projects with

other adult students, with problem-based learning activities, with novel ways to increase their interaction with faculty, with action research projects, with enhanced student-to-student interactions that foster informal relationships, or in integrated themes that address those broad outcome factors identified” (Graham & Donaldson, p. 7).

In the past, Astin’s (1993) theory of involvement, which is based on the traditional aged student, is used to explain how students can adjust to their new environment and get the most out of their college experience (Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, & Bradley, 2000). However, adult participant varies greatly from the traditional aged student, yet studies have shown that adult students report experiencing the same personal, social, and cognitive growth of their younger counterparts (Donaldson et al., 2000; Graham & Donaldson, 1996, 1999; Kasworm, 1990; Kuh, 1993).

Adults may compensate for the lack of time they are able to spend in out-of-classroom activities by becoming fully engaged in the classroom. They compensate by developing relationships with faculty and other students in the classroom. Participants mentioned engaging socially with other students in the class before, after, and during breaks in the class (Donaldson et al., 2000). They conducted interviews with 13 returning undergraduate adult students; all participants were 27 years of age or older. Women accounted for 80% of the participants, which is similar to the findings on motivation in Cupp’s (1991) work and Sizoo et al. (1996) findings. Students used words such as “goal-oriented” (Sizoo et al., p. 7) to explain their motivation to return to college and valued the support from family, friends, work contacts, and former teachers. Students suggested that they drew on past experiences and applied what they were learning to their current lives. They also noted having realistic views of their educational goals.

Adult students feeling a connection to the institution were the themes in Graham and Gisi's study (2000); they found patterns closely related to the previously discussed findings of the study conducted by Donaldson et al. (1993), who found six attributes highly regarded by adult learners. Graham and Gisi found what they have labeled as educational ethos, where the educator has respect for the students, is highly available, has concern and direct contact with students, and is involved in the learning outcomes of the students. Graham and Gisi use Kuh's definition in that it is a "belief system of educational principles and values" (p. 100) shared by the campus community. Beyond the institutional belief system, implicitly, it is a student-centered way of teaching and the student-faculty interaction is a vital part of the student feeling as if the college cares about them.

Adult Development Literature

In reviewing the literature of adult student development within the context of an undergraduate classroom setting, five dissertations were found with the following search criteria: *adult student, adult business, reentry students, transitions, first-year seminars, and undergraduate programs*. These studies examined the development of adults who were returning to higher education. Researchers were seeking to find the factors associated with the adult learner's decision to return to undergraduate school or how the needs of the incoming adult student are different from the traditional aged student. Common findings from the empirical studies were that students were returning due to a life transition or the inability to progress in a career without a degree. They also expressed having a fear of failure and concerns with their ability to cope with multiple life roles. Two of the five dissertation studies were quantitative (Gomez, 1987; Seger, 1989), two were qualitative (McPherson, 1999; Rapier, 1994), and one was a mixed method (Ross, 1985), using both qualitative and quantitative strategies. Other

studies found were dissertations which focused on GPA differences, utilization of services, and attrition rates (Gomez).

The following five studies are organized by the intention of the study in three categories: to determine if respondents could be grouped into age-related life stages, to understand adult student motivation for returning to college, and adult student's meaning-making experiences as they return to higher education.

Age-related life stages. Research exploring chronological age as a reason adults decide to return to school following a life transition was explored in Ross's (1985) study; she used the theoretical framework of Levinson's age-related life reassessment and mailed 143 questionnaires to women between the ages of 25 and 50. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 16 of the women. Findings suggested that all women viewed the career aspect of their life as a transition, and age only played a factor for women participants in their late 30s. One or more life events were reported by 62% of the respondents as significant in the decision of the women to return to school. Significant considerations in making their decision to return to school were the student's financial situation and moving geographically. Family-related events and other complex situations, such as critical life events, were the most commonly stated reason for making the change; therefore, there is indication that the external forces, along with the life reassessment, play a role in this group of women's decision to return to higher education. Ross reports that while this group of adult learners was highly motivated, they still felt a fear of failure, which was associated with multiple responsibilities and roles expectations.

With respect to adult responsibilities and role expectations, Gomez (1987) found that adult students who perceived themselves to be in a "period of stability, active purpose, basic satisfaction and open exploration, also reported school having a more positive effect on their

home and family life” (p. 113). Despite Levinson’s age-related life stages, which say there is a correlation between age and adult development, this study found no relationship between age and transitional periods (Gomez). A life-stage lens was used to explore student’s perspectives in Gomez’s study of adult students returning to college. A questionnaire was mailed to graduate and undergraduate students who were enrolled at a public university. Gomez received a 62% response rate (1,305 respondents) of which 59% were women, and 46% of whom were married. Over half of the 46% who were married also had children. Five dimensions were used for respondents to rate themselves on a scale describing which period best describes their life (e.g., a period of stability or a period of transition). These five dimensions were: stability, directionality, change orientation, satisfaction, and openness. Gomez’s research contradicted the life-stage theories in that she found no relationship between the respondent’s age and their perception of their stability or transition. As the respondents increased in age, they became clear of their purpose in life, more satisfied with their life, and more open to others. She found that those who were married had higher scores on stability, directionality, satisfaction, and openness. Furthermore, a difference was found between men and women – becoming a parent for women aided in their sense of direction and satisfaction with life; men however, did not report this same impact.

Adult student motivation. To understand the differences between adult students’ and traditional aged students’ reasons for entering college, Seger’s (1989) study used 108 recent high school graduates and 104 students from a community college, 25 years of age or older, who have had a break of three years or more in their education. Respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire which requested demographic information, reasons for returning to college, expectations, services needed, and fears that the student may have as they return to college. The

traditional aged students responded that their primary reasons for entering college were to prepare for a career and expand their social world. This group of students mentioned fearing how stressful college would be for them. Adult students predominately responded that returning to higher education was an outgrowth of a related life transition and that they were seeking personal growth.

Gomez's (1987) study findings were different from those of Seger's (1989) as well as not concurring with the literature on adult students that suggests that adult have difficulty managing various life roles. Gomez claimed that students with a strong sense of stability and direction reported higher satisfaction with school as it related to their other life roles. The literature on adult students generalizes those students who have multiple life roles may have trouble adjusting and succeeding in college. However, it should be noted that the sample included graduate students, who may be in a different situation than an adult seeking an undergraduate degree.

Adult meaning-making. In order to explore the transitions of returning students, McPherson (1999) used telephone interviews to ask 28 full-time adult students, 25 or older freshman, about their thoughts and experiences regarding their decision to return to a public, four-year institution. He found that students had experienced a life transition and realized that obtaining a degree would assist them with their career goals. These students were local residents and said location was a key factor in their decision to return to college. Participants said they wanted to attend a school where they could maintain their household and not disrupt their families. The women responded that they had always had the interest of furthering their education, but due to family responsibilities (marriage and children) it was not the priority, until their children were older. Others said that they did not return to school due to health reasons, such as realizing that they would not be able to perform the physical labor they were doing for

much longer or a current disability. Many felt that they would not be able to reach the career goals without a degree. Many participants noted how difficult it was for them to balance the workload of college attendance, and how important flexible course scheduling was for them. Also, participants were concerned about not being able to be involved in out-of-class experiences – especially lectures and events that take place in the evenings. Adult students reported that their professors made assumptions about their knowledge of concepts, and they often felt confused in the classroom. Many felt that their study skills were rusty.

The connection of education and transformative learning was the research area in Rapier's (1994) study exploring adult student's meaning making as returning undergraduate students. Specifically, it looked to see if adult learners had previously experienced a transformative experience or whether college was a pathway for transformation. The study is unique in that it investigated if there was a link between education and students' transformative experiences. Interviews were conducted with 20 freshman adult students (25 years of age or older) enrolled at a large public mid-western university. Of those interviews, 10 were female and 10 were male students. While adult students were looking to increase their marketability for jobs, they realized that their educational goals did assist them through transitions, which were current at the time of their participation in the study or had happened to them in the past prior to the study. A large majority of the students were exploring education as a vehicle for their transformation, while a smaller percentage were retuning to college because of a previous transformational experience.

Various studies have been completed on the needs and requests of the adult student as well as the resources that would help facilitate an adjustment to college. In the past two decades, universities and colleges have become increasingly aware of their growing adult

population of students and have been completing research on the perceptions of students' requests for services and programs. Additional themes from the review of literature were: age related life-stage examination, motivations for returning to school, gender differences among adult learners, programs needs, participation and involvement, adult meaning-making, and student identity. What was missing from the research is the sense of going beyond understanding students' experiences or transformational experience related to why they returned to college, in order to explore how to better assist with their adjustment to college in the classroom. In my study, I explored how a first-year seminar course could be tailored to better meet the needs of the adult learner.

First-Year Seminars

In the past three decades, there has been a significant attempt to explore the first-year of college students, including their characteristics, goals, self-efficiency, demographics, needs, involvement, and past experiences (Astin, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Upcraft et al., 1989). Even more research has been completed on the first-year seminar, looking at process, content, and assessment. What has not been extensively explored is the adult learner in the context of a first-year seminar course; in fact, only three empirical articles exist (Hatch, 2003; Julian, 2001; Welch, 2004). Only a small amount of information is known about the adult first-year student's transition to an undergraduate degree program. Also scant in the literature is the adult undergraduate business student experience in a first-year seminar course. Only one conceptual piece, The Smeal College of Business at Pennsylvania State University's First-Year Seminar Course, regarding adding four modules to the current curriculum (leadership incorporating teambuilding, workplace diversity, community service, and ethical behavior) was found (Sweitzer & Baker, 2006).

First, the role of first-year seminars will be discussed. Second, research studies on first-year seminars purposes, seminar content, and process will be reviewed. Third, the empirical studies and assessment of first-year seminars is addressed, along with a discussion of the findings of student involvement. Fourth, recommendations for first-year research and assessment are given. Fifth, a critique of the literature will be provided. Chapter Two will also be summarized.

The Role of First-Year Seminars

Beginning in 1989, these introductory classes were termed freshman *orientation course* or *freshman seminar*. Since 2000, the title of the course has been broadened to include transfer students and to progress toward the words *first-year* and away from the word *freshman*, which is seen by educators as gender specific. It was this change that began the new terminology of *new student seminar* or *first-year seminar* (Upcraft et al., 2005). A first-year seminar course is a credit or non-credit bearing course which assists the students in understanding the campus culture, available resources, and to hone study skills.

Researchers in the area of student development (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005) along with retention theorists (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993) have found positive correlations between student involvement, student learning, and their adjustment to college. Regardless of whether a student is a traditional or adult student, transitioning to postsecondary school is a stressful time for first-year students (Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). The research shows first-year students need a comprehensive first-year seminar course to facilitate adjustment and socialization to college. Data from the second National Survey of First-Year Academic Practices indicated that 94% of United States higher education institutions offer a version of the first-year

seminar (Barefoot, 1992). The content of these seminar courses vary; however, all appear to have the theme of transitioning the student to college and to foster student development (Anderson, Gardner, & Kuh, 2006). Many schools list that the primary function of the seminar is to assist new students with their academic and social development in order for these students to make a successful transition into college. A variety of the first-year seminars are offered with respect to credit hours and content. Some colleges design their introductory first-year classes to be an extension of orientation, while others are conducted for basic study skills or discipline-related material. Unfortunately, most colleges have one program for all first-year traditional students and do not take into account the life experiences of the adult students and their individual needs for the course.

Literature from ProQuest searches yielded dissertations on the first-year student and their experience in college, and some conceptual pieces for practitioners working with first-year students. Additionally, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition website and monographs (*The First-Year Experience Monograph Series*) assisted in listing further resources that support the first-year student.

Research Studies on First-Year Seminar's Purposes, Seminar Content, and Process

Successful first-year seminars are intended to assist students with the transition to college by acclimating them to the institution. Other goals of the orientation course are to prepare students for the demands of a specific academic discipline, and ultimately to aid in the retention of students (Upcraft et al., 2005). The Policy Center of the First Year of College suggests additional goals for institutions offering first-year seminar courses, such as the ability for the student to be able to self-manage, develop personal relationships, strengthen academic skills, and participate in active learning opportunities (Swing, 2001). Not all colleges mentioned their

intention to accomplish each one of the goals listed, however, more commonly the colleges indicated a desire for their students to develop personal relationships and increase their academic skills. Only one university in the research mentioned service-learning as an activity used to encourage active learning opportunity for students.

Many seminars are an extension of student orientation while others are designed to assist students with basic study skills (i.e., time management), and some schools link the seminar to a specific discipline (Barefoot, 1992; Upcraft et al., 2005). Frequently, the content includes career exploration, maintaining interpersonal relationships, identity development, health and wellness to manage stress, developing responsibility, understanding diversity and multi-cultural awareness, academic advising, writing, reasoning, and developing critical thinking skills (Swing, 2001; Upcraft et al., 2005). More infrequently, a student's faith and spiritual dimension are additional topics discussed (Upcraft et al., 2005).

Tobolowsky et al. (2005) reference the work of Barefoot's (1992) typologies. According to Barefoot, the first-year seminar course can fall into one or more of the following categories: extended orientation seminar, academic seminar with standardized content, academic seminars with adaptable content, pre-professional or discipline specific seminar, and basic study skills seminar. Institutions may also have a hybrid seminar in which the content of the course is a combination of two or more of the five elements previously mentioned.

Assessments of First-Year Seminars

Many researchers, through assessing the experience of students' college years, have made contributions to field of student development by helping educators and administrators understand more about a student's learning. The first-year seminar is often said to be the most researched and therefore assessed movement in higher education. In fact, the National Resource Center for The

First-Year Experience and Students in Transition states that since 1987, they have received hundreds of requests from graduate students and researchers interested in measuring the success of the introductory seminar.

Some suggestions for examining what happened are to look at students' skill development (i.e., writing and critical thinking), their ability to negotiate college (i.e., information resources such as counseling, and technology), students' understanding of academic life (i.e., study and organization skills), and their non-cognitive skills (i.e., self-confidence, teamwork, and multicultural understanding). Skills development can be assessed by reviewing student portfolios, exams, and written exercises. Verifying the students have negotiated college can be measured by overall retention and success rates. Understanding academic life may be assessed by reading student essays, journal entries and by conducting interview with students. Lastly, non-cognitive abilities can be seen by observing in-class activities, reviewing inventories and questionnaires, and conducting focus groups (Swing, 2001). As researchers look at what happened during the semester, they also can follow up with what mattered. Ways to determine what made a difference in the learning of students is to look at the students' performance in later coursework, asking them to complete a survey or a learning assessment.

Student Involvement Assessment

The first notable research study in the area of student involvement identifies the importance of students developing key relationships with faculty, collaborating with other students, and participating in an active learning environment that continues to design programs that promote success for students in college. Astin et al. (2002) have computed data from the findings of their 35-year study (1966-2002) by collecting 6,925,717 responses from first-time, full-time freshman attending 1,086 four-year degree-granting institutions. They studied the

trends of college students with respect to career interests, income levels of parents, religious preferences, cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, stress, and grade inflation, just to name a few.

In Astin's (1993) work, he found the single most important factor in student learning to be involvement. Astin considers involvement to be participation in study time, attending classes, personal computer usage, interdisciplinary courses, study abroad programs, college internship programs, racial and cultural awareness workshops, independent research projects, class presentations, clubs and other activities on campus. Astin (1993, 1999a, 1999b) believes that for student development to take place, the student needs to be actively involved in his or her environment. In reviewing the literature many authors believe that it is the educator's role to encourage students to become actively involved in college life through activities and organizations.

Other Ways to Assess the First-Year Seminar Course

The second notable assessment was completed in 2000 by The Policy Center on The First-Year of College (2002) and was the first comprehensive national survey of the first-year experience. However, 2 years later in 2002, the national survey went through careful revisions and this time emailed chief administrators asking whether or not their school offered a first-year seminar. The email surveys received a response rate of 23.7% and 711 institutions participated.

The most commonly reported type of seminar at four-year schools was the extended orientation seminar (60%) where the majority of the time only 25 students or less were enrolled in each section. From the findings of the survey, 91.2% students received credit for the seminar, 77.2% of campuses extended a letter grade, and 20.8% offered only a pass/fail option. Participating institutions noted that their course was offered for one-credit (35.4%) while others

said it was a three-credit course (29.6%); only about half of the participating campuses said that their seminar was required (46.8%). Conversely, at 20% of the schools that seminar course was not required. Surprisingly, none (0.0%) of the schools that participated said that the seminar was a core requirement while only (6.0%) said the course was a major requirement. The majority of the responses said that is a general education elective (57.3%) or an (free) elective (42.0%) (Policy Center on the First-Year of College).

Participants of the survey were asked to select the top three objectives for their program. It is important to note that depending upon the type of seminar course, course objectives varied significantly. The most commonly stated objective from 306 public institutions was for the student to develop academic skills (67%), while orienting the student to campus resources and service (67.3%), followed by encouraging self-exploration and personal development (41.8%), developing a supportive network/friendships (38.6%), create a common first-year experience (27.5%), increase in faculty/student interaction (28.8%), improve sophomore return rates (30.7%), to introduce a discipline (6.9%), while (4%) stated other. It is important to note that these totals do not equal 100% due to the fact respondents were able to select more than one response (Policy Center on the First-Year of College, 2002).

Course topics listed were: study skills, campus resources, time management, academic planning/advising, critical thinking, career exploration/preparation, college policies and procedures, writing skills, diversity issues, relationship issues, and specific disciplinary topic. Course topics at all schools (public and private) that were commonly selected were study skills (62.8%), campus resources (61.5%), time management (59.7%), academic planning/advising (58.1%), and critical thinking (52.3%). For public schools, the national survey found that study

skills, campus resources, and time management (71.9%, 69.3%, 69.0%, respectfully) had higher importance than at private institutions (Policy Center on the First-Year of College, 2002).

Participants were asked to list the outcomes of the first-year seminar. At public institutions, who conducted an assessment found that 71.8% of students who participated in the seminar continued to their sophomore year of college. There were questions not explored that are relevant to better understanding first year seminar for adult learners. For example, it would be interesting to see if a college had a first-year seminar course that was required for their core requirement and the student receive credit hours, would the administration see higher increases in retention than the schools reported in this study. A limitation of the study was that the survey instrument relied on the perceptions of a senior administrator and not the faculty member teaching the course or the students enrolled (Policy Center on the First-Year of College, 2002).

Empirical Studies

Additionally, Tobolowsky et al. (2005) studied 39 schools that conducted research on first-year seminars at two-year, four-year, public, and private institutions. For the scope of this paper, hybrid institutions that were public, four-year institutions were reviewed. From the initial 39 schools, 7 matched closely with the search criteria. These seven schools are: California State University (Northridge), Gallaudet University, Indiana State University, Kennesaw University, Edgar Evers of the City of New York, Millersville University, and Temple University. The findings of these schools' assessments suggest that a student's GPA who enrolls in the first-year seminar is higher compared to those GPA's of student not taking the seminar. A few schools go as far to say there is a statistically significant (positive) impact on GPA and that retention rates increase 2-10% when students elected to take the course. Most of the assessments are quantitative in nature and have a heavy focus on measuring retention. Student course

evaluations were most commonly used and few of the colleges used the data to influence decision making, and no action research studies were conducted as a follow-up, so there was a lack of closing the loop.

Many doctoral dissertations that have focused exclusively on retention have found similar findings to a study conducted by Tobolowsky et al. (2005). In reviewing 20 dissertations with abstracts pertaining to the first-year experience, half of them (50.0%) had in the scope of their study to measure retention. The other half had various themes, which will be discussed below. Of the studies measuring retention, eight used a quantitative design and two studies used data from more than one semester. Only one dissertation in this category had a qualitative design. This study used discussion and reflective journaling as part of the design and reports findings that first-year seminar has a positive impact on a student's "GPA, credits earned, social integration, and retention" (Bortman, 2005). Another notable quantitative study found that a student's GPA from high school was the best predictor of the student's academic success in their first year of college (Cox, 1993).

Some dissertation findings were not able to show the significance of the first-year seminar to student success and involvement. One of the studies was a three-year longitudinal study using student's grade point average (GPA), retention rates, and their score from the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ). Students in the control group were found to have the equal GPA's, retention rates, scores on the CSEQ as students in the treatment group (Hammond, 1994). Conversely, one study's respondents perceived their first-year seminar course for non-traditional students had positive impacts on student adjustment and involvement. It was estimated that 52% of the students to use campus services, persistence to graduate, and overall

satisfaction with the educational institution (Julian, 2001). It should be noted that the study's respondents were not students, but the educational institution's administrators.

Additional topics using the first-year experience in specific interest areas included a study of socio-economic factors (Beckles, 2004), stress and adjustment (Grackin, 1999), interdependence and confidence (Kleinman, 2003), assessment of reading, thinking, and mathematic skills (Kucharczyk, 2004), examining relationship between moral reasoning and identity development with respect to gender differences (Bruess, 1996), career decision-making maturity (White, 2006), and intellectual and ethical development (Arcady, 1989).

Only a handful of studies were completed with the adult learner in mind. Rhoades and Carifio (1999) suggested that adult students need a seminar designed specifically for the adult learner. From their findings, adults gave negative responses regarding the first-year seminar stating "they already knew" or "did not need" the course. These findings go against what the purpose of the first-year seminar is designed to do, which is to meet student needs. The study suggests that educators and administration need to make changes to the content and requirements for adults enrolled in a first-year seminar (Rhoades & Carifio). Additionally, only two dissertations were found that focused on adult students within the context of a first-year seminar or college orientation course (Julian, 2001; Welch, 2004). Welch examined adult learners' perceptions of a one-day orientations program offered by McNeese State University. His findings are similar to Rhoades and Carifio's who said that adults need a different kind of first-year seminar. In Welch's study the adult learner stated that the one-day event was ineffective as an orientation and that the content was not always relevant to their lives. Julian's was previously discussed as an assessment of administrator's perceptions of adult learner's experiences.

Recommendations for First-Year Seminar Research and Assessment

It is suggested that there are gaps in the first-year research and assessment. Many university accrediting agencies seek verification on the success of the program by measuring that program goals and objectives are being met and seek ways to improve the process. If schools have their first-year seminar class as an elective, and not a major or core course, there may not be sufficient data to report to accrediting agencies. Many times the assessments that do take place are either poorly designed, not published or the assessments are limited to a semester. There is a need for a longitudinal research. The link between research and assessment to policy and practice of every day policies and their impact on student success is unexamined (Upcraft et al., 2005).

Swing (2001) gives a thoughtful suggestion to have the first data collection at the beginning of the first year and to follow up with an assessment at the end of the first year. Two additional collection points are needed and one may be at the end of the sophomore year or at the beginning of the junior year, and the last collection point at the end of the senior year. Pre-tests, post-tests, time-series design, multiple-regression analysis or multivariate analysis, are possibilities for measuring the success of the first-year seminar, just to name a few of those Swing mentioned.

Upcraft and Schuh (2001) also have an eight-part framework for aiding in the assessment of effective first-year programs. The assessment rubric seeks information on who participates, students' satisfaction, and common themes that are present to benchmarking a program to similar institutions. Additional survey resources available for campus educators and administrators are the first-year benchmarking survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and the Your College Year survey have become publicly available.

To summarize, transitioning first-year students are oriented to the college by being provided with information about college norms, required coursework, available resources such as a counseling center, career development, study abroad program along with clubs and organizations. It is vital that students adjust to their new environment and the literature shows that the sooner students become more connected to the program, they will have higher rates of succeeding and lower rates of attrition.

Critique of the Literature

The review of literature suggests colleges and universities' focus needs to not be solely on education and content, but the development of students. Experts in the field, such as Astin (1993, 1999a, 1999b), Gardner et al. (2001), and Upcraft et al. (2005), have recommended orienting the first-year students with an introductory class, providing them with the resources and skills necessary to be successful, assigning them a mentor and/or academic advisor, encouraging involvement within the campus community, and for administrators to strongly consider assessing the course for continued improvements. Many national surveys have examined what campuses are doing with respect to their first-year seminar along with important studies on first-year students -- The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Your First College Year Survey, and The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (Hunter, 2006). There are many stakeholders in a student's first-year of college as well as many challenges (Upcraft, 2004, as cited in Sweitzer & Baker, 2006). Some of these challenges are the lack of consensus on the content to be included in the course, along with meeting the needs of diverse groups of students (including adult learners), and focusing more on student learning than retention. Educators want to see that what they are teaching the classroom is effective and making a difference. Students usually have the goal of graduation and obtaining a promising career. It is no surprise that

educators in higher education have used this area to research for their dissertation topic, especially if they can complete a study showing evidence that first-year seminar have an positive impact on retention rates. Administrators want to be able to demonstrate that the financial decision to fund a first-year program was advantageous and is effective. Deans and presidents of educational institutions want to be able to prove to accrediting agencies while showing an increase in numbers retention. Many campuses have retention committees giving recommendations to their provost and president about what works in retaining students and how to have first-year students return for their sophomore year of school. It is no wonder why this is one of the most highly assessed areas and educators are beginning to know a lot about what other campuses requirements for the first-year seminar with respect to content, process, and assessment results. However, there are still gaps. Despite the literature on the increase in the number of adult students returning to college, the first-year seminar literature primary focuses on the seminar course from the traditional student's perspective (Belcastro & Purslow, 2006). The most obvious gap is finding the link from what schools actually do in class and their own individualized assessment of their practice. How does the adult student use what they are learning in the classroom environment to aid in their adjustment to college, development, and participation in the campus environment? More simply stated, what impact does the first year seminar have on adult student learning and adjustment?

Summary of the Literature

In summary, the purpose of this study was to explore transitional experiences of adult students during their return to higher education through an adapted first-year seminar course. This chapter reviewed three major bodies of literature: adult learners, adult development (transition) theory, and first-year seminars. The first section of this chapter explored adult

learners' characteristics and their educational needs in the first year of returning to college. Some of the findings were adult students have requests for different services and resources than traditional aged students, and adults returning to school had experienced a transition, which provides a foundation for the study. The second section of the chapter reviewed adult development (transition) theory since the research on adult learners returning to higher education. The empirical literature in this chapter was synthesized by themes of adult student characteristics and the purpose of the studies which are: age related life-stage examination, motivations for returning to school, gender differences among adult learners, programs needs and services, need for curricula to be relevant, the need for a strong support system, participation and involvement (teacher-student interaction), and adult meaning-making. Some of the major findings were that adult women are more motivated than adult men and traditional aged students, adult students do not fit into the age related life stage theories and, therefore, there was no relationship between age and transitional periods. The third section explored the literature regarding the first-year seminar for purpose, content, and assessment methods. The undergraduate students' experiences were highly assessed; however, gaps within the literature were action research not being used as a methodology, the lack of literature on business students, and the lack of literature on adults in a first-year seminar course. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology used in this study to assess the needs of the adult learner in the first-year seminar course.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This study used qualitative research methods, specifically an action research design, to explore the transitional experiences of adult business students during their return to higher education through an adapted first-year seminar course.

Qualitative Research Design

This study used a qualitative design to understand the experience of adult business students through rich description and development of themes surrounding the transition to an undergraduate business program. An underlying belief of qualitative design is that it uses practical knowledge to understand individual needs and interests in order “to coordinate social action to satisfy mutual interests and needs” (Ewert, 1991, p. 351). Through the use of language, meanings are drawn from common norms, expectations, and interpretations to explain complex social contexts and actions or events within a society. These contexts are too fluid and defy categorization and the interpretive approach provides an insight to how events and society’s norms and beliefs are understood (Ewert).

Qualitative research is inductive in nature and allows themes to emerge from the rich, in-depth data. The first assumption of qualitative research is that it seeks to understand how individuals experience and interact within the social world (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The adult learners’ adjustment to college life through the experience of participating in a classroom research study allows the students to share their life experiences and to show their uniqueness. This study explored transitional and potential transformational experiences of undergraduate adult business students as they returned to college.

Second, the researcher is the primary instrument for conducting the research and is not a detached, objective observer; instead the researcher becomes immersed in the study (Patton, 2002). The researcher must play two roles as both the researcher and the educator. It is through

this method that the researcher intervenes in order to solve a practice-based problem, while at the same time engaging students to be co-researchers. The students will also have two roles as students and participants. They will participate as a team and be involved in the curriculum design through participatory planning. The qualitative researcher works with the participants to uncover the meaning-making process of the participant. In this study, uncovering the meaning-making process was accomplished by reflection on experiences, class discussions, and participant interviews. Qualitative studies use a natural, interpretive approach to research. The researcher is the interpreter using inductive methods to uncover the personal nature of the research context. Qualitative research studies the personal nature of meaning-making experience. It does not generalize the participant's experiences to all human experiences and perceptions. The "meaning" is central to the study; the participant is encouraged to be an active participant in the study as the researcher seeks to build rapport and credibility with the participant (Creswell, 2003).

The third assumption of qualitative research is that it is inductive in nature. It is through the work of the researcher that he or she is able to construct main concepts and theories from uncovering themes and categories (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Often when there is an undeveloped or emerging theory, qualitative research is utilized (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This is relevant to this study because there is not a model that has emerged to assist educators who are teaching a first-year seminar course with adult learners in the classroom. The purpose of qualitative research is to capture or interpret the perspectives of the participant in their social setting rather than begin with a theory (Creswell, 2003; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). Therefore, qualitative research designs can effectively "permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents" (Patton, 2002, p. 21).

Last, qualitative research is unique in nature because it contains rich narrative from participant interviews, document analysis, and fieldwork (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In addition, qualitative research can not be reduced to one-dimensional thought; understanding a participant's social world is much more complex as it is the essence of his or her reality of the lived experience. Researchers look at the historical and social aspects surrounding the context and realize that a participant's background shapes the way he or she interprets the experience and how those views are formed through interaction with others. The researcher is looking at the complexity of the participant's view of the situation being studied and does not want to constrict the meaning of the experience by attempting to define categories (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative inquiry "assumes that there are multiple, changing realities" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 101) and that participants are able to express their views (Creswell, 2003) and construct knowledge (Ewert, 1991). It is within the purpose of this study for participants to use this knowledge construction for their own personal development and to actively engage in action research by assisting the researcher with designing a first-year seminar for adult business students.

The classroom context used for this study provided opportunities to collect and analyze descriptions and reflections from the participants. As Merriam and Simpson (2000) summarize:

Qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an *understanding* of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process (rather than the outcomes or product) of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience. (p. 98)

From the literature on the intention of first-year seminars, researchers need to understand through the eyes of the students their career exploration, identity development, interpersonal

skills, stress management, reflection, coping with the transition to college, campus involvement, critical thinking and reasoning skills – looking at what mattered to adult business students and what has had an impact on the students’ educational development (Astin, 1993; Terenzini & Reason, 2005; Upcraft & Kramer, 1995; Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005; Upcraft & Gardner, & Associates, 1989).

A qualitative research method was chosen for two reasons. First, the research study focused on one university’s first-year seminar course and its impact on the transitional experience of a small group of adult business students. Second, the lack of relevant literature directly related to the topic is deficient and exploring an in-depth analysis of potential transformational experience for students will add to the literature base. Furthermore, this study provided the greatest opportunity for adult business students to become engaged in the construction of knowledge, to understand their own transition to higher education, to facilitate an understanding from the adult business students’ point of view as to why they have chosen business as their program of study, and to determine the adult business student’s experience of the first-year course. In this study, these purposes were accomplished through an action research design, as discussed in the following section.

Action Research

Kurt Lewin (1946), a social psychologist and educator, is credited for coining the term “action research” and his writings intertwine with John Dewey’s (1938) work of learning from experience. Dewey believed that education is the key to social change, democracy, and freedom. He believed that freedom allowed members to become socially conscious individuals who are looking for growth and development. Both Dewey (1938) and Lewin explain the importance of reflective practice through ongoing learning and development. However, the goal of action

research is to improve practice and develop individuals; therefore, not all action research is necessarily conducted to transform practice and the study participants (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Action research appears in a context where people want to make changes thoughtfully, usually after critical self-reflection. Reflective practice (Schon, 1983) in action research is crucial and is designed as an activity to bring about change demonstrating where research and practice intersect (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Smith, 2007). It emerges when individuals/educators want to examine where they are now, how ideas/curriculum came to be, and how, in educational practice, things might be changed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Action research has been adopted in various social and organizational settings such as business, organizational development, education, social work, criminology, nursing, and public health for problem-solving (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Smith, 2007).

Action research is “designed to develop new skills or new approaches to solve problems with direct application to the classroom or other applied setting” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 122). Therefore, action research methodology was the most appropriate in order to determine how something occurs within a particular context (adult business students’ transition to undergraduate business school) and at the same time how educators can improve the first-year seminar to better meet the needs of these adult business students.

Action research has four distinct attributes, making it unique from other forms of inquiry. Those attributes include: a) building relationships with participants enables collaboration in a democratic manner; b) seeking to understand *how* and to solve a problem, which in turn requires a collaborative effort if change is sought; c) developing interventions; d) requiring researchers who are enthusiastic about their topic, context, and students/participants (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stringer, 2007). These four characteristics of action research are consistent with this study,

which was to understand the adult students' transition to undergraduate business school and intervene with their experience in a first-year seminar course. As the instructor and researcher, I shared my own career paper with students which helped build rapport and relationships with the students (participants) so that they felt more enabled to participate.

To solve the problem of the first-year seminar curriculum being tailored to traditional aged students, participants determined what changes were needed to the curriculum. Since action research studies are completed by researchers that have passion for their students, my own experience of working with incoming, transfer, and adult business students for the past 5 years is my life's work. My goal as an educator is for students to learn and become actively engaged as they adjust to college and meet their goals for education and their career. Action research is not just problem-solving but a collaborative effort to improve practice for all who are involved (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Action research for the purpose of this study was a combination of practical and emancipatory perspectives as they both have the intention of intervening (Quigley & Kuhne, 1997). The practical orientation to action research is inductive, interpretive, and inquires about outcomes for immediate practice based-change, while emancipatory seeks to improve the social world by empowerment, discourse, "seek[ing] generalized truths", and "deep structural or political change" through ideological critique of contextual awareness (p. 75). Kuhne and Quigley (1997) suggest that a practical approach is more commonly used in within formal education setting and therefore due to the constraints of the research context, (student receiving graduation for the course), this study was not solely emancipatory. However, it did have an emancipatory facet because the viewpoint takes on a broader perspective of the problem and

provides the most effective way to provide suggestions to administration regarding the adult's needs for a orientation or first-year seminar course.

The action research model that was used for this study was the model of Kuhne and Quigley (1997). Their model best fits the purpose of the study and my philosophy of education; Kuhne and Quigley state that “collaboration through action research provides a humanistic, adult-helping-adult decision-making process with great accessibility to practitioners, who wish to learn from practice and engage in knowledge production” (p. 77). Their model is based on one of the three knowledge categories of Habermas's (Ewert, 1991) work which includes technical (deductive reasoning in a controlled setting), practical (responding to practice related problems), and emancipatory (collaborative decision-making from group communication). Kuhne and Quigley (1997) advocate an action research approach which is practical and has a process containing three phases with six steps. It is similar to the four cyclical components: plan, action, observation, and reflection written about by other authors (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The first phase in Kuhne and Quigley's (1997) model is planning, which was used within the first-year seminar classroom to understand the problem associated with the existing course, define the projects, and to determine ways to measure the effectiveness of the newly designed seminar course to the previous approach. I worked with adult learners to discover new ways of teaching and learning by collaboratively planning the semester's topics and activities.

The second phase, the action component of the model, created more of a challenge because the action research design emerges throughout the implementation of the research. Therefore, prior to completing the study, it was not possible to predict the topic suggestions, requests of the participants, and specific changes made to the design of the course. The action

emerged from the planning session. I made suggestions based upon Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition theory, which attend to the issues that adult business students experience regarding transitions; namely, situation, self, support, and strategies. In addition, we incorporated College of Business established classroom curriculum topics to meet University regulations and AACSB requirements concerning the objectives of the course. Throughout the first-year seminar course, the participants were interested in exploring a variety of topic such as business concepts, planning for future semesters, resources available on campus, inviting guest speakers, discussion of current articles, and listening to students express conflict, stress and solutions for coping with returning to school.

As an icebreaker, the students wanted to spend time discussing their reasons for returning to college and we developed a curriculum plan for their academic career at the University, which better assisted them with scheduling future courses. In addition, students wanted to know more about services and program available to them, and gained assistance for updates in career development. They suggested inviting alumni and guest speakers to the class. Furthermore, they collectively came to an agreement, in order to better manage resources, and suggested alternative times for meeting. The majority of the class sessions were planned by the students regarding their interests and the overall approach to the course was to help adult business students develop interpersonal skills as they make meaning of their transition to college. Collectively, we implemented the change to our curriculum for the course and made observations based on the results. It is through observation, the researcher is permitted to document the process as it unfolds and make adjustments as needed to enhance the learning of the students. Observation and document collection occurred through using field notes, career paper, personal

communication on discussion boards and by electronic mail correspondences, written assignments, and during an audio recorded exit interview with each student.

The final phase, reflection, requires careful analysis of course documents and developing the concepts stemming from class discussion. As the researcher, I reflected in my journal on critical incidents and topics generated during the class time, while the students reflected on their own personal background and development or experiences they might have during our class time. It was through this process of both the researcher and the participants reflecting on ideas, which was cycled back, to repeat the spiraling process of planning, acting/observing, and reflecting.

Action research involves thoughtful consideration and facilitates the professional development of educators by giving a sense of self-efficacy, increasing knowledge about curriculum, improving teaching, and enhancing student learning. Undoubtedly, action research is a complex process; by collaboratively looking for ways to improve practice by seeking solution-oriented investigation, the researcher gives the participants a sense of connection and ownership in the process of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Mertler, 2006; Stringer, 2007).

Guiding Research Questions

Because the purpose of my study was to explore transitional experiences of adult business students who return to or who were beginning an undergraduate business program, two questions and two sub-questions guided the purpose:

1. How can we best meet the needs of adult business students?

- 1a. What are the reasons for the adult business student deciding to attend or return to an undergraduate program?

- 1b. What is the relationship between personal development and adjustment for adult returning business students as they complete a first-year seminar course?
2. How do adult business students experience university life, their identities, and work as they return to an undergraduate business school?

Participant Selection

This qualitative study used a purposeful sample of adult business students who were beginning their first semester at the University. Students at the University registered for their courses through the Student Information System (SIS) or by contacting the Extended Studies program. The participants self-identified and requested a section of the Foundations of Business Administration (FBA) course that is noted by the register's office (on the SIS) as a section for "non-traditional/adult students only." The course was able to accommodate a minimum of 6 students and a maximum of 20 students. Upon approval of the Dean's office, the student was scheduled into the class by the administrative assistant after meeting the criteria established for the study. The selection criteria for this adapted seminar class were those participants:

1. Were age 24 or older;
2. Were returning to an undergraduate business program (after a 2 or more year break from college and/or 6 or more years of separation from high school);
3. Had applied and been accepted by the university as a business major or who have recently completed the change of major form (and declared business as their major) and returned it to the Dean's office;
4. Needed to take the FBA course as a requirement for graduation;

5. Had an interest in completing a research project with the instructor of the course and were interested in assisting the design a first-year seminar course for future adult business students.

In addition, the participants had an interest in being actively engaged in their learning, development, and understanding one's own transition to college.

Setting of the Study

The University catalog description of the course states that the Foundations of Business Administration course:

Establishes platform for understanding of functional areas in business and how they work in concert for the benefit of the organization. Students will gain meaningful information and tools so that they may make informed choices with respect to their educational experiences and pursuit of a career in business. (University Catalog, 2007)

The FBA is a 1-credit interdisciplinary course designed with the following four objectives, which have been organized to benefit the student's development in the course and also to meet the standards of The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) to provide: (a) students with an opportunity to investigate their goals, interests, skills, and abilities so that they can make informed choices and meet their personal goals through a meaningful university experience, (b) the integration process by providing a platform on which to build student understanding of the different functional areas in business, how they work in concert for the benefit of the organization, and how this breadth of knowledge will benefit students in working toward and meeting their goals, (c) exposure to a breadth of university experiences, both educational and extracurricular, and to suggest ways in which students can

make these experiences work together toward accomplishing their goals, and (d) exposure for students regarding possible careers in business.

Currently, the regular FBA classes are held during the day at 9:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 2:00 p.m., which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the adult student who works full-time to attend. The course had never been offered during the summer sessions. Many times they are attending class over their work lunch hour or are required by their supervisors to take leave to attend. The current day schedule becomes a problem for the adult student because the FBA course is a core requirement for graduation.

As background information on the size of the adult learner population (25 years of age or older) and the number of night classes, The University's Institutional Research Department where the study took place has provided statistics. The latest statistics available were from the fall 2008 semester when there were 1,204 undergraduate class sections (university-wide) and 116 of the sections (10.4%) were offered at 6:30 p.m. or later. Within the College of Business, 16 of the 138 undergraduate class sections (8.6%) with a scheduled meeting time were offered at 6:30 p.m. or later. These data exclude "meets by appointment" courses in the fall 2008 semester. The total population for adult students was 406 with 176 part-time and 230 adult learners attending full-time across campus. There were 6,327 traditional-aged students with adult students across campus, making up 15.6% of the population. Within the College of Business, there were a total of 82 adult students with 43 part-time students and 39 full-time students. In the fall of 2008, there were 1,319 traditional-aged students within the College of Business with 82 adult students, who made up 16.5% of the population.

The classroom setting was an adapted course in a conference room at the University which accommodated the instructor/researcher and the participants (up to 20 adult business

students). Since the classroom of the traditional FBA course has 80 students in a stadium-like setting, it was important that a special section of the course be designed for adult business students. In addition, the class was planned to be scheduled for summer 2008 on a Tuesday and Thursday afternoons (3:00-5:00 p.m.) for 120 minutes where it is scheduled to meet twice a week for 4 weeks.

Due to the participatory nature of this study, the participants had an opportunity on the first class to meet and discuss their vision for the remaining classes. These ideas were used in the planning stage of the action research design. There is a need to make several changes the first-year seminar curriculum because the format and content does not meet the need of adult students. The current first-year seminar curriculum is described below.

Current First-Year Seminar Curriculum

Currently, the standard curriculum is designed for the traditional student. The course is designed in thirds; the first few weeks of class of the course are designed to acclimatize the student to the University setting. Technological aspects of the course, such as Blackboard, Student Information System (SIS), and email, are explained. In addition, campus resources such as Career Education, Career Development Center, Honors Program, Counseling Center, and the Learning Assistance Center are introduced. The second part of the course allows the students to explore majors within the College of Business. Students have a small reading assignment where they read about a certain field of business. Each week two to three majors are discussed for a total of nine possible majors: Accounting, Finance, Management Information Systems, Information Technology for Business Education, Marketing, Management, Entrepreneurship, Human Resources Management, and Supply Chain Management.

After students have an understanding of the functional areas of business, they design a 4-year curriculum study plan with the course instructor and their advisor to aid the students in knowing which courses need to be taken in future semesters. As part of the current curriculum all students learn about internship opportunities, create their own résumé, meet guest speakers who are often alumni, and learn business etiquette and proper business communication. The curriculum is highly structured and is tailored to meet the needs of the traditional student.

However, the interests of adult learners were quite different, and adapting to their needs requires flexibility in curriculum design. Many of the adult learners already knew exactly what they wanted to major in and many had a résumé. The adult business students wanted more workshop-type sessions which they designed. They suggested inviting guest speakers and campus resources, such as a library faculty member to present tools for doing on-line research, and counseling services. The Career Development Center was also invited to do mock interviews, look at their résumés, cover letters, and reference pages. They asked for additional time during class to reflect and discuss what they are experiencing as a part of being in the class. During the action research process, the adult learner participants determined which elements of the curriculum best met their needs and interests.

Data Collection

The data collection was performed over a 1 month period (summer class) and consisted of written documents such as a background career paper assignment, reflection papers, audiotaped class sessions, and informal exchanges such as a discussion board session on a Web-based Blackboard Learning System for asynchronous communication to discuss, comment, question, and encourage each other through the course. Additional data was gathered from

student communication through electronic mail, researcher's observational field notes, and at the conclusion of the course, an exit interview concluded the course.

Career Paper Assignment

The first assignment was discussed on the first day of class, which was a career transition paper. Questions were asked regarding the reason the students were returning to an undergraduate business program, and looked to identify any transformative experience, managing transition to school, and any concerns the students were having with their return to the University. The instructor of the course also shared her career paper so that students had an understanding of the nature of the assignment and to build rapport with the instructor for the 4-week course.

Reflective Assignments

In addition to the career paper, the participants were asked to write reflectively on their thoughts, questions, and feelings related to their experience of returning to undergraduate business school for the duration of the course. Time was allotted at the conclusion of each session to allow for reflection on the topics that would be discussed within the group. Writing assignments were a requirement of the course regardless of whether a student decided to consent or not consent to the study. All students were required to complete the assignments so that the instructor/researcher was not aware of who had opted in or out of the study. The intent of this study was to allow the process to be as collaborative as possible given that the participants played an active role in shaping the course. It was through these assignments that participants assisted in planning classroom topics and electing new topics each week. Since action research is an on-going cycle of planning, acting, and reflecting, sufficient opportunities were given for reflection for the participants and researcher both during the class and outside the class. To

facilitate this, participants were asked to complete a critical incident questionnaire (CIQ) (see Appendix B) weekly to provide feedback on the topics, their engagement in class, and their learning. This CIQ was posted to Blackboard following the class session and reposted to Blackboard so that students could review the feedback and so that the instructor could make needed changes for the next class.

After gaining informed consent from the participants, at the end of the course a copy of the writing assignments were made by the researcher for her coding and the original was returned to the participant. The writing assignments will be destroyed 2 years after the research is completed. Additionally, as the researcher, I kept my own journal throughout the course to reflect on my perceptions of each class session and this was part of the triangulation of data. My own reflections were a crucial part of this study as they kept me grounded in the process, as recommended by Herr and Anderson (2005), who highlight:

Because of this lived complex reality, keeping a journal is a vital piece of any action research methodology; it is a chronicle of research decision; a record of one's own thoughts, feelings, and impressions; as well as a document reflecting the increased understanding that comes with the action research process. Beyond these, it is important to keep track of the ethical decisions made throughout the research process. (p. 77)

The researcher had strict procedures to follow in order to protect the welfare of the participants and complied with rules and regulations regarding research design of the Institution Research Board (IRB) at the researcher's institution and the Human Subject Committee at the University where the research took place. The researcher has received approval from both the Universities to conduct the study. To protect the identity of the study location only the approval letter of the researcher's institution is included (See Appendix A).

Additionally, the participants were assigned a grade from the instructor/researcher, it was imperative that the participants understand the nature of the adapted section in which they were enrolled. Participants were given the option to be registered in the traditional-aged classroom. They were able to make this decision with no repercussions. If participant decided to remain in the class, he or she was given an informed consent form. The students had the option to select whether or not they wanted to consent to allow the researcher to use their data in the study but still needed to complete the activities required for the course (Appendix C).

Classroom Discussions and On-Line Discussions on Blackboard

Upon the participants' decision to remain in the course, all students were shown how to obtain access to the Blackboard tools for the class, the students' personal email account, and the SIS for the class. Having an account of the discussions on Blackboard was much easier than writing notes about the research project simultaneously during class time. The postings were available for review by both students and the researcher/instructor. If a student requested, a class session(s) could be held on Blackboard instead of the regular face-to-face class time. The design of the course was consistent with action research due to the amount of participation and flexibility for the students. Since I was both the instructor and the researcher simultaneously, there was not a lot of time for taking notes. On one occasion, it was necessary to ask a student to be the scribe to record significant events, rather than relying on the researcher's notes alone. Class observation was also important for completing field notes. These notes were analyzed after each class session and compared to reflections written in the researcher's journal.

In addition, a needs assessment (Rollins, Enderlein, & Payne, 2000) to measure the value of campus resources for adult students was disseminated in the class. Completing the assessment

was something we had talked about as a group, and therefore I included it at the end of the Findings section in Chapter Four.

Exit Interview

The participants in this study were asked to take part in a 60 minute, semi-structured exit interview (see Appendix D) with the instructor at the conclusion of the course in lieu of a final exam. I set up exit interviews during finals week with each participant to discuss each student's development as he or she transitioned to college, and his or her understanding of how a first-year seminar course impacted his or her adjustment and learning. These exit interviews allowed the researcher to meet with each participant individually for 60 minutes face to face, to clarify comments from the exit interview and to allow him or her to further reflect on his or her comments. This data was collected and triangulated in the methods describe in the following section. According to Patton (2002), interviews are a way of discovering things we cannot observe and will allow each participant to expand on his or her background assignment, discussion board entries, and reflection regarding the course and his or her own development as being part of the study.

Data Analysis

Action research requires an ongoing observation, reflection, and analysis of the data throughout the research process. In order to draw conclusions from the data, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that it involves a process of developing initial thought patterns from the findings and verify them by comparing them to the data. All data collected from this study (assignments, interviews, observations notes, and reflection papers) was included. An inductive approach means the researcher is immersed in the details and begins his or her work by exploring, confirming, and ending with synthesis. The purpose of inductive design is that

themes emerge in order to examine perspectives and explanations of key findings to the study (Patton, 2002). The participants contribute by verifying the themes as I began to write the findings section; I periodically (every week) asked for their feedback as participants either during class time or through an on-line discussion board on Blackboard.

Due to the nature of an action research study, a researcher should expect to potentially shift the questions, methods and design, as the data is collected and analysis begins to unfold (Herr & Anderson, 2005). These shifts may occur in relation to the structure of the course, the topics discussed, and/or participant involvement. For action research, this shifting is undoubtedly an essential component of the continuous interacting spiraling of reflection and action; in turn data analysis is continuous (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stringer, 2007). Therefore, the trustworthiness of a qualitative action research study lies in the willingness of the participants to make meaning and intervene to create change (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). This is discussed in the following section.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The purpose of action research is to solve problems in an educational setting so that the researcher and participants are able to produce “context-centered” knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p. 97). Qualitative research has rigorous standards for a study to be trustworthy. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002), there are four measures: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following categories discuss how I have offered a transparent account of my research on these four criteria, my own background as the researcher, and how I established a trustworthy study.

Credibility

In order to establish credibility, there is a need for rigorous research methods, establishing creditability of the researcher, and for the researcher to value qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). Rigorous fieldwork produces quality data, and the credibility of the researcher is dependent upon his or her experience and credentials. The study was a 4-week course, which also added to the credibility since it was an intensive interaction with the students and the research. In addition, I have consulted with my dissertation committee advisor, who offered expertise in the methodology of action research, to establish further credibility.

A researcher's training, education, experience, integrity, and the way he or she presents him or herself to the participants all play a factor in establishing credibility. This is important because the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). As a researcher, I have had professional experience working with over 3,500 first-year business students over the past 5 years in the role of the instructor of the first-year seminar. This experience has given me the opportunity to work with students who have just graduated from high school, transfer students, and returning adult learners. In addition to my years of teaching, I have completed 3 years of doctoral study in adult education, and currently am a tenure-track educator with a Master of Business Administration (MBA). Additionally, I am able to relate to my participants as I was a first-year business student at the University being studied and would have valued a seminar focusing on the transition into the college environment. Also, I have been the author of refereed journal articles and various conference proceedings in the area of student development, academic advising, first-year seminars, student retention, and adjustment. The rigor of my methodology as well as my own credibility as an educator and researcher has been established for this 4-week course prolonged interaction with the students.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the findings could be applied in another context. However, as previously discussed, qualitative research is often not concerned with generalizability (Patton, 2002). The findings of my study are not generalizable to the experiences of other first-year students at various universities across the United States. Qualitative action research focuses on a unique setting, and it is up to the reader to determine how the results can be applied to similar situations. It can be assumed that the BSN 101 Foundations in Business Administration (FBA) course at this College of Business is quite different from that of other business schools. Therefore, students may have a different experience if they were enrolled at another institution. However, the study can be replicated; other schools may be offered insights by reviewing the findings and implementing suggested applications for adult learners in a first-year seminar course. To enhance transferability, I have developed steps other institutions could follow as they work with adult learners, who are experiencing a transition to college.

The reader is offered a rich narrative and thick description of the data collection techniques and methodology. The data collection techniques that were used in this study was a career transition paper, reflective writing assignments, and descriptions of the participants. Because of these varied data collection techniques and the description of the methodology, other researchers would be able to replicate the study, which ensures transferability in the qualitative research process (Patton, 2002).

Dependability

Measures of dependability look to examine the findings for consistency, quality, and thoroughness. It is a transparent, open account of the documentation a researcher records of the actions and decisions regarding the research process (Patton, 2002). The researcher provides the

methods of data collection and sufficient evidence to the reader. Additionally, the researcher describes the changes that took place in the setting and the effect the changes may have had on the study. To ensure dependability, I kept an audit trail. An audit trail is a transparent account of one's research. This detailed journal (log of events) will be a personal account of the events throughout the study and my experiences in the classroom; it was a transparent account of my rationale for my data collection. Recording the exit interviews, field work, and written assignments allowed an external researcher to examine the procedures followed to determine dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the issue of objectivity, which is problematic due to the fact that in qualitative research, the researcher shapes the study. Confirmability seeks to establish the genuineness of something. Knowing my own vested interest in the first-year seminar, I established two external experts independent of the study to audit my data collection and data analysis to be sure my own observations, interpretations concur with those of the students. My bias, in terms of my identity and positionality, influenced the study; therefore, I used audit trails and triangulation by looking at various data collection methods. In addition, I asked participants to complete member checks and look for misrepresentations in the description and analysis of data.

In action research, neutrality and objectivity are not necessarily desirable due to the nature of the study. Therefore, I had the students who were participating complete member checks to see that I have accurately reflected their experience. In following the action research design, member checks also allowed participants to make additions or changes in order to feel more engaged in the study. Also, I kept an audit trail of my research including my daily log

(journal) and maintain an awareness of negative instances by reporting those occurrences to accurately describe the research process so that it contributes to confirmability and credibility of the study. To determine trustworthiness, triangulation methods assisted in confirming that the data is represented fairly and is unbiased.

Summary of the Methodology

A qualitative action research method was aligned with the purpose of improved practice for adult learners in a first-year seminar course. In conducting this research, we participated in the cyclical design for personal and professional development. This chapter has discussed the methodology, specifically the action research design, participant selection criteria, setting of the study, data collection, data analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter Four will be devoted to introducing the participants, explaining the new design of the first-year course, and summarizing the findings of the exit interviews, course documents, participant reflection papers, and students' meaning-making process. Chapter Five will discuss the findings and recommendations. Implications for education practice will be shared and suggestions for future research will also be given.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter provides an overview of the study participants and class sessions as well as researcher reflections about action research. In addition, this chapter also describes thematically the findings from the study. The intention of this action research study was to explore how a first-year seminar course could be improved to better assist adult students and to understand more about adult learners' experiences returning to undergraduate business school. The action research study was completed over the summer in 8 meetings, 1 on-line session and 7 face-to-face meetings. The class sessions concluded with an exit interview with each participant. The research study was guided by two research questions and two sub-questions:

1. How can we best meet the needs of the adult business student?
 - 1a. What are the reasons for the adult business student deciding to attend or return to an undergraduate program?
 - 1b. What is the relationship between personal development and adjustment for adult returning business students as they complete a first-year seminar course?
2. How do adult business students experience university life, their identities, and work as they return to undergraduate business school?

The following section describes in detail the adult business students who participated in the study, observations from the researcher's notes from class sessions, conversations with participants as well as student reflection papers, and exit interviews. Also, information about the planning of the first-year seminar course as it relates to the research questions and the action research cycle is discussed.

Biographies of the Participants

The response from adult business students willing to take a summer course before the semester of their planned return was overwhelmingly positive. The intention was to recruit 8 to 15 men and women to participate. All 8 students but for one met the requirements for the course. At the onset the eighth candidate missed the first day of class, and after talking with the student, it was determined that due to her age (19 years old) and her being unfamiliar with business, she felt that the traditional-aged classroom would be more beneficial to her. She decided to withdraw and enroll in the course during the fall semester when functional areas of business would be explained over the course of 16 weeks instead of 4 weeks. Seven adult business students participated throughout the duration of the action research study. Not every student attended every class, but each student stayed in communication with the rest of the group. All missed classes were legitimate due to work or family obligations. The 7 participants, 1 male and 6 female, came from a variety of backgrounds, careers, and experiences and varied in age from 24 to 34.

There may be several explanations as to why there were more female participants than male participants. The first reason was that perhaps more female students attended the Dean's orientation for transfer students and more of the male students were unable to miss work and therefore did not hear about the opportunity to be involved in the course. The second speculation is statistically supported by the University where the study took place. The data shows that there are more female adult business students than male adult business students within the 30-34 age group. In the fall 2008 semester, adult female students in the College of Business represented five of the eight business students (63%) attending on a part-time basis, which was what most of the participants were doing as they all had full time employment while participating in the course.

and research study. Lastly, it was a true random sample – both female and male adult business students had an equally likely chance to be a participant in the study, but due to the small number, 1 male student represented 14% of the population. Having one more additional male participant would have been 29% of the population (to be proportionate), and three male students would have been 43% of the population, which is more than the male enrollment (37%) and would not have been representative of the population.

The 7 participants were asked to choose pseudonyms during their interviews; there were no additional stipulations. The following autobiographies were written responses from a career paper in which each student illustrated individual stories and his or her uniqueness. For the career paper, I asked students to tell me about their early childhood, their past employment as it relates to their return to school, and anything else they would like to share about themselves. While the group was diverse, the group members were more alike than different, and the following section details each participant's individual positionality and his or her original intention for returning to an undergraduate business program. For a more comprehensive view of each participant, Table 1 depicts each participant's biography and provides a summary of the adult business students' company type, job title, age, educational level of completion at the beginning of the study, and reason for returning to college. It should be noted that all participants in the study were White adults. Each of these participants is introduced in first person, using his or her own words.

Table 1

Participant Summary

Name	Company Type	Job Title	Age	Education	Reason for Returning to College
Amy	Department of Defense	Human Resources Specialist	26	Transfer Student (Senior – 111 credits)	She felt as if she was in limbo in her career and life, became engaged and education is very important to her fiancé's family
Clifford	Logistics Company	Operation Supervisor	34	Transfer Student (Sophomore - 51 credits)	Fulfill a personal goal, timing was right, and to advance within current company
Danielle	Banking and Credit Industry	Customer Service Representative	26	Transfer Student (Junior – 66 credits)	Unhappy in past careers (before her current position in credit/banking) and desired the financial security of an undergraduate degree in business
Faith	Veterinary Hospital/Animal Medicine	Veterinary Technician	32	Readmitted Student (Junior - 78 credits)	Wanted to accomplish a goal she began 11 years ago, taking charge of her career, and catalyst event – victim of crime caused reflection and life changes
London Izzy	Food Service Management	Director of Food Service	29	Transfer Student (Freshman – 21 credits)	Life-long goal, trying to do better for herself and her family
Sarah	Accounting firm	Staff Accountant	33	Transfer Student - Associates Degree (Sophomore - 48 credits)	Unhappy in her current career, new staff (with 4-year degrees) taking over her workload
Tiff	Hospitality & Restaurant	Hospitality Manager	24	Transfer Student - Multiple Associates	Security and wanting a better life than her family, her mother is disabled dependent on government assistance

Amy

“I was born on July 6, 1982, only one year and five months following the birth of my older brother, Joshua. My parents, both white, would probably have been considered lower middle class. They divorced when I was only four years old and had a lengthy custody battle that left my brother and me in the custody of my father. We visited my mother every other weekend during the school year and every other week during the summer. My mother immediately remarried and has been married to my step-father for twenty-two years. My father has been married twice since that time, and has been married to my step-mother for twelve years. With all of these transitions, my brother and I learned to be resilient and steady during times of change throughout our childhood. I think this is why I now tend to be very complacent and accepting. I have two-half siblings, a brother and a sister, from my mother’s second marriage, and I have two-step siblings, a brother and a sister, resulting from my father’s third marriage. All are younger than me. Needless to say, this large amount of necessary family blending has made me very adept at getting along with new people and fitting into whatever role is necessary for me to assume depending on the situation.

“I am the first generation of my family, on my maternal and paternal sides, to attend and graduate from college. This has had a lot of influence on my desire to complete my degree and it is probably as important to parents as it is to me.

“My father has worked a traditional “blue collar” job in manufacturing for over thirty years and has only missed one day of work in over eleven years. On the other hand, my mother has been a stay at home mom for most of her adult life, working sporadically in different fields. I tend to be very much like my father, and have always had a very strong work ethic. I have

worked since the age of fifteen and have held full-time positions since the age of nineteen.

While living primarily with my father and my brother for the majority of my childhood, I did not feel any gender issues, as my father treated both me and my brother as equals. I was never made to feel incapable of doing anything that my brother or father was doing, even if it was a traditionally masculine activity. This allowed me to never fear that I would be treated differently in any environment simply for being female.

“During high school, I was ranked 5th in my class, worked part-time, and still had many responsibilities at home. Prior to working, I earned an allowance of ten dollars per week from vacuuming, dusting, doing laundry and doing dishes. While working I still did all of those things, minus the allowance, and had to pay for all of my own bills, clothes, recreation, etc. This was a sharp contrast to most of my friends who did not work and had plenty of their parent’s money at their disposal. However, I am appreciative that my parents chose to teach me to be financially independent at a young age. This also furthered my desire to complete my bachelor’s degree, as I knew that my education would help me to remain financially independent and unburdened.

“I worked full time in retail for almost six years. That experience taught me to work with people from all walks of life. I learned a lot of important skills in that position that have carried over to every other position that I have held. However, I always felt very frustrated when customer’s treated me as if I were uneducated or inferior, which happened often. I guess some people see that type of work as substandard and make some cruel assumptions about people working in retail, even though many of the people I worked with had college degrees and took their jobs very seriously, and were very good at what they were doing. This too pushed me to finish my degree.

“When I first started college, I was majoring in psychology. Every time someone would hear what my major was, their first reaction was ‘and what are you going to do with such a degree.’ I never had an answer, because I really wasn’t passionate about the subject, and I really could not connect the dots between degree and career.

“Working in retail and working with a lot of business people through my position at OfficeMax, I learned that I worked successfully in a business environment. I was more passionate about the work and really had a much clearer line of sight between degree and career. Although I enjoyed business I knew that I did not want to go into management and marketing, especially not in a business where I would be working late hours and weekends. For me, I value my education and I value my family and my free time. Work is the way that I can allow myself to enjoy those things. I did not want a career full of travel either. I settled on Human Resources Management after discussing the details of what the human resources department at OfficeMax did. Even before I was hired at my current position, I was pretty certain that I wanted to work in the public human resources arena as opposed to a private sector position.

“There are times when I look back and wish that I had done things differently and finished college the traditional way, four years right out of high school. But then I realize, my life experiences that resulted from not doing just that, are what helped to steer me in the right direction and to discover the extent of my capabilities and what is right for me.”

Clifford

“I was born in May of 1974, on Mother’s Day, in Carlisle, PA and raised in the small town of Mt. Holly Springs. I was the youngest of four children, all of whom were significantly older than me. It is important to note here that by the time I was born, my parents had been

married for thirteen years and had started to stabilize financially, the majority of the early year problems with marriage had been conquered, and my siblings were all old enough to help out, thus making my home life and upbringing relatively easy. We could have been classified as a white, middle class, blue-collar family. My father was a forklift mechanic and my mother worked in a crystal plant as a laborer and neither of them had a high school diploma. We were not wealthy, but my father was raised to be very good with money. The bills were paid first, you paid yourself second (retirement), and then whatever was left over could be spent. We had a nice home on a decent piece of property; my parents both had reliable transportation, and everyone had new clothes on their backs. We also had some toys, like an RV, that bring back many memories of weekends away and family vacations. The fondest of these memories were the annual week long family vacations that were spent in Chincoteague Island, VA that I continue to share with my family today. As a child I never did without and could very well be labeled as spoiled. My parents had a very strong belief in God, our creator, and as a child I was raised in the church. My family was one of 3 charter families that started the Mt. Holly Springs Church of God when I was 10.

“By the time I was in middle school my brothers and sister had moved out to start lives of their own and I was essentially an only child at this point. By the time they had all moved out however, I learned some very important lessons from my brothers and sister about what not to do in life. Although I am not glad for the consequences that they had to pay, I learned much about the repercussions of drinking and driving, drugs, early pregnancy, and divorce. I learned enough to know that I was better off keeping myself out of trouble. My family was not a bad family by any stretch, but it is amazing how easily poor decisions can come back to haunt you. As my siblings moved from home, my mother returned to school to finish her high school diploma and

become a nurse. When she graduated from nursing school I was beginning my freshman year in high school. This self improvement of my mother's, as well as my siblings leaving the fold, resulted in a significant jump to the already solid financial standing in our home. Although money was not an issue it was not handed out freely and I was required to get a job if I wanted anything above and beyond the necessities.

"I started working part time jobs when I was 14 mowing lawns and sacking groceries at the local grocery store but during the summer following my sophomore year my father got me my first full time job working for the company that he worked for, [Company name removed]. I would ride back and forth to work with him, and he taught me much about dedication and a solid work ethic. My father's belief was that you did not miss work, for any reason, and that you agreed to work 8 hours a day for 8 hours of pay. Goofing off while on the job was stealing from the company. My father also believed that it was important to develop relationships and to have fun at work. These are all beliefs that have been instilled upon me that have served me very well in my life. This job was my initial introduction to warehousing and although it was a very labor intensive position that I held for 5 summers, I learned a lot that has transferred very well to my development into the operations supervisor position that I currently hold for that same company.

"During that same summer, I was sent to Oklahoma for a week to visit with my uncle who worked for the Federal Aviation Administration and was a private pilot who owned his own small airplane. During my visit with him I made the decision that I wanted to be a Professional Pilot. When I graduated high school I started at Geneva College for a double major degree in Professional Piloting and Business Administration. Leaving for college was my first experience of being away from home for significant amounts of time. I had been to many summer camps, but over the years I had really become a 'mama's boy' and these long stays from home took

some getting used to. I performed fairly well in college although I did not put forth my best efforts. When I left school after the fall semester of my junior year, my GPA was a 3.151. I was the only member of my family to ever attend a four year school and this is something that both of my parents were extremely proud of. My entire family showed me more encouragement and support than I had ever imagined. During that semester, my life was shattered when my father died suddenly at the age of 53. My entire outlook on life changed at that moment. I completed the semester and returned home to be with my mother and attempt to help her put our lives back together.

“I returned to working at [Company name removed] as a full time associate, where I have been ever since. During my climb to my current position, I have found that the virtues and ideals passed down to me from my father and the people skills that I developed and learned from my mother have a tremendous impact on a person’s ability to improve themselves within a company. Without my degree, I have been able to move into a position where a degree is a requirement within my current company as well as most others. Now I have hit a road block. I love my current role and I have no desire to leave my company, but I am looking for a new challenge, one that without a degree will be extremely difficult to accomplish. Supply Chain Management/Logistics has been an enjoyable and rewarding career for me to this point. This desire for new and different challenges is my main driving force for my need to obtain a degree in this field. Another driver on an equal level is that I recently had a scare where my current job was nearly eliminated and I realized through interviewing for other positions at other companies how difficult it would be to replace my current income without a degree. I have no desire to be wealthy, famous, or run the world, but I do have a desire to be challenged and to live this life comfortably. After the death of my father my whole philosophy on working has changed. I

work so I won't have to. Working is a means to an end. My desire is to gain enough money to retire as early as I possibly can. My father and my brother (who died at 41) were not able to do this. I want to be able to enjoy my wife, and children, and grand children as early and as often as I possibly can.

“My current desires in life are a long way from the ‘flyboy’ that I always had a desire to be and that I set out to be, but are not very far removed from how I was raised. Time, life, and God have a way of molding us into what is going to work best for us. In today's world, an education is extremely important to succeed and in order to continue to find new challenges within my chosen career; a degree is something that I must pursue. However, things are not so different from years ago when honesty, integrity, and treating others like you would want to be treated are still the backbone of what makes a person and can carry you farther than any piece of paper ever will.”

Danielle

“I was born on January 25, 1982 in the height of winter in Jacksonville, North Carolina. I was born on the Super bowl that year and my father had found it incredibly difficult to take himself away from the football game in order to transport my very pregnant mother to the hospital. The result was me almost being born in my father's station wagon, but instead I was born in the hallway of the hospital on the way to her hospital room.

“My parents had me when they were both older in life. My mother was a home wife and 43. She already had given birth to a 17 year old son and a five year old daughter. I was quite unexpected. My father was 45 and a retired Marine. He had served our country for 20 years and had fought in the Vietnam War. Even now, he doesn't talk much about the war but he has a

strong and deep abiding love for our country and the Marine Corps which has instilled in me the same patriotic respect for those who are willing to fight.

“My family was never rich. I guess in order to classify us we were white middle-class. We lived in a nice little cul-de-sac where everybody knew everybody else. My mother never graduated from high school. Instead she dropped out in tenth grade after she failed her Algebra class. She vowed never to go back. My father was never the greatest student and from his stories quite the little hellion growing up. He did graduate high school after a few classes and immediately joined the Marine Corps to earn his living.

“My father was never very religious. He believed in God but mostly from a distance. My mother on the other hand was a devout Christian and very protective over her children. My mother was so protective that my brother graduated high school and started at the local community college. He went two semesters and dropped out. He refused to work and my parents were trying to pay for him out of pocket which ended quickly when the funds became relatively unavailable. My brother is now 43-years old and living with my father who is still taking care of him. He had neither the desire nor ambition to work or leave the house. He feeds off my father’s money and it infuriates me sometimes. I grit my teeth and wonder what will happen to him when my father passes away. My father is older now and not in the best of health. My mother has since passed away five years ago and I vow that I will not be responsible for my brother.

“My sister, on the other hand, is five years older than me and acts like she’s ten years younger. She dated one bad guy after another since high school. We moved to the small town of Waynesboro, PA in order to get away from the rough crowd she had taken up with as a freshman

in high school. She graduated high school and married her high school sweetheart not so much because they were in love but because she wanted to leave the house and thought that that was the only way she could. She thought of college but found the idea nonrealistic. She thought that her only way was to marry herself out of the family. She had a baby at age 21 and was separated from her husband at age 24. She became resentful of her life and unfortunately her adorable little daughter seems to take the brunt of her disappointment.

“She continued going from one bad boyfriend to the next. She relied on them to buy her things and take care of her. She finally met a decent man, and she quit her job and moved in with him so that he could be the provider for her and her eight year old daughter. My sister and I are close, but I’m more distant from her because her personality doesn’t necessary mesh with mine anymore.

“Looking at my brother and my sister, I realized early on that I didn’t want that for myself. I always wanted children and the beautiful wedding and the white-picket fence, just like most women do, but I also wanted to have a sort of independence. It terrified me to think of being like my sister or brother and relying solely on a provider to take care of them. Well what if something was to happen and God forbid my father passed away or my sister’s boyfriend was in an accident. They would left alone and terrified because they haven’t the means to take care of themselves.

“I never wanted that for myself. I like the idea of being close to people, but I abhor asking for money. I only do it at as a last resort and haven’t done it in years. I made a few mistakes in my career life thus far. I made the mistake of working for the American Red Cross. I applaud everything they do for people and the individuals who do work there, but having it as

my first job after getting a certificate from Hagerstown Business College for phlebotomy was incredibly tough. It was an extremely stressful job where I easily worked 60-70 hours a week and drove three to four hours a day to get to the different blood drives. The money was exceptional but I realized I was extremely unhappy. I never saw my father, which was hard because it was just after my mother passed away and it was a very hard time for him. They were married 43 years. I also never saw my friends or my boyfriend. They were all supportive and my boyfriend would always make sure I had a nice dinner when I came home at 11:00 at night and had to leave the next morning at 7:00.

“I was so unhappy that I quit within four months. My boyfriend was surprised I lasted that long. He knew how miserable I was. I hated not having a job. That fear of relying on somebody overcame me and I applied for every job imaginable. I accepted the first job that I was offered which was as an Activities Assistant at a nursing home in Chambersburg. I didn’t mind helping the residents there but I was appalled at the lack of cleanliness at the nursing home and also how the majority of the nurses no longer seemed to care about the residents there. I found a lot of them mean and heartless and it angered me. I worked there for eight months and left to work at [Company name removed]. The main reason I started at [Company name removed] was because it was full-time, had health benefits and paid better than the nursing home position.

“Once, I started working at [Company name removed] I found the prospect of business appealing. I worked in the customer service field and found that I enjoyed helping people. It wasn’t in the same capacity as in the health care field, but I realized that I was still contributing. I enjoy the idea of making somebody’s day better. I know what it’s like to have a bad day. I was already taking a class or two at Hagerstown Community College and decided that I was going to

direct my studies towards business. I am now slowly getting on my way towards my Bachelors Degree. My father is extremely proud of me. I would be the only child who would have received such an honor and I know I will probably be one of the proudest people the day I receive my degree. I have worked long and hard and I am confident that I will get a good job that will further my career goals in the future.”

Faith

“Born in 1975, I was the daughter of the 1950’s. Although I was born into a family that was young and struggling to make end meet that is not the family I was raised in. I was born in Summit, NJ to a young native Jersey couple with no education beyond high school. I was the second child out of five and when I was 1 year old we moved to Hershey, PA. My father started a company shortly thereafter. My mother, never working a day in her life, raised 5 kids exactly how she was raised. Unfortunately she didn’t realize that the times had changed. My father was never around to help raise his children only to reprimand them and sign over his weekly paycheck to my mother. I spent my life trying to get my father’s attention by playing multiple sports and doing well in school. Sadly, the only time anyone got my father’s attention was after you got less than a B on your report card or if you lost the game for your team. It took me a full twenty-nine years to realize my parents will never be happy for me and they will only be proud of me when I assume the role of the perfect 1950’s housewife with a successful husband with no history of marriage or any children, whose parents are still married and in love and influential in society, and we have our third of four children on the way, each one smarter and more attractive than the last. The expectations would not end there because there would need to be a large house with a white picket fence and 1 dog and 1 cat. I would love to say that my life has been molded by people that cared for my best interest but that would be a lie.

“I learned early in life that appearance was everything. The yearly trip to New York before school started to make sure that I was in fashion seemed normal to me. I always wore the latest styles and that was what defined me, or so I was taught. When I entered college I realized that parents said ‘I love you’ to their children. I realized that my parents filled the void of love expression with money. At that point I realized that this was not who I wanted to be. As a freshman in college I began to soul search. It was that same year that my mother explained to me that ‘I sent you to college to find a husband or marry someone with a degree so that you never have to work’. The thought of being ‘taken care of’ for the rest of my life made me shudder. This was the conversation that would ruin my college career.

“I entered my junior year of college working weekends and holidays at my hometown veterinary hospital where I had worked since the age of 15 because my boss was a friend of my father. I realized that I would stop trying to work ten times harder than the other students at [University name removed] because of my un-diagnosed ADD that my parents denied that I had. I welcomed my 1.91 QPA and dismissal letter. I felt free from my parent’s judgment. I failed as they knew that I would and now I could live my life. I got my own car, dog, and apartment. I then began working for Merrill Lynch, a job that I worked very hard to possess. The phone call to my parents should have been the defining moment of my life. As the silence on the other end of the phone grew uncomfortable I heard ‘who’s gonna give their money to a twenty-four year old red-head?’ My heart will never sink lower than it did at that moment.

“After a year with Merrill Lynch I realized that it was not going to be the tool that would bring me the satisfaction that I anticipated. The next stop on my train to parental acceptance was the Community Banking Manager with Harris Savings Bank. This position made me smile because it gave me access to my parent’s bank accounts. I realized shortly after I took over my

branch that my parents closed all of the accounts with Harris. I felt as though this was the answer that I was searching for. I have procured higher positions with more respect than my parents had ever thought possible for their uneducated daughter. The only other avenue to attempt to gain the love that I longed for was marriage. As I entered my second day of the Hawaiian honeymoon I realized that absorbing the frustrations of my new husband through consecutive beatings was unacceptable.

“My 2 day marriage with a divorce procured by my father’s company attorney only solidified the fact that I was doomed to be the disappointment in the family. Therefore I moved to NC where I could no longer be an embarrassment to my family. I assumed the only role that I had ever been good at, I became a veterinary technician. After 4 years of soul searching, I reached a fork in the road. With a new found outlook on life and a sense of pride in the person that I had become I returned to my hometown.

“After multiple life altering events both traumatic and enlightening I obtained a sense of self. I chose to come home, complete my education, take charge of my life, and not be “the victim” of the horrific occurrences that have befallen me. I have obtained a strength that my mother’s awful statements cannot shake. I have become a rock. As a stable and solid object with a well-defined center I will succeed in college and in life.

“As I re-enter college the last 2 of my 4 siblings are graduating, one a doctor at the hospital of his choice which is extremely difficult to achieve, and the other being “my little sister.” This is my time now. I am going to begin my life. I am re-entering college for myself this time. With no expectation comes only the surprise of success.”

London Izzy

“I was born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1978. I was the second daughter of my parents. While my sister and I are not twins, we share the same birthday, just a different year. I don’t remember much about being a child; I only know what my parents have told me. We were lower class, we used to get boxed lunches delivered to us and I do remember having to eat powdered milk on our cereal. I always had all my sisters hand me downs and my jeans would always be high waters. Our family is of German and American Indian descent. My mom was raised in the Presbyterian Church, while my dad was raised in the United Methodist Church. When we were young my parents would drop us off and pick us up from Sunday school at the United Methodist Church by our house, but one day that stopped. When I was fourteen I decided join the youth group but when I was senior in high school I once again left the church due to being treated differently than others. Every summer my parents would take us camping at Caledonia for a weekend and Rehoboth Beach for a week during Labor Day. Growing up we lived on a farm, without the farm animals. We only had one neighbor that was my sisters’ age, so they hung out and I was the tag-a-long. We only had one television in our house, so we were always playing outside, making forts or making mazes in the fields.

“My parents both worked for the federal government, my dad was at New Cumberland and my mom was at Mechanicsburg. My mother never went to college and my father only took a couple semesters of college. While my parents both worked, my sister and I had to go to a babysitter and we had many terrible babysitters. I vaguely remember doing homework, but I do remember always being mommies’ helper. I would keep my room clean, wash and fold laundry, help cook dinner, do the dishes and even vacuum. I enjoyed helping out around the house. I

believe that is where I started my career in food service. I had very loving parents and they did the best they could do with what they had to offer.

“When I was in school, grades didn’t seem like a very important issue, I even had to take a summer school course during 11th grade. After graduation I left for college and in all the prior years of my life I was never taught about finances or what seems like any real life issues. I am still trying to get my finances right because I learned the hard way of how to be responsible. I believe these are the many reasons why a college degree is important to me and why I chose business and specifically Finance as my major.

“I joined the Army in 1998, when one of my friends decided to join I told the recruiter to sign me up. My parents told me that I made a big mistake, but I was going nowhere in life and I just needed to get away from the area. My parents now think it was the best decision I could have ever made. I remember my first duty assignment in Hawaii. I was far away from home, with no friends or family and I was starting to get home sick and depressed. I had an E-7 (Sergeant First Class), who didn’t think women should be in the military. I met my husband in the Army a few months after being on the island. I believe that’s when life started to make sense and I figured out what I wanted in life. I started being the best soldier I could, moving up the ranks and started going back to school again. We had two children while we were in Hawaii and they continue to be my motivation to get my degree and do the best I can. When I was discharged from the military I was hired at a retirement community in Carlisle as the Assistant Director of Food Service. I had a General Manager (GM) above me that at first we worked well together, but after a month of training me on how to do every job, he stopped doing any of the work himself. Two months later he was out of our unit and a new GM was hired. I was frustrated that they brought in a new GM instead of offering me the job, but I stayed. My new

GM, Christine, taught me about how to dress professionally, about catering and how to be a good manager. I really enjoyed working with her. She is the one who also taught me about the Certified Dietary Manager degree. She worked around my schedule so I could go to school and take the credential exam. They ended up firing her after two years and hired another GM (once again did not offer me the job). The new GM who had been with the company for a couple of years, needed me to train him on how to do the company paperwork, payroll and all of his job responsibilities. After two months of training the new GM, he still did not know how to do his job and I decided that this was not the company for me. I now work at another nursing home as the Director and even though I moved up to the position I wanted, I deal with other employees who are lazy and don't care about the job and the residents that we are there for. Instead of having a boss that doesn't know what they're doing, I now have an assistant who has been at the home for 28 years and still doesn't seem to have an answer to any question. I do enjoy working with the other department directors because they are knowledgeable, deal with some of the same issues and they are really good, caring people. Until I started this job at the County, I have had very little good work experience working with any males. They seemed to be always higher up than the females and they seemed to get away with doing things that a female couldn't. Since I've worked with the county I have had a better work experience with males (the few that work there). Our administrator, he is always looking for new ideas from us, asks our opinions on topics and just comes around to chat with the department heads.

“I chose to finally start my next degree because I would really enjoy working with others who have degrees and hopefully care about their job as much as I do. The regulations that come from the State Department of Health are getting very strict for the food service department. And with little funds and even less staff, some regulations are practically impossible without the help

of other departments. But the other departments are always worried about their own regulations to worry about another department.

“I have found that the reason I chose the major of Finance and why I continue college is because both of these didn’t seem priority in my life when I needed them. They are a priority in my life now. I may be late learning, but better late than never.”

Sarah

“I was born in 1975, in McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania. I am one of four children. I have an older sister, an older brother, and a younger sister. I do not want to say that we were poor but we did not get to go places or do things that other families got to do. We did not go anywhere for vacation. I don’t know if we didn’t have the money to go on vacation or my parents did not want to go or my dad didn’t have the time. He worked a lot so we could have money. Times were a little tough for us since there were six of us. I guess I could call the time that we had to drive my brother down to Virginia to a baseball camp as a vacation but we only drove him down and then had to turn around and come back the same day. I guess that was better than nothing. Every school year, mom had to take us shopping for school clothes. We all had to have everything new; we could not wear last year’s clothes even if they fit. I was taught to be ‘a good girl’ in the aspects of doing what I was told to do, respect my elders, share, and don’t be selfish. We were also taught ‘treat people the way you would like to be treated.’ I now know that you can’t please everyone even though you try to do so. Looking back, I see dad and mom only wanting the best for all of us.

“My father worked full time and my mother did not start working until all of us children were in school. I praise my mom for being a stay at home mom since she had to take care of the

four of us. I know how hard that was. She got a job at our school as a cafeteria worker. I believe she took that position so she could keep an eye on all of us. My father started out as a grocery bagger when he was 9 years old at the local grocery store and then eventually moved his way up to being a person who stocks shelves. He got offered a manager's position but he did not want to be responsible for any of the duties that came along with being a manager. If my dad wasn't working at the grocery store, he would be listening to the fire tones because he was a volunteer fireman as well. Neither of my parents went to college. My dad graduated from high school. My mother only completed the 7th or 8th grade. I remember asking my mom why she didn't complete high school, and she replied by saying that it was too hard for her to finish. Her answer always stuck in my mind, and that is why education is so important to me. I know she tried her best but I think she could have got some help.

“Because my mom did not complete high school, we couldn't go to her with questions on our homework assignments so instead the four of us children would help each other out or we would have to wait until dad got home. He would be the one that would know the answer because he has a good head on his shoulders. I knew from my mom not getting an education that I wanted a great career so my parents would be proud of me.

‘Where I grew up everyone pretty much knew everyone especially my dad. My mom and us children were always known as ‘you're John's wife and you're John's children.’ That has always stuck in my mind because I did not want to be known as ‘one of John's children’, I wanted them to know me by my first name. I started playing sports not just for that but because I love to play sports.

“I remember my younger sister and I would run up the street to the neighbor’s house, who we thought was a grandmother to us. She would take us places as long as she knew that dad and mom knew where we were. Before my sister and I could go we had to make sure our ‘to do list’ was complete. It consisted of homework, washing dishes, making our beds, and cleaning our room which wasn’t too bad because we shared a room so it usually didn’t take us long to clean it. Our rewards were either money or spend more time with this grandmother. It was my dad’s hard work and stating ‘if you want something in life you have to work hard at it but also to enjoy life too’ that have shaped me to have a strong worth ethic.

“I remember my first job. I was a secretary for The Tourist Promotion Agency. I dealt with a lot of clients on the phone as well as sponsored events. I worked hard at this job because it was my first one and I wanted to make a good impression. While I was working there, a client that was well known in our town asked me if I would like to be her bookkeeper. She owned a bed and breakfast business. I jumped at that chance right away. I knew that after this job that this was what I wanted to be (staff accountant). My employer believed in me because she knew my dad of course but she also knew that I was a hard worker. In fact, she told me I could use her as a reference and she also got me into a program called ‘Employment & Training’ where if I took a few tests and passed them then they would pay for my college. That is why I decided to go to Hagerstown Business College. When I got the ‘staff accountant’ position at [Company name removed] after graduation, I loved it because it was what I wanted to do. I absolutely loved going to work in the morning until the firm got bigger as in more clients so of course we had to hire more staff. They hired employees that had a four year degree or higher so then I lost the majority of my workload. That is another reason why I wanted to further my education so I can get the workload that I love to do.

“I am making the right decision to continue my education. With the assistance of my husband, this is the most important decision that I believe that I will have to make in my lifetime. It is going to be worth it. Once I feel that I am satisfied with the education that I want or can get then I will see where it will lead me. I know it will lead me to where I want to be. I know that I still need to grow more but with more education and many life experiences, I know that I will be a good role model for my son and for anyone else who knows me.”

Tiff

“I was born in the year 1985 at Bedford Memorial Hospital. Bedford is relatively small. The most known stores located here are Wal-Mart and Tractor Supply. There are a lot of local shops in town that sell everything from washer and dryers at S & S Appliances to Vera Bradley purses at Elaine’s Wearable Art. Bedford is located right off the turnpike and is only 14 miles from Breezwood, Pennsylvania which is a major intersection for travelers.

“Family is not something that I have little of. I like to believe I am blessed for the fact that at times I have more family than I know how to deal with. My mother’s name is Paula and my biological father’s name is Jim. My mother and father were married for six years and had two children together, myself, and my older sister, Kerri. Before I was even a year old, my parents divorced. My mother moved us in with her boyfriend. Whether or not my mother cheated on my father or if they ended things amicably I’m not sure. I don’t believe it is my business and to this day I don’t care to ask. She got remarried and then I had two fathers. The second’s name is Shane. Many people wonder how I have two fathers when I tell them so. I call both of them Dad and love them equally. As I told you I have been with my step-father since

before I was even a year old. He raised my sister and me and loves us as his own daughters. Naturally, we took to him as if he were our father.

“My mother and step father separated one week before my 18th birthday after seventeen years together. Today, my biological father has been married for five years to my step-mother Janelle. Janelle has two girls, Brittany and BreAnne. My step-father has also remarried. Her name is Shelly and she also has two daughters, Jill and Jenny. I forgot to mention my step brother Jason who is my step dad, Shane’s son. Now you can start to see what I meant when I said I had a lot of family. The good thing is that I get along with all of my family very well.

“When everyone asks why I decided to go back to school the term I most often use is security. I don’t want my life to be as hard as it was for my parents. My biological father, Jim, has worked at the local factory, [Company name removed] for the duration of his life. He makes a reasonable salary, but he still at times has to struggle to get by. My stepfather, Shane, runs his own business. Mostly he has dealt with logging, but in the last few years he has branched out into some excavating. My mother helped my stepfather out when they were together. She worked at home, or when needed helped over in the log yard running the wood processor. Some of the local guys will tell you that she ran the wood processor better than any man. Her and my father made decent money. We lived in a very nice log cabin which my dad built himself. We had a swimming pool, four-wheelers, and they drove nice cars. Most people, even till this day, believe that my dad has a lot of money. They are mistaken. Yes, he makes a moderate living, but all the equipment, machines, and nice vehicles he owns are accompanied by debt. The wealth he has is in his equipment. He doesn’t have loads of cash in the bank like everyone presumes.

“My mother has worked like a ‘man’ her entire life. She is very rough, tough, and can run almost any piece of machinery. Consequently, she has paid for her hard work. Today, she is permanently disabled. She has severe back problems. She put her body through too much over the years. She has good days and bad days. She can’t work due to the fact that she never knows what day will be a bad day. On her bad days she cannot even get out of bed. She is on more pain, depression, and other pills than I want to imagine. Her pills are what get her through each day. I am sorry for her. She went from a life with my father where they were alright when it came to money to now where she lives on social security and help from the state.

“My mother’s situation is a big driving force for my return to school. I want a better life. My sister is three years older than me. She has four kids and she is divorced. My stepdad bought a trailer, put it in behind his house, and basically pays for her and her kids to live. I watch lives that my mother and sister live and realize they both depend on someone else to live. That is not the life I want to live. I want to be able to take care of myself. You never know what is going to happen in life. Maybe I will get married to a great man and we will remain married for the duration, or maybe some unfortunate situation will happen to me. You never know. That’s why I believe you should be able to rely on yourself.

“Everyone wants to have a lot of money. The problem is people do not have enough ambitions to go out and earn it. I do. I want to be able to live a life where I’m not worrying about money all the time. I don’t want to live paycheck to paycheck. The only way I believe I am going to get that security is through education. Sure I could go get a job at the local factory being that I am a minority, but if something happens and I lose my job, where will I be then? No one can take your education away from you. You will always have it and can rely on it.

“Why did I choose accounting as the profession to pursue? I am a great math student. I enjoy numbers and trying things out. With that in mind, I don’t think I would get bored with my job. My accounting professor is actually the one who persuaded me into the accounting side of business. When I started back to school, originally, I was just looking to get a business degree. My professor, knowing how well I did in his accounting classes, told me of the benefits of accounting compared to just a business degree. I’m glad he had so much influence over me. The accounting profession seems to be the right choice for me.

“Since I have been sixteen I have been working. My first job was at Pizza Hut, and I worked there for six years. Working at a fast food restaurant can really put some perspective on your life. Mostly it puts perspective on what you do not want to do for the rest of your life. As much as the bosses and owners want you to believe they care about you, they don’t. You are there to make them a buck. I was promoted as high as I was going to go, was one of the best employees they had, and only made sixty-five cents more than minimum wage. I could barely pay the little bills that I had. I knew that place was not the place for me. I was capable of much more. I am a natural leader and can put that talent to much better use. My boss at the time was very negative towards my returning to school. My opinion of her only got worse over time. I believe she was jealous because she couldn’t finish school, and my opinion was that the job that she holds can be held by just about anyone. You do not even have to have a diploma to be a manager of a fast food joint. I have a bad attitude towards that whole experience. I would say it was a waste of my time during those six years, but it was a learning experience. I realized what life I wanted, and Pizza Hut had no part in it.

“So far my journey through school has been exciting. I started at the local community college, got three associate degrees, and graduated with a relatively high GPA. I learned a lot

about myself and what I am capable of. I can't wait to see what happens here at [University name removed]. I hope to do well here, and continue on as far as my education can take me.”

In summary, the diverse backgrounds and experiences of this group of 7 adult business students provided a rich source from which to gather information for the study. As a researcher, I was fortunate to find students who wanted to get a head start on their fall semester while at the same time working on an action research project. Students were open-minded about exploring their original transition for returning to college, their transition through the course, and the connection to their personal development. The findings provided by these adult business students are presented at the end of this chapter. The following section provides details about the action research process beginning with the planning stages and followed by the acting, observing, and reflecting stages spirals back to planning. Also, the next section describes the classroom sessions, reflection assignments, Blackboard discussions, and concludes with the exit interviews.

Overview of the Action Research Experience

Action research is an ongoing, non-linear spiral of knowledge, and as the class sessions unfolded, so did a cyclical pattern of knowledge creation – a curriculum for adult business students. As I (the researcher and the educator) examined student responses to the Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ), I could identify specific learning needs, or if a student requested more information on a certain topic, I was able to make adjustments to our syllabus for the remainder of the class sessions. This evolving design was consistent with the action research process and demonstrated some important findings for educators and administrators who work with adult students.

My dialogue with each student began prior to the summer course. The course offering was listed on the University's student scheduling website, and students as they were admitted to the College of Business received a letter from me explaining the course and the chance to be involved with a research project. I received calls and emails from students in early spring as the recruiting process began, and I developed a class list of students who were interested in participating and planned to enroll in the course.

Class Meeting One – Planning Session

The first day of class was held on July 22 from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the College of Business conference room. Since it was a small group, it was important to have a place to meet that was conducive to group discussion. I arrived 25 minutes early as I was eager to meet my special group of students. To my surprise, Tiff was already in the room. She appeared very nervous and was biting her fingernails. I introduced myself, and immediately she said, "I'm really nervous. This is my first class." I quickly consoled her and told her that we would have the most fun possible and still get class credit. Shortly after, Faith arrived; she was the student who had become very frustrated with the registration process. I told her that I was glad that she was here. She informed me that she had 10 emails of "getting the run around" to share with me. I requested that she keep them since it is good documentation of the struggles adult students have as they return to college and attempt to register for classes. (She later emailed me all correspondences.) All students were in attendance except for one, who I came to learn was a 19 year-old student who did not fit the criteria for the class or the study. After communicating with the participants, we discovered that four students did not know where to park and did not have parking permits. I gave them a visitor's pass for the day so that they would not receive a parking ticket. While the rest of us waited on them to return from running back to their cars, we

conversed to break the ice. After rejoining as a group and communicating with the participants, it was determined that two students had not gotten their student identification cards (campus photo ID). This prompted an immediate conversation about the need for a campus tour, which we did the next class.

Requests were made by the group for a time adjustment for the class; the 3:00 p.m. class time was causing some hardship (with respect to taking leave from their employer) for some of the participants. Collectively, Tuesdays and Thursdays were good days for the class; however, Faith expressed needing to quit her job if the class remained 3:00 p.m to 5:00 p.m. Tiff, who was commuting from Bedford, Pennsylvania, did not want the class to end too late. The most mutually convenient time for meeting was still Tuesday and Thursday, but we began an hour later; our class time would be 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. beginning the second week of class. I introduced myself, and I explained the importance of the first-year seminar and how the class was part of my research to include a curriculum that was tailored to the needs of adult students. So that the students could begin to get to know one another and I could quickly learn their names, I gave each student a 3 x 5 index card. I asked each to tell me why they were returning to the University, why they were majoring in business, their general goal for the course, the number of credits they had earned, their current job title, and something about themselves – family, pets, or hobbies.

To give the students some ideas for topics, students reviewed the upcoming fall syllabus and chose topics of interest and added some of their own. New topics that were added were: campus tour, Career Development Center (CDC) – intervention of cover letters, résumés, and reference pages; library overview and instruction; MBA and CPA programs; and meeting College of Business staff and administration. Two additional topics (financial aid information

and meeting the registrar) were mentioned, but later it was decided by the group that either these topics were no longer needed or the student with the request took care of the issue(s) on his or her own. The group unanimously decided to keep topics from the traditional-aged classroom such as study plans, Blackboard, internships, and a business etiquette discussion. They elected not to have a textbook or to read *BusinessWeek*, have a guest speaker on study abroad, or go into great detail on the different functional areas of business (majors). I asked for their input on possible topics for the remainder of the classes, and Amy graciously accepted the role of the group recorder. These topics were not audiotaped due to the fact the group was often times mobile (i.e. in the library computer lab or touring the campus). The topics, which emerged from the first day of class, built the foundation for the group as to what aspects of business we would explore, along with the topics for the students' adjustment and transition to college through the first-year seminar course. Before class ended, as a group we decided on the topics and agenda for the next two classes (Thursday and the following Tuesday).

I passed around announcements of campus opportunities, business club information, and the upcoming important dates for involvement in the fall semester (i.e., etiquette dinners, ice cream networking social). During this time, Danielle asked how she would go about changing her major, and luckily I had a Change of Major form. About a week later, after reading my note to her on my of her papers, she asked me to assist her with the paperwork to make the change from Business Undecided to Human Resource Management.

Next, students took a short assessment (Rollins, Enderlein, & Payne, 2000) that was created for the University. I was curious to see if the results of the University's assessment team from the year 2000 matched the current needs of my students. Results from this assessment are addressed in the Findings section of this chapter.

I left the room after briefing the students on the purpose of the study, therefore giving the students privacy as they decided to or against participating in the study. I began to set up the computer lab while Amy handed out the consent forms for the study and delivered them to the Dean's office, where they remained in the sealed envelope until grades were given at the end of the semester. Once the students had completed the consent process, we used the last 45 minutes of our time together to be sure they could log into their email, Student Information System (SIS), and Blackboard. Clifford and Faith were not able to attend the transfer student orientation day and therefore did not get their student IDs. By not having their student IDs, both students were prohibited access to the University's on-line tools including email, SIS, and Blackboard. The students' main concern was that their academic advisor was not yet listed in the SIS. This is not normally an issue the first day of classes in the fall because all paperwork has processed through by the end of August; however, with the course being offered in the summer, this was a first time for me to experience this issue. I assured the students that I would work with the department secretary to find out who each of their academic advisors was along with their contact information. I emailed the students the following day with that information. I wrote in my journal,

I find it very interesting with respect to transition that many of the students have already started thinking about the fall schedule and two declared accounting students (Tiff and Sarah) were thinking about the CPA/MBA!! Many activities were accomplished; however, the time went so quickly.

Before our next class, I had many planning activities to complete: I made a request for the CDC to visit the students, reserved a room at the library and set up an hour library instruction with a reference librarian, and posted an agenda for the next two classes to Blackboard. I was

feeling quite anxious as I usually have all dates set prior to the first day of class; planning the sessions a week ahead was against my usual way of instructing, but everything worked out. It was my own pedagogical compulsiveness.

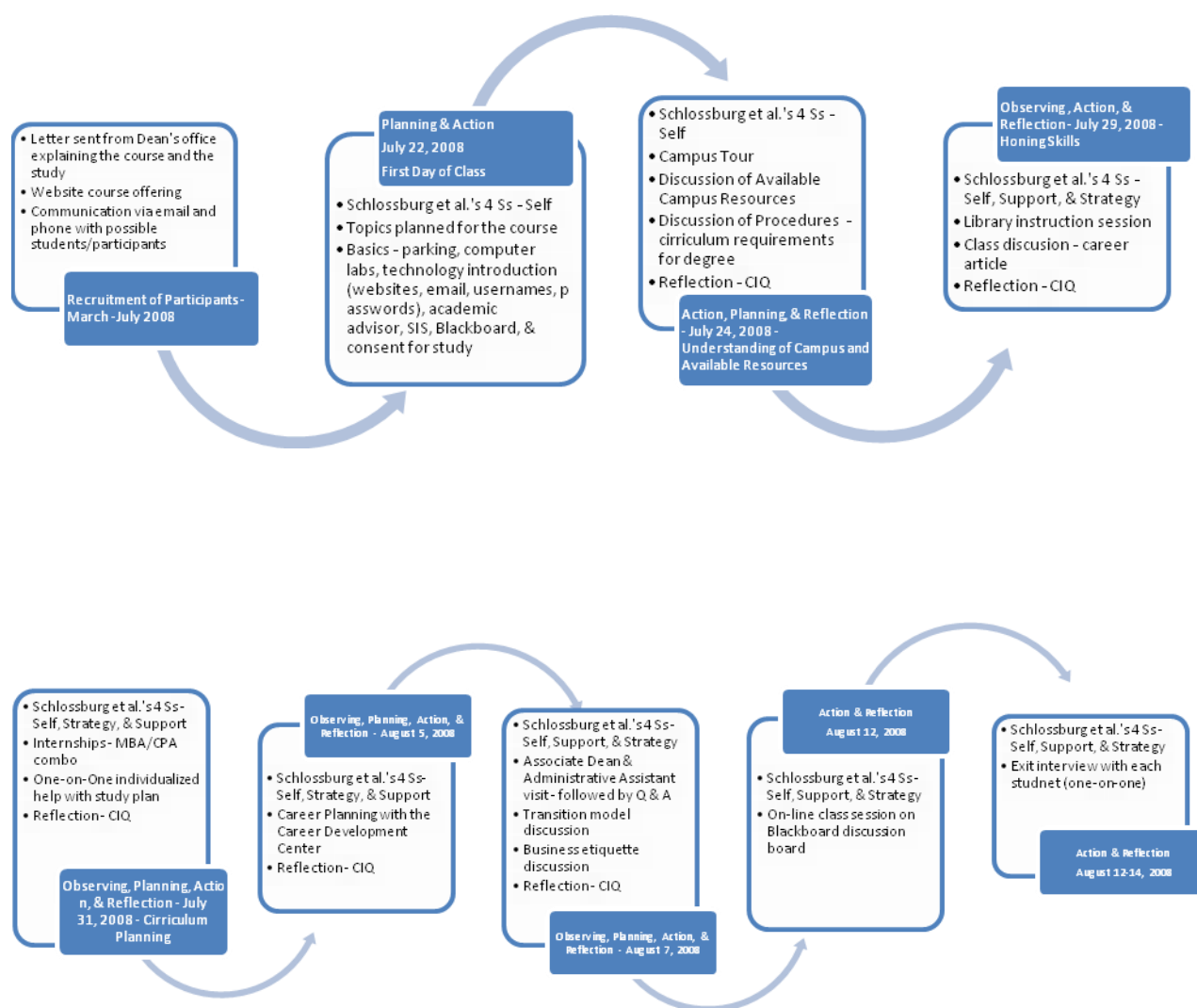
In summary, in this class, I saw the confusion students were experiencing during registration, anxiety for our first day of class, and how starting class one hour later helped alleviate stress level of students. I made a note to not overlook the obvious such as assuming new students have their student ID, attended orientation, know who their advisor is, know where to park, and are familiar with the email, SIS, Blackboard, and the University website. I also wrote in my journal:

I had no idea how important the campus tour would be for this group of students, and library instruction was also something they all asked to be added to the curriculum.

Other adult first-year seminar instructors may want to consider the importance of having students introduce themselves the first day; they really seemed to like doing the activity.

The experience of engaging students to participate in an action research project yielded its own significant learning points and offered a curriculum for future sections of the first-year seminar, Foundations of Business Administration (FBA). The following sections reflect the group's planning session, classroom sessions, on-line discussion board conversations, reflective writing assignments, and exit interviews will describe the various content and activities of the group during the study. Figure 1 offers a flow chart to represent the study's progression.

Figure 1. Study Session Flow Chart



Class Meeting Two – Campus Tour and Curriculum Discussion Session

Before we began class, I explained to the group that Sharleen would not be joining us this semester and that she thought it was to her advantage to take the course in the fall. Additionally, I asked if there were any corrections to our agenda; nothing was noted by the participants except for London Izzy, who told me she would be late the next class since she had a doctor's

appointment scheduled. They were eager to walk the campus and to receive the materials necessary for them to begin their study plans (see Appendix E). As promised, we took a campus tour. We began our tour of the building where all business classes were taught and business faculty offices were located. We went on to the operations center, which hosted the police station, parking registration, and the ID center. The ID center hours were very limited, and when we arrived, it was already closed. A supervisor and I spoke, and she agreed to open the facilities so that Clifford and Faith could obtain their student IDs. As we were leaving the police station Faith said to me, “You know everyone on campus and you know how to get things done.” We made our way to our administrative building, where the Financial Aid office, Student Accounts, Human Resources, and Registrar are located. At this time, I remembered that Tiff had asked about inviting a financial aid administrator to our class. She told me that she has already taken care of this issue, and everyone unanimously agreed that it was something that could be removed from our list of activities as we meet each week. We made our way to the library, which is currently under construction, but they were able to see the circulation desk where there is always a faculty member who specializes in library instruction willing to help. I showed them additional computer labs, rooms which they may reserve, and the Starbucks along with other cozy areas to study or relax. The last location we toured was the student union building where we went through the bookstore, food services dining area, and lounges. From across the street, I pointed to the dining hall and the nontraditional student lounge, which I later found out was one of Faith’s favorite places, when she sent me this text message on my mobile phone “Omg the NTSL is the best thing ever. I got so much done! Thanx again.” It took about an hour to complete the campus tour, and everyone was in agreement that they wanted to know how many classes they

still had to complete for their degree, so we went back to our conference room and discussed the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) Worksheet (see Appendix F).

As a group we discussed the topic of academic advisors, and I made sure everyone knew who their advisors were along with their campus contact information. Before even beginning the discussion of the core courses, major courses, and general education requirements, students were apprehensive about how hard the classes were going to be. They wanted to know which business core classes were going to be the most difficult. Some of the students had more classes from their previous institutions transfer than others. In fact, Faith had the most while London Izzy was concerned why many of her military credits had still left her with a freshman status.

At the conclusion of class, I assigned their first writing assignment, and as a group we determined that Monday by email at 9:00 a.m. would be when it was due. I asked the students to write about their decision to return to college, which was a way to help me answer my first research question from their own words. Here was their first written reflection assignment:

“Tell me about your decision to return to college. Discuss the factors surrounding your decision (i.e., life events), support from others, and your concerns returning. Do you consider it to be a transition? Consider the following quotes as you reflect on your decision to return to college.” I asked students to reflect on the two quotes from the works of Bridges (1993) and Schlossberg et al. (1995) regarding change and transition.

At the end of class, I gave the students 5 minutes to answer six questions on the Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ). I combined our first class meeting and our second class meeting on the same questionnaire. The responses were reviewed at the following class session (Class Session Three).

In my reflections from our second class, I noted that the participants wanted to know that someone cared about them and was serving as an advocate. Clifford and Faith were relieved to finally get their student IDs and all students were glad to know who they would be working with (their academic advisors) after the course was over, for their scheduling.

My notes in my journal prior to class mentioned the conversations held with students who had scheduling conflicts with future class sessions. I wrote:

Faith came to see me before class today to let me know she would be missing the Thursday, 7/31 class due to a flight to a conference. We discussed the various topics of upcoming weeks and adjusted the syllabus to accommodate her attendance.

Also, I wrote:

Amy emailed me to say she would need to leave the last 20 minutes of class on Tuesday, 7/29 to meet her realtor – she and her fiancé are looking to buy a home. She also was concerned about the training she had at work on Thursday, 7/31 and asked if it would be okay if she missed.

Up until this point, I was concerned about the students opening up to me in order to have successful data collection. My own nervousness was put to rest when, after class, everyone else had left except for Faith. I wrote in my journal,

Faith really opened up after class on struggles to return to college and traumatic life experiences – (a victim of a serious crime she later writes to me about) -- she was emotionally upset and I was so glad I always carry tissues in my bag. I naturally being to feel a special connect to Faith – I want to ‘take her under my wing’ because I want her to succeed this time back to college.

Class Meeting Three – Tuesday, July 29th Session

Having had the weekend to read the student's reflection papers, I found them well written, and most students "opened up." Unquestionably, the return to school for this group of students is a transition. One student in particular, Faith, may have had a transformational experience as the catalyst for her return. Sarah openly expressed struggling with her low self-esteem and unhappiness with her current employer because the firm was underutilizing her accounting experience and capabilities. Clifford expressed his transition to school as a precautionary measure – planning for job loss, fulfilling a lifetime goal, and motivation from his supporters along with a little happenstance. Amy also wanted to fulfill a lifetime goal and can count on strong supporters. Danielle started her career with varying interests, such as nursing and various other helping professions, and states that she will be proud of herself when she makes it to graduation. Tiff also has strong supporters and realized that returning to school may cause the loss of some friendships in order for her to accomplish her educational goals.

Additionally, I reviewed the results of the CIQ with the students. They found the following things helpful during our last two classes: Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) curriculum worksheet, the campus tour, learning the expectations of the class (i.e., doing the syllabus together), learning about general education courses, Blackboard, course scheduling, and parking rules and restrictions. They said that in future classes they wish we would talk about résumés, different majors, student clubs, and the MBA program. Having received this feedback, I went back to our list of items to rework an agenda for the following two class sessions.

For the third class, we met in the library and received library instruction from Professor Dobin. He had made an electronic folder, which was publicly available on the library page for

the students' future use. As a group we explored the various business databases and library resources such as RefWorks. Upon the closing of the library instruction session, the students were requesting that we begin looking at their study plans. Without my assigning the study plan, many students had already started working towards completing their curriculum plan. With the remaining time in class, I spent about 5 minutes with each student looking over his or her rough draft. At the end of class, students completed their perceptions of the class on the CIQ.

Some closing remarks I made in my journal: "I am feeling as if I am running out of time – this course could be longer.... It is much more difficult to teach a class from week to week than with a syllabus the first day of class."

Class Meeting Four – Thursday, July 31st Session

From the CIQ of July 29, the students said they were surprised by the amount of library information available on-line and they really liked the reference librarian, Professor Dobin, who is quite the comic, and the handouts I had given them with all contact information for the department chairs and secretaries. What they hoped we talk about in future classes was "professor styles and tendencies." One student wrote that he or she wished we would have talked more about business majors. Because the CIQ does not ask for the student's name, I asked the group if it was something they wanted, and except for Danielle they said it was something they did not feel that they needed. I wrote something I learned in my journal: "Just because a student is 24 years or older, does not mean that they have necessarily explored their career options and students still may need elements of the traditional-aged first-year seminar." In order not to hold up the rest of the group with career exploration, I give Danielle our FOCUS program website and some handouts I have collected over the years that focus on the daily activities of someone in finance, accounting, marketing, management, human resources, and

supply chain management. While all students said they did not need to take class time to go over the areas of business, many noted that they found the handouts useful. Students wrote in their CIQ that they liked learning about major dates for the networking social, etiquette dinners, and the career expo.

After we reviewed the results as a group from the CIQ, we had a brief discussion on individual learning styles and the importance of knowing how one learns. I encouraged them to monitor the time of day they learned best and if they are, for example, a visual learner or an auditory learner. We discussed the usage of technology and grading – the three exams per semester versus the instructor who uses papers and team projects and presentations to measure learning.

The accounting declared majors, Tiff and Sarah, heard me mention the first day of class the possibility having free electives in the undergraduate business program count towards credit in the graduate program, Master of Business Administration (MBA). “Today, the MBA director, Dr. Wolf, and her assistant Melissa came to visit the class to talk about the CPA/MBA program and internships, which is another program of which she is in charge.” I wrote in my researcher’s journal:

Students, who were very engaged, were asking questions about federal programs where students work as interns while in the last year of college and secure full-time employment after graduation. All students except for Clifford and Amy, who were complacent in their current careers and were furthering their education, were interested in internship opportunities and appeared to take valuable information away from the information session.

I also wrote, “I personally wished everyone was present because the material was so important.” So that Faith, who was at a conference, and Amy, who was completing a real estate transaction, had access to the class materials, I made packets for the missing students with Melissa’s business card, MBA handouts, and career expo information. Students were also given dates of internship workshops. I wrote in my journal, “Students were engaged during the session and seemed to appreciate the question and answer session. Danielle asked a lot of great questions.” Danielle was one of the less vocal students in the class. To have Danielle more involved and to be sure that she was getting answers to any questions she may have had, I asked her directly if she had any concerns.

We addressed some other questions students were having such as the website resources I provided along with individual questions on transfer credits and future coursework. It became apparent that students still had one-on-one questions regarding their individual curriculum plans, so I worked with all students again ensuring they had all course needed to complete their undergraduate program requirements.

For one of our future topics, we would be talking about résumés. Before the end of class, I wrote on the board some key things for the students to add to their résumés (which would add credibility to their educational accomplishments). One thing was the college “is nationally accredited by The AACSB.” We discussed some tips such as when they should include their GPA on the résumé, how many pages their résumé should be, and what to keep on or leave off. I showed them my own résumé as I would not have them complete an assignment that I would not do myself. We closed class by completing and collecting the CIQ’s.

For the weekend, I asked them to finish their final study plan so that I could look over it and provide feedback. In addition, Samantha, Assistant Director of the Career Development

Center, would be visiting the next class, so I asked those students interested in having Samantha critique their cover letter, résumé, and reference page to bring them to class on Tuesday.

Reflecting on the class, I noted that two students, Danielle and London Izzy, stayed an extra half hour after class to receive additional help from me on their curriculum study plan.

Class Meeting Five – Tuesday, August 5th Session

From the July 31st CIQ, students indicated that they liked discussion on how one could obtain an MBA and progress towards sitting for the CPA exam, learning more about internships, and the curriculum study plan. The students indicated that they were surprised to learn that assistance was available to help them apply for federal jobs, that attendance at an internship workshop session was required before obtaining an internship, and the large majority of internships are paid. The overall impression from the students was that it was a great class and that they looked forward to talking with Associate Dean Martin and Sandy along with our future discussion on business etiquette. During class, Clifford asked me how he would obtain a 2007-2009 University catalog. Other students had been given one at orientation, but Clifford was unable to attend due to work requirements. I made a note and brought him a catalog to our next class.

Samantha, the Assistant Director of the Career Development Center, arrived and discussed cover letters, résumés, and reference pages. She brought materials and provided copies for each student. Students really were engaged when she critiqued their résumés – London Izzy, Sarah, and Faith allowed her to use their résumés as examples. Students said they were excited about the CDC visit with Samantha and found it to be a valuable use of class time.

As we all informally chatted the last half hour of class, some interesting conversation took place. Danielle informed me that the materials I had given her and the rest of the class (on

business majors) had helped her make a decision on her major. She chose to major in human resources management (HR). I had a Change of Major form in my class folder and took a moment to assist her with filling it out. I wrote in my journal after reading her transition reflection paper:

I was not surprised to see Danielle select HR, I found that she liked helping people and when I provided her feedback, I recommended HR and Information Technology for Business Education (ITBE) as a possible major for her to explore.

London Izzy was debating among finance, personal financial planning, and accounting as majors. I explained more about how the core courses ACC200 and FIN311 would solidify things for her. I learned from her transition reflection paper that she had a military background and found the internship program to be great because of the opportunities with Letterkenny and Mechanicsburg Naval Depot. I gave her feedback about exploring finance (corporate finance) to personal financial planning (consulting with clients). She is considering accounting too but is only able to take one or two classes a semester. She was excited to know that she could use her free electives to work on a second major of her choice; she was considering double majoring in finance and accounting.

Clifford brought up a question regarding professor tendencies. We discussed the important of learning style, best time of day, and different philosophies educators may have about teaching and learning.

Prior to class, I wrote in my journal:

Faith emailed me all the correspondences on the trouble she had to go through to schedule the course for the summer term; Additionally, she emails to say that when she

types on the study plan template (Word document) that it was a empty file when she returns to it. We talked at lunch time today and she is going to come in early to see me.

As part of the class, the students and I discussed the appointment times for the end of class interview. Students gave me their preferred times for the last week of class. Clifford had a vacation planned well in advance for the last week of class. Clifford would complete his interview the following week.

As a group we began the advising quiz, which was not graded. It was a document that I had given to the students to answer some of the most common questions asked by the students to the Associate Dean's Office. We discussed the document and students seem to be glad to know the answers to these commonly asked questions (see Appendix G). Students gave me additional information on the nontraditional student assessment; details will be discussed in the Findings section.

Since we were nearing the end of the course and the beginning of the fall semester, students also had questions about Fall Welcome Week, and, as a faculty member, I had no idea what they might be referring to – they quickly told me about the activities for the week before classes started. Students were wondering if it was mandatory and if they should attend, which led to them feeling passionate about discussing their experience at the transfer orientation. They said except for the meeting the Deans and learning about the opportunity to take this class, the orientation was tailored to an 18-year-old student. They had many examples; one in particular was the dorm tour. I asked them to address Fall Welcome Week with the Dean when he visited the class on Thursday.

We planned for Thursday's class because as a group we decided to have a class from 3:00-6:00 p.m. on Thursday and doing a on-line one hour session through Blackboard to make up for the scheduled on-campus Tuesday class.

We briefly discussed an article related to career that are "hot" and students say how supply chain management, accounting, finance, and marketing were listed as the upcoming jobs are in the business field. As I note from my journal, "the students seem encouraged to see how their skills will be in demand." We ended class with students filing out their responses to the CIQ so that the future class sessions could be planned by finding out what the participants wanted to talk about at the next class.

After class, Faith came to see me and I printed the PowerPoint on Marketing for her which was posted on Blackboard. By looking at her menu of programs on her laptop, we discovered that she has Word but not PowerPoint. I also showed her how to access the wireless Internet which is provided in the building for student use.

Class Meeting Six – Thursday, August 7th Session

From the August 5th CIQ, students indicated that they were the most engaged during the résumé workshop and enjoyed Samantha's presentation, handouts, and critique. What surprised them the most was "keys to making a decent résumé," "how helpful the critique was," and "some of the minute details looked for in a résumé and how bad my résumé needs worked on." As it was nearing the end of the semester for the course, I paid particular attention to the last question asked on the CIQ, which was exploring what students hoped we would talk more about. They said they were looking forward to hearing more about the etiquette dinners, business etiquette, and Fall Welcome Week. I was personally surprised at how many of the students wanted an

etiquette discussion because on the first day I assumed when I mentioned it as a possible topic that it would not be picked up by the group as an interest area.

I passed around a sign-up sheet for students to select a time of their choice for their interview. All dates seem to accommodate everyone as I picked appointments from the previous day's suggestions from the group.

Prior to the dean's visit, I shared a career paper that I had written for a previous graduate career counseling class, which I found to be beneficial to me. I gave each student a copy of mine and asked them to write a three page autobiography of their career and the decisions that have led them up to returning to college. These reflection papers were used to describe the student participants at the beginning of this chapter.

The Associate Dean, Dr. Martin, and his Administrative Assistant, Sandy, spoke with the students about the procedures of the college and answered questions the students had for them. It was an excellent addition to the class, and before leaving the room, Dr. Martin told all the students to come to his office for a College of Business t-shirt. It seemed like a good time for a break and all students went to his office as he found not only the size shirt that was requested by each student but allowed them to choose a color (blue or red), which are the University colors. Not only were the students delighted to have Dr. Martin and Sandy visit, they were elated with their new gift that connected them to the University. The group knew that I wanted to get a picture of them and Tiff said, "Let's wear our College of Business t-shirts!" This captured the connection that the students were beginning to feel to the college. I have the picture framed on my desk.

As part of the research project, I discussed Schlossberg's et al.'s model and gave students a photocopy of the model and briefly talked with the students about the handouts. As I was

going over the model, two students in particular, Faith and London Izzy had a connection to the “Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out.” The much anticipated discussion on business etiquette was next on our agenda. The students asked questions about dining during interviews, and we all had stories of our experiences regarding this issue. We discussed proper attire and Faith shared how when she worked for a brokerage firm, there was an unwritten rule that women must wear skirts and she recalls an etiquette test during the day of her interview for the job with behavioral type questions; one she shared was, “Do you salt your food before tasting it?” We also talked about the cultural differences and the importance of eye contact and a firm handshake. Overall, it was a collaborative discussion that everyone seemed to enjoy.

After our class session was over, Faith came up to me and was very emotional. She was frustrated about her first time at the University a decade ago and “being told the wrong info.” She also explained how her mother did not want her to use the services available to her for her diagnosed ADD. Her mother was concerned that if faculty knew she was diagnosed with a learning disability, it would complicate things for her. I assured her that she has completed all the steps required for assistance and that faculty members are to respect student disabilities and there should be no repercussions. Looking back on this discussion as I write this after the study has ended I now see it as foreshadowing an event that occurred for Faith into her fall semester. This event is discussed more in Findings section of this chapter.

On-Line Class Meeting Seven – Tuesday, August 12th Session

From the August 7th CIQ, students indicated that they were the most engaged during our “discussion on business etiquette,” “talking with Sandy and Dr. Martin” and “found the entire class very informative.” They also noted that they were surprised that “Dr. Martin is here for support,” “we don’t have to go to Welcome Week,” “etiquette facts,” “ability to take a class pass

or fail instead of a letter grade,” and “how far along I am.” They found the procedures discussed by Dr. Martin and Sandy to be important, planning their study plan, knowing who to talk to for scheduling issues, and meeting different faculty members to start networking. Additional anonymous comments shared were, “Entire class was very informative helping with my transition back to a four year school. Thank you.” Another student shared, “I’m comfortable with my knowledge base at this point.” As I reflect on the last two comments, I feel confident that this adapted first-year seminar course aided the students in their transition to college.

Since students were curious about on-line classes, we decided to hold a class through the discussion board. The questions we discussed were:

1. How can universities and colleges make improvements to more effectively meet the needs of adult students who are returning to college?
2. How can universities and colleges make improvements to more effectively meet the needs of adult students who are enrolled in a first-year seminar course such as BSN 101- Foundations of Business Administration?
3. Describe how you were feeling about your return to college prior to taking this course.

Do you feel as if you had a transition with respect to this course?

Themes from this class session will be discussed further in the Findings section of this chapter. I wrote in my journal that “I preferred the face-to-face class sessions much better, however, I saw the value in giving the student the experience of using Blackboard as an on-line forum.” I think the on-line session was successful because the students had developed a relationship from being in class together the first three weeks. I am not sure we would have had the same in-depth discussion if we would not have been face-to-face a few times. Additionally, the participants will be more prepared if they in the future decide to enroll in a on-line class at the University.

Class Meeting Eight: Exit Interviews with Participants

Throughout the last week of class, I conducted follow-up interviews with each of the 7 participants. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. The questions used in the exit interviews are included in Appendix D. The objective of the exit interviews were to explore how students' perceptions of their transition had changed from the beginning of the course along with ways the University and the course specifically could be changed to better meet their needs. Additionally, the follow-up interviews asked for insight about the action research process and to gather information on the students' perception of Schlossberg et al.'s model. The results of the interview are integrated into the findings presented at the end of this chapter.

Since this was the day of our summer class, I gave each student a handwritten note and their own copy of the group picture which I took as the group during the third week of class. Each student seemed to appreciate the note and a memory from our class.

Summary of Participants and Class Sessions

Through involving participants in the planning and activities within the class sessions, many insightful results of using an action research approach to exploring adult business students' transition to college and tailoring a first-year seminar to their needs emerged. The next section of this chapter explores a thematic approach to explaining the significant findings from this action research study.

Findings

In this section, the findings of the action research study are presented in detail. The purpose of this action research study was to explore how a first-year seminar course could be improved to better assist adult students and to understand more about adult learners' experiences

returning to undergraduate business school. Through involving participants in the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages, many insightful results of using an action research approach to exploring adult business students' transition to college and tailoring a first-year seminar to their needs emerged. From reviewing all reflection papers, correspondence, Blackboard on-line discussions, and transcripts from the exit interview, four major themes emerged regarding the students' reasons for returning to an undergraduate business program and their transition and development in the course. The first significant finding was that students stated that they were returning to school for career advancement. Many of the students in the study expressed having feelings of exclusion about career opportunities because they did not have a degree. The second significant finding was that students who were returning to an undergraduate business program were working through issues of fear, self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and doubt related to their decision to return. Many participants had a compilation of factors for returning to an undergraduate business program, and the third and fourth themes address their experiences of belonging and support at the University and managing conflict and balance to ensure a successful return to college. It is important to note that many of the issues raised by the adult students in the study are also relevant for traditional-aged students.

Career Advancement

The students' primary reason for returning to an undergraduate business program was to fulfill a lifelong goal of earning a bachelor's degree which would aid in their career advancement. Amy, writing in her reflection paper, summarized what other participants in the group were saying about their return to college, "The decision to return to college was not difficult. I always knew that I would finish my undergraduate degree, and it was my personal

goal to so.” Within this theme of career advancement, there were three categories that emerged from the data: wanting something more, unhappiness in current career, and financial security.

Wanting Something More

A few of the participants were looking towards a career change or to stay in their current career but to advance in order to challenge themselves, as Clifford mentions in his exit interview:

The biggest thing was not that I feel I’m stuck in my career position, but that I want to improve myself in my career position. I’m bored. I’m doing the same thing day after day. With that being said, with the level that I’m at in order to move up to the next level it requires that you have a degree within my company. In fact, the position that I’m in, we are required to have a degree. So I’ve moved up that level without one, but I need to move forward to keep myself challenged. It’s something that I am looking forward to, I truly am. It something that I’ve been wanting to do for a long time, but I got to the point where I didn’t need it, and now I’m at the point where I need it again.

London Izzy reflects on her decision to return to as a way of moving away from something else and saw her return to school in her reflection paper as a way of facilitating that transition:

My decision to start college again was an easy one. One main reason for returning to college is so I can leave the food service industry. I have been in food service for 13 years now and it’s the only career I have had.

Many students mentioned that it was the “right time” as if their return to school. As Amy addresses in her interview:

I really think it was after becoming engaged that I felt like I was kind of in limbo for several years and not going anywhere ---not doing anything. My future mother-in-law is

very--- Education is very important to her. So when my fiancé proposed to me, it was very a big deal to her that he was marrying someone that didn't have a degree. So that was kind of a push.

Additionally, Amy described in her reflection paper that finishing her degree was her number one priority. She explained the factors leading up to her decision to return to school:

Around the same time I re-entered [University name deleted], I applied for and was hired for my ideal job as a Human Resources Specialist with the Department of Defense. I had previously been considering working in HR in the public sector so it really was the perfect opportunity. Also, a condition of my employment was that I be at least a half-time, degree seeking student. This aspect of my new job added to the importance of finishing my bachelor's degree.

Similarly, Faith stated in her reflection paper, "I believe that it is my time. The first time around I was not ready for the freedom of college, or the growing up that came with a degree, I am, however, ready now."

While knowing he would always returning to finish his undergraduate degree, Clifford, recalls his father's sudden death in 1994, while he was a junior in college; he needed to withdraw from school to help his mother and family find what he referred to as "normalcy." In his reflection paper, he discussed how "life happened," which was getting married, having children, and achieving the "American Dream," leaving little time to return to school. He wrote:

My decision to return to school was a compilation of many different factors that have finally aligned and resulted in my enrollment in [University name deleted] for the Fall 2008 semester. Time, money, family, and my job have all played a very important part in

my ability to enroll now, but the decision to finish my schooling was actually made fourteen years ago when I dropped out of Geneva College after the death of my father.

London Izzy added descriptive detail about the timing being right for her return to school in her reflection paper:

The timing for me to start this degree has been perfect. My husband and I are in good, stable jobs and both of our children will be going to school all day this year. Financially it is also the best time for me to start and within a couple years I may get to go to school full-time. I started this degree to improve myself and to have a job that improves my outlook on life.

Danielle also mentioned it being the right time to return to school she also was wanting “something more” for her life as she describes during her exit interview:

My sister had never gone to school and she got married right out of high school and got divorced and had a kid, which is fine with her, but I never wanted that. I wanted something else; I wanted an actual career.

Similarly, Tiff spoke in her exit interview about her fears to financially provide for herself after seeing her mother’s health deteriorate, which has left her mother disabled and unable to work:

I want a better life then what my family has had. I want more for myself because honestly the biggest thing is that I see all of these people getting divorces and this and that. The sad truth is that most people do. I watch my mom who is disabled and is in a home and she can barely get by, and I want to be able to take care of myself. I don’t want everyone to have to take care of me. That’s probably the biggest thing is security.

Clifford also mentioned in his exit interview his financial concerns: “I realized that without a degree if something were to happen to my position I would not be able to maintain my current salary with the degree.”

Unhappiness in Current Career

Some of the participants mentioned their unhappiness in their current career and a need to increase skills and their knowledge of technology. Sarah stated in her exit interview:

I decided to come back because I am not that happy about where I am now. The company that I work for got bigger and hired new staff that have four-year degrees or higher. So I lost a lot of my work load, so I would like to pursue it [my degree] to get my work load back. I’m not very happy. I have a two-year degree, so I have some knowledge. It’s not like I don’t have any.

Sarah’s discontent in her current position also comes across strongly in her reflection paper: “I don’t think that it is right because I am not doing exactly what I want to be doing, which is more accounting work. I feel that I didn’t get a two year degree for nothing.... I feel that I have been working hard at this job and not getting anywhere.” More concerning is the following statement: “I am really glad that I chose to go back to college and make something of myself.” Sarah’s perceptions of herself were very concerning to me as it demonstrates the layers of feelings of being undervalued in her current position.

Similar to Sarah, Danielle was also unhappy in her previous career, during which time she had to come to terms with the passing of her mother while she was working 80 hours a week for her position. The guilt and sadness of not being with her mother enough before her passing is observable during the interview. Danielle told me during our exit interview:

I was going to be a phlebotomist, which is taking people's blood. I finished that program and got a position working with the Red Cross. That was a horrible, horrible, job, and I worked there for 4 months while I was completely unhappy and quit. I worked in the blood mobile, and a lot of it was traveling. The first 6 months I traveled to Baltimore every day and I was never at home. My mother passed away, and so that was hard, and my father he had congenital heart failure, and he was really sick. So I wasn't able to spend any time.... I mean the money was good. I wasn't able to spend any time with my boyfriend or my family. I decided it was better for me to find a job that I really liked in order for me to be happy, and even though the money was good, I just realized I'd rather not work 80 hours a week and cut back and actually spend time for myself too.

Additionally, Amy was unhappy in her retailing supervision role, which she took on after dropping out of school because she found it too difficult to work full-time and go to school full-time. She talked about what led up to her interests in Human Resources during her interview:

Well, starting back I had always planned on finishing; I just need a specific push to make me actually get back to it. When I started college, I started working and worked full-time. Actually I went to the university full-time and worked full-time, and that didn't work out so well. So I stopped and worked at Staples for 6 years full-time and I worked as a supervisor. I like working in business, and I like dealing with customers, but not on a retail level -- I didn't like that. I didn't want a position where I had to work evenings and weekends and deal with sales quotes and things like that. So I started to talk to HR within Staples, and I met a few of them and kind of liked what they did and thought that it would be a lot more interesting for me. More up my alley, I guess.

Tiff's unhappiness in her previous position before returning to school is evident in the painful details she wrote about in her reflection paper. She recalled being told, "'You are going to be a lifer here, who are you kidding?'" That made me angry. I guess it was a driving force that led me back to school to prove everyone wrong who doubted me."

Financial Security

The students noted in their reflection papers and during their exit interviews that they "wanted a better life for them and their family." Gaining financial stability was relevant to this group of students. London Izzy stated in her exit interview, "I have been talking about going into a math or accounting degree probably since I was 20 [years old]. I'm trying to do better for my family and for myself and be less stressed hopefully." Tiff's reflection paper explained her previous position as full-time shift manager with a pizza shop and the financial struggles working for a salary just over minimum wage. "I decided this was not going to cut it. I was determined to make it so that I didn't have to struggle for the rest of my life." Sarah mentioned financial rewards from completing her degree in her reflection paper: "If my degree doesn't get me a better paying job with this company then I am doing this to get a better job and a better paying job." Sarah's struggle between wanting to feel that she is valued in the accounting profession and bettering herself was evident. In a following paragraph she added, "I decided to return to school to better myself as a person and for my job." Faith also added in her reflection paper the importance of education and how "that near death experience was my life altering decision to stop trying to work ten times harder to get the same end result of the comfort and security that comes along with having a college degree."

Clifford shared his own experience with a near job loss. The company, at which he was currently employed, recently went through layoffs and job restricting. Clifford explained his

strategy for planning to apply and interview for other positions outside of the company. He mentioned in his reflection paper how this was required during of this time of turmoil, “so that my income would not be interrupted throughout this transition.” Luckily, Clifford described the end results of the restricting as “things falling into place” since he was reassigned to another account and was able to move geographically closer to the University, which he said played a factor in his returning to school. Acquiring and maintaining financial security was extremely important to this group of participants.

Fear, Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Doubt

Many of the participants mentioned fears, concerns, and doubts throughout the class discussions, in their reflection papers, and during the exit interview. Logically, it became the second theme to host the descriptions from the participants about their experience in returning to an undergraduate business program and especially their experience in a first-year seminar course. As the course progressed, I could see a shift in the confidence levels (levels of self-efficacy) of the students; their negative feelings moved toward more positive feelings.

Fear

Most participants were candid about their apprehension to return to school. They mentioned lack of confidence, fear of being inadequate, worrying about technology, low self-esteem, and beginning college later in life. They acknowledged a variety of anxieties, which contributed to the self-doubt they had about being a successful business student. The fear of returning to school was mentioned in Tiff’s reflective writings:

I am very excited about [University name deleted], but that excitement is accompanied with fear. I am very nervous about starting the fall semester. I am going to be in a new

setting with what I imagine will be very different teaching styles and expectations. I hope I will adjust smoothly and succeed here at the University.

In Tiff's exit interview, she shared similar statements to her writing assignment as she reflected on her experience of returning to school:

I have been taking care of my schooling and it's sometimes nerve wrecking [sic] trying to find out what your next step is. What the next paperwork you have to do is. I applied to the University at the beginning of the year and I got into it. I didn't do all of the steps I needed to do apparently until these last couple of weeks. I thought I was ahead of everybody, but I wasn't I found out through the admissions office. It was like a week that I turned in all of this paperwork, that needed to be done, all of the financial aid, all of the applying for the loans. It was stressful, but I got it done.

Sarah shared her own concerns of having self-doubt about beginning back to school in a reflection paper she writes, "I have been out of school for twelve years so I know it is going to be very challenging but I hope I can accomplish it." Additionally, Clifford reflected back to his first visit to the campus, which happened to be the first day of our class, during our interview and had this to share:

When I first came in, I was extremely nervous. Then again, I have never been on a campus this big. Mt first year on this campus and there are buildings everywhere and I don't know where to go and I have no idea what to do. When I got there, a gazillion kids were outside in the parking lot.

It is interesting to note that London Izzy referred to her perceptions of the group by using the plural “we” and stated this in her interview: “I think that we were more worried about school then [sic] relationships, especially at our ages.”

Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Doubt

Some students showed signs of demonstrating low self esteem and low self-efficacy. Sarah’s low self esteem and self-efficacy about returning to school was evident in her reflection paper:

The adjustment mentally is going to be very challenging in that a lot of things have changed since I have been in school. That includes technology and how each college handles everything. I know that in the long run that it will help me mentally because once I accomplish getting through college then I know I can accomplish anything that comes my way. Then I will feel better about myself.

In another reflective piece, written by Sarah, she unguardedly compiled her thoughts on her low self-esteem:

I will have a better relationship with myself because I don’t have a lot of respect, confidence, and self esteem for myself and I know in the end I will have more respect, confidence, and self esteem. I have been putting myself down for a few years now and it is time for me to stop. I am better than that.

Sarah showed movement towards an increase in her self-esteem in her later writings when she was reflecting on her personal development through the course. She had an increase in self-efficacy, as she came to believe she was capable of performing to reach her educational goals.

While other students mentioned what I will refer to as a cognitive development, Sarah mentioned a different dimension – a holistic development that includes physical and spiritual development:

Spiritually, I am doing this to better myself and to get a better paying job in the field that I really love to do. I am determined to graduate with a bachelor's degree or a master's. I have a lot of spirit when it comes to me or anyone else I know that wants to better themselves by going back to school because it is a good feeling when you accomplish something that you have really worked hard for. Physically, I have improved my physical improvement by eating healthy and dressing more professionally.

Clifford shared from his reflections on his own transition writings, which included the mention of cognitive development:

Looking back over the last 14 years since I left school and comparing them to the most recent summer semester that I took classes at HACC and [University name removed], I have realized how narrow minded and lackadaisical I have become with my thinking.

Belonging and Support

The participants explained “that it was their time to return,” almost as if it was the right time and everything was aligning in their lives for them to finally complete their education goals; this was not without support from family, faculty, administrators, colleagues, employers, and friends. Every student in the study mentioned the importance of having support; some mentioned financial support while others mentioned emotional support such as encouragement, family members providing child care service or delivery of meals. Many of the students shared throughout the course, either in classroom conversations, reflection papers, or in the exit interviews) that they were a first generational college student and how proud their family and

friends were of them to be returning to college. Tiff referred to the support from her family and significant other and said, “That really helps and encourages me to keep going.” Faith shared this in her exit interview:

My father has given me quite a bit of support both financially and quite amount of support he feels that I have always had it in me to finish and with his financial backing I think it is more of a silent “you can do it” more than anything else.

Additionally, Faith referred to all the support she had received prior to coming back to college; however, Faith mentioned her perception that her colleagues, while they supported her, had mixed feelings. “Doing the jobs that I’ve done, most of the people I have worked with do not have college degrees and so while I think they are a bit envious, they are supportive.” London Izzy mentioned similar feelings from her colleagues in her interview: “Colleagues, you know my colleagues, are not really that much support because they don’t want me to leave.” Danielle in her exit interview mentioned the financial support from her employer through the company’s tuition reimbursement program, but noted that they were “not that supportive in adjusting schedules.”

However, London Izzy mentioned the support of her mother, who helped her watch her children. What was most concerning for me as the researcher was the support London Izzy may or may not have been getting from her husband. Statements she made during the interview were contradictory, when she stated, “He knows I’m not happy where I am so he gets frustrated at time[s] because I have a lot more homework then and I don’t hang out with the family as much. He has always been supportive and he is looking forward to me being done with school.” She then mentioned the struggle she had to quit smoking and how her husband did not share in her desire to stop:

My husband is saying he wants to even though he is the one that I can't get to quit, but it's hard for one of us to do it without the other. I went and got the Chantix [prescription to assist with smoking cessation]; I'm using that. I just haven't set a date yet. I have quit so many times before, but my husband always brings me back.

As previously mentioned from my email correspondences with London Izzy, after the study, I learned that she was expecting her third child and planning on taking a semester leave.

Danielle also had two conflicting statements in her interview regarding her perception of her father's support, who she currently was living with. She stated, "He is constantly asking me how my classes are going and how much farther I have to go. It seems to me like it's been forever, but he is a big support." However, later in the interview she shared, "My dad is a big supporter, but there have been times where he will make me feel guilty because I'm not able to spend time with him."

Many of the students spoke about the support they received from our college administrative assistant, Sandy. Faith had this to say in her exit interview:

She was eager to help me and very supportive and shared stories with me about herself and her college career and wants to see me do well and that feels good too...If you don't have someone backing you, then it's going to be twice as hard as the first time around.

Clifford also said his spouse was his biggest supporter and she told him how proud she was of him. He shared from his interview:

As far as faculty and stuff, you have been wonderful just in the encouragement that you have been giving everybody I wouldn't expect that wouldn't subside at any time. Just in speaking with the folks that came in Dean Martin and Sandy and a lot of the other folks you had come in seem very supportive and want to help out. The folks that are basically

on campus it seems will be there if they need to and want to ensure our success. Just the overall support that I have had has been overwhelming.

Sarah mentioned the support she received from her immediate family: “My husband was very supportive after I came to him and said, ‘Ok, I’m ready to start back.’ My son ...seemed to be ok with it.... He’s hoping to do homework together. ‘Like, hey, you can do my homework and I can do yours.’” Sarah mentioned receiving support from her in-law by picking her son up at daycare and their helping with family meals. She also mentioned an emotional support that has increased her self-esteem in her reflection paper:

The support of my family has been great. I am going to need all the support I can get.

My parents and in-laws told me that now is a good time to start and to believe in myself because they believe in me.

Students mentioned feeling a sense of being part of the college by meeting the associate dean and his administrative assistant. The associate dean told all the students to come to his office for a College of Business t-shirt; he found not only the size shirt that was requested by each student but allowed them to choose a color (blue or red), which are the University colors. Not only were the students delighted to have this visit, they were elated with their new gift that connected them to the University. The group knew that I wanted to get a picture of them and Tiff said, “Let’s wear our College of Business t-shirts!” This captured the connection that the students were beginning to feel to the college. I have the picture framed on my desk. Also, what is interesting to note is how the students in their writings had started to use the University name and the abbreviation for the University in their writings. As time as progressed in the course, their language usage of this abbreviation had shown that they felt a sense of belonging to the University. At the beginning of the class, student would use broader, generic terms such as

“school” and “college,” but now they used the actual name because they were feeling more a part of the institution.

Group Relationship and Learning

While it was not intended to be part of the research, students perceived a sense of fellowship had developed among the participants in the class. Halfway through the 4 week summer semester, students were comparing their fall semesters and finding out which classes they would have with other members of the class. Some of the participants of the study, who had full-time positions, mentored the younger adult students who were thinking of going into similar careers as those who were in permanent, full-time positions. Students also mentioned what appears to be group learning. Faith, shared this statement during her exit interview, “These things that we learned we could bounce off each other being non-traditional students. We learned it invoked questions listening to other people that we would have not necessarily have thought of.” Sarah added from her exit interview:

It was very nice because they were going through the same things that I am. It was just really nice to meet people that I know they are going through the same thing they are.... I know someone who will be in the class I’m going to be in [during the fall semester].

Danielle mentioned how through what is actually the action research process allowed her to feel more engaged and valued within the classroom and also mentioned a key word found through many of the participant reflection papers and interviews “learn”:

I thought this class was very beneficial for learning the ways of the college. I liked the idea that we got to discuss the syllabus and what would be more beneficial for us as a group. It made me feel like more of a participant in the classroom and I got to learn what I really cared to know about.

Danielle added from her interview:

I was also excited that it was based for people my own age, for people that are going through the same experiences, not someone who might be 17 or 18 and living in a dormitory, which I wasn't able to do.

Additionally, she stated, "doing the reflection paper and just talking in class. I did talk to Amy after class and asked for a little bit of information on HR. She was very helpful and very nice too."

Amy also mentioned in her interview that she had conversations with Danielle about a career in HR and shares how she perceived the participants from the study to be very similar with respect to time constraints and commitments:

First of all I think it was nice because most of the people will be in your classes and you know who is kind of in the same circumstances. So if you have group work you could say, "Hey Clifford" you know he has the same job. I know it was funny Danielle approached me after class one day and asked my about working because she is interested in federal jobs so I think that good as far as a networking in that sense.... We have different issues in our lives. We are worried about the same things. We have the same constraints work school and work.

London Izzy expressed a similar sentiment: "We were talking about what classes we had [together]. We are all excited because we have each other in class.... It actually gives you study people because we can go on and study together." London Izzy had the outlook that she was already looking forward to her future relationships with other participants from the class. In fact, she mentioned during the interview how she was looking for an internship with the government and stated, "She [Amy] will keep an eye out for me."

Clifford reflected on what he had learned from being in the class during his interview and also mentioned the importance of having a group of adult students with the same life experiences in the class:

I truly enjoy the opportunity to be in the class. It has been something with the specific group of folks that you had in there, I mean the older students -- we were able to feed off of each other and learn from each other and each of our experiences. That was nice not having to -- going back into the college environment, after so many years especially, having other folks who were in the same situation and sharing experiences and things like that with them was extremely helpful.

Valuing Experience Through the Action Research Project

I wanted to be sure to express that the participants appreciated their voices being heard and it was the project of action research that made it possible to understand their needs as adult learners. During the exit interviews it was determined by the students that having a small class size, enrolling in the course prior to the beginning of the fall semester, having an advocate for adult learners, and engaging in an action research project to help develop a curriculum for future adult learners was a valuable experience for all participants. During the study, I solicited feedback from the participants about how they perceived the study was progressing and for their suggestions for improvement. From the beginning, I received many insightful comments. For example, Amy reflected on her observations during the classroom research:

The motivation for the adult students returning to school seemed to be very different than that of the “traditional student.” They were returning to school with very specific goals and expectations. Some were returning for financial reasons, while others were returning to advance within a career field or to pursue a new career field. Some participants were

returning in order to fulfill a life goal. When the syllabus for the standard First-Year Seminar course was presented to the adult students, they felt that the course content would not be adequate to meet their individual needs. All felt that a large portion of the curriculum was irrelevant to them as adult learners and most proposed additions to the curriculum that would be more beneficial to them as adult learners. Also, it was especially helpful for each student to become acquainted with other adult learners in similar situations and a faculty member who understood each of their unique situations. This allowed them to create a social network within the school for which they could turn to for support and advice. All of the students in this section of the course were enthusiastic to have the opportunity to be part of this course which they described to be so accommodating to their unique needs. Through this research project I have gained an appreciation for the dedication required of an adult student who makes the decision to return to college to complete their education. The choice requires the rearrangement of every other aspect in their life, and it requires them, as well as their families, to make significant sacrifices in order for them to make the choice possible.

Similarly, London Izzy shares that being involved in tailoring the course to the student needs within the classroom was beneficial to her along with feeling that she was not alone. She states:

That was great because we all need different things and [there are] many differences between other adult students.... I know the campus a little bit, but maybe someone else doesn't know the campus at all. So it was nice that everyone offered their opinions to exactly what they wanted to learn.... Some of them are going full-time to school and working part-time and some of them are only taking a class and working full-time. So it

shows that I'm not alone. Other people [participants from the class] might graduate 2012 and I'm graduating in 2014, but I'm not alone that I'm graduating years from now.

Clifford shared similar sentiments during his interview, "Honestly, coming back to school I felt like the only adult student in the whole world, but I know that's not the case." Sarah also mentioned something similar in her reflection paper, "The experience in this course helped my progression by finding out what college life is going to be like and what it feels like to know that I am not alone on returning to college life." Additionally she continued to mention the importance of learning, "I felt that I got to participate more in this class and I learned what I really wanted to know."

While Faith went beyond explaining that other participants description of feeling they were not alone to express more of a feeling of being overlooked the first time she was enrolled and how that has changed due to having the FBA course:

[The] Foundations of Business Administration [course] has been the best start to my college career that I could possibly get.... I don't feel like just another face in the crowd that when I get lost or start to drown. I will just disappear the way that I did the first time.

From the beginning of the class, it was very important to me as part of the action research process to make sure the participants felt as though they were collaborators in the research. Clearly, the student engagement in the action research process was meaningful to the participants. The incorporation of reflection through the reflection assignments, career paper, and discussions proved to be an effective and powerful pedagogical tool for the adult business students in this study.

Sarah noted in her interview that she appreciated helping in designing the course and the value of the CIQ's:

You were able to give us what we wanted to discuss through the course -- that was really helpful to me to be able to discuss what we wanted to talk about in the four weeks; It was nice to have our feedback with the CIQ's on what everybody wanted to talk about.

The observations made by the participants throughout the study, along with their noted connections to adjustment and learning, were expressed during the final interview and signified the shifting identity brought about by the planning, acting, observing, and reflection implemented during the summer class. As each participant individually discussed their overall reflections, their move toward an increased self-confidence was obvious and they constructed new knowledge of their return to an undergraduate business program. Many students even declared their success in their reflection papers and during their exit interviews, by saying statements such as what Faith said during her interview "I am going to finish."

First-year seminar course. A recurring theme was that students had mentioned enrolling in the FBA course in the summer term better prepared for the fall semester by helping them become organized. Students liked being in a smaller class, and a large majority of them referred to it as "the one-on-one FBA class." The power behind these observations by the participants reflect that enrolling in the course as a tool to bridge the connection between their original transition and their personal development and transition through the course has been successful. Clearly, dialogue played an important role throughout the development of the action research process.

Faith talked about in her interview how having a class discussion on business etiquette was beneficial to her and states, "Just the small amount of etiquette that we went over even in the

past few weeks has been very helpful out in the world.” She later clarified that at a recent dinner function, she had become the expert at the table on the proper etiquette. She continued by discussing the importance of having the course and to be able to have a resource (BSN101) for all the information she needed:

All the different organizations and business organizations I can get into for networking and all of the things we have discussed in class that would have taken me forever to compile and find time to visit each other the different departments. I think that’s been very helpful.

Clifford share similar sentiments:

The information that we went through and things that we talked about, the tours and where to go to pay bills -- things like that were very helpful to me.... I feel that the class was very helpful to my return.

Many students mentioned how the course alleviated worry and stress from their fall semesters and “set them up.” Faith shared in her exit interview:

There were things that I didn’t realize that were a problem or something I should be worried about coming back to school that have turned out to be and that I realized I should have been worried about, but I was so worried about other things. I didn’t even realize these were things I needed to worry about. The problem is that we have a limited amount of time as adult students so when these things come up its ten times more stressful and we are not here on campus to fix them. So taking this course ahead of time has everything completely organized for us. We’ve learned the lay of the land. We’ve learned how to get our Blackboard and how to get our email and all that stuff activated. I think that this course should be something that they should make people take.... I didn’t

realize how much I needed a walk around the campus or how I needed an extra five second to get my student ID, which is really hard to find 5 seconds to get the student ID more then you know.... I think this would be great to be mandatory thing for all incoming students. I know it would be hard to say this is something you have to take, but if you have to take it to graduate. Then why can't you say you have to take it when you are coming in.

Tiff shared during her interview, "The experience was great. It helped me to get ready for my schooling here at [University name removed]. I think that I would have been a nervous wreck if I wouldn't have had this class because it is the best thing that I could have taken or done so far." She also added from her reflection paper:

This class, in a way, may be the most valuable class I have or will have taken. Not one day did I dread coming to class. I listened and asked as many questions as possible to make myself more comfortable. I got more out of the course than any course I have taken so far. Allowing us to choose the subjects we were going to discuss made the class more targeted towards each individual. We all got what we needed from the course. I would advise everyone to take this course with April. She has made this transition and easy and exciting one. The class was interesting and we got to learn more than just information for [University name removed]. We learned life lessons. Things we can carry on with us after [University name removed] to keep being successful.

Many students mentioned the words "learning" and what they gained from taking the course and how the orientation day did not meet their needs. Sarah shared her thoughts during the interview:

I really think this class helped out a lot for me because April was really good at showing us where everything was and we didn't get that at orientation. The tour, library, Blackboard and everything like that really helped me out a great deal. Everything I learned was something I didn't already know.

Similarly, London Izzy mentioned the support she had received through the course and how she felt more comfortable: "It [the class] helped me with many things. Knowing where things are, getting the support we need, and just feeling more comfortable on the campus. Most classes aren't like this; they are not for the adult student."

Faith also mentioned how the course allowed her to feel more comfortable in adjusting to the campus and therefore she knew where to go for assistance and support. She stated in her exit interview:

Now that I have a goal and people that I feel are on my side that are giving me the right information and who are supporting me and that I could go to if I had a problem. I have had this course and I have worked out 90% of the glitches that I am going to run into and I'm not thinking there aren't going to be more, but at least I have worked through most of them. I know whatever comes up from here I know there are people to go to help me.

Also, Faith added her perceptions on the learning the participants experienced due to the flexibility within the class during her exit interview:

With the course and what it is supposed to be focusing on that's the best possible way to go about it. I think that is was an amazing help for everyone of us. So everyone was pretty assertive about what they wanted to learn about and we got through what everyone needed to go over.

Amy appreciated the opportunity to review the current syllabus used in the fall and spring terms of the BSN101 course and had this to say:

I think that this class was definitely helpful for me. When you gave us that syllabus for the actually fall semester class, nothing on there was really important to me. Like clubs and things like that, I just don't have time for things like that. I would have to take vacation from work to go to a club.

What Amy did find beneficial was “showing me where the non-traditional student lounge...Knowing that things like that are there...meeting Samantha and meeting Sandy and things like that.”

Students liked being able to tailor the course to their needs. Amy refers back to the traditional (fall and spring) syllabus and says:

The syllabus seems more like not an acclimation to a career, it's more of an acclimation to the university. This class is more of both, it is treating us more like the adult learners that we are people that are already in a career that have that in the background and are choosing to change or to farther their progression in their own career that they have already started. Just us being at a different point, like if I were to take it in the fall with the freshman, I think it would feel totally different to be writing my resume like some of us are writing functional resumes.

Furthermore, Faith added from her exit interview:

So I think a lot of it, as far as success of this class, has to do with you in the fact that you are very flexible. You really listened to what we really needed and focused on each one of us and what are needs were and changed things around on days that we weren't going

to be there and the thing that we didn't necessarily want to learn. So a lot of it goes to you, but I think that was the most successful way to go about this course.

Danielle needed the most assistance with exploring possible majors. She had come into the course beginning various programs at other institutions only to not enjoy the day-to-day duties required for the field. She was trying to narrow her decision among three majors on the first day of class and she had this to say in her interview on the career planning aspect of the course:

I was excited about going into the class; it helped me a lot with stuff like the resume work shop because my resume needed a lot of work. Just talking about the different programs that the college had to offer and the different majors and it kind of helped me go in the direction I wanted to go in business. I've gone from [considering] accounting to finance and then finally deciding on human resources. I think the class really helped me on deciding where I wanted go with the degree.... I felt it was a good course to take at [University name removed] because it's an introductory course just to the college in general. I think that the campus tour helped because I probably would not have been able to find my classes in the fall. I would have had a tougher time finding classes. I think that helped and just discussing all of the different programs that the college had to offer, like the career center, the resume workshops, internship workshops, and the career expo. I think all of that really helped in introducing me to the university.

Students appreciated the individualized attention due to the smaller class size; many participants referred to this as "one-on-one" when they spoke about the study plan assignment. London Izzy stated in her interview, "You wouldn't have had that one-on-one to exactly figure out where you need to go.... I've actually learned.... Doing the study plan I have both ways

[accounting major and finance major] already planned out. That's actually helped me a lot."

Danielle added from her interview, "The student plan really helped a lot. Having that one-on-one is nice too for it being such a small group. It was nice that everyone could get the help that they needed." Clifford is also in agreement when he stated during his interview:

I wouldn't have had the opportunity to ask this many questions and to be specific about my own needs.... The study plan is extremely helpful. I'm so thankful to know this is what I need to know to accomplish what I need to do.... It was so helpful and I am so thankful for the time that you spent looking over everything to make sure it was okay. Of all of the things we talked about through the class this was one of the biggest things and just becoming acclimated to the school.

Other students share how the course has aided directly in their transition. London Izzy's perception was:

The experience of this course has actually been a great thing and I'm glad I took it during the summer because it transitions me to being here. I am much more prepared as an adult student. After the class... I feel extremely confident. I feel very confident in the things I needed to do. So be able to find the places I need to find and be able to go to the places I need to do to. I'm much more familiar with the college and the university then I was 3 or 4 weeks ago.

Sarah shared how she was feeling in her exit interview prior to enrolling in the course and how she perceived the opportunity to take the course a transition in of itself:

I was feeling very scared prior to taking this course since it has been a long while since I'd been in school. I feel that I had a transition with respect to this course because I am feeling more confident then when I first started.

Clifford continued to reflect and stated:

I think having the class that we had really made my transition, I don't what to say easy, but a whole lot better. So just in having this one specific class tailored to an adult made such an impact to each one of us that was in the course. So far as the services and everything provided, I think that it is something that as adults we can use as well as the traditional students. I'm extremely grateful for the class and for what you did because it is such a burden lifted off of me because of the anxieties that I was feeling.

Clifford goes more in-depth to describe his transition through the course and how the company of other adult learners made him felt more comfortable in his return to college. He shared in his Blackboard discussion posting:

Prior to attending the BSN101 class with April, I was extremely nervous to attend [University name removed]. The college that I attended years ago was not nearly the size of [University name removed] and I really had no idea of what to expect. Also, with the progress that has occurred in the last 13 years with computers and education, I felt relatively old fashioned. I don't consider myself old, but after seeing many of the kids at my summer HACC math courses, I am certainly not as young as what I once was. This course has lifted a lot of the weight concerning the advances in technology and just becoming somewhat acclimated to the campus and where everything is. The library system, although fascinating, seems to be friendly enough that older folks with any kind of computer knowledge can get a grasp on it. The tour of the campus was very helpful and all of the discussions about where to find help with the different people that attended our classes showed me that I am not alone in this. This class has certainly encouraged me and helped to deal with a lot of the anxiety that I was feeling.

Clifford's transition was evident through the course in his reflection paper and demonstrated his movement from negative feelings toward more positive feelings regarding the return to college, "The individual BSN101 course has certainly alleviated much of the anxiety that I had previously felt, and I am looking forward now to moving on to the challenges in school and my career that lie ahead."

Danielle also felt that the course has been a transition and is showing signs of sense of belong to the University:

I was a little nervous about going to a university, but after going to the class and knowing that there are other people in the same situation as me helped a lot. I'm looking forward to fall semester now. I still have a few anxieties about classes and what to expect as far as work load and professors are concerned, but I think all those fears will be alleviated once I start classes. This class helped tremendously with my transition to [University name removed].... My anxiety has subsided since taking the Foundation of Business Administration course.

She additionally added from her reflection paper:

Going back to college was a tremendous transition for me. It was an anticipated transition because I thought long and hard before decided if returning to college was what I truly wanted to do. I believed that in the long run it would benefit me and my life. I believe that taking this Foundation of Business course during the summer helped me with my upcoming transition into yet another part of my educational career.... I think that this summer course has helped me complete the transition into [University name removed].

Faith and Danielle communicated back and forth on the on-line discussion board and shared their beginning anxieties about returning to school and how the course has been a transition and a symbol of their adjustment. Faith stated:

Prior to this course, I was not only anxious about returning to college as an adult but also frustrated about what courses I need to graduate and getting organized, when I have such a short time to figure out my plan. Every aspect of this course has helped to relieve much of my frustration and my anxiety. The transition for me was more about coming back to school and wanting to be here and approaching this as an opportunity as opposed to the first time around when I was just a kid trying to gain some freedom. This course has become my symbol. I realize that I'm now focused and I know that I have to graduate and start the rest of my life.

Danielle shared her own adjustment and development:

I was a nervous wreck about starting at [University name removed]. Everyone was telling me, "Oh you'll be fine." Well that is a lot easier said than done. After having this class I can really say I am not nervous at all now. I am actually excited to start this fall and see how I do.

Tiff may have been the most excited about the class being offered in the summer for returning adult business students. She shared in her interview how she is even looking to the future for graduate school:

One thing that I would recommend to any adult student is to take this course. It has me set and if I had not taken this [course] I would have been stressed right before I started it all. I would have had stress even before I had classes worrying about class, how hard classes are going to be or if I'm going to do well or fall flat on my face. I feel much better

now. I am ready now.... I would say take it in the summer to any adult student or transfer student. It makes you feel like you are right where everyone else is.... Whereas I took this before my fall classes and it make me feel more comfortable going into those classes.... I'm very excited that I have taken it. I was a little nervous coming into it, but I told everybody that this class really helped me out... It's opened my eyes to the possibly that I do have a good possibly that I can get into graduate school and the classes I need to take to get into graduate school.

Danielle shared how the course and the reflection assignments within the course, conversations with other students in the class, along with my feedback on her reflection assignments aided her in making a decision on declaring her major. Amy mentioned something similar and demonstrated her understanding the courses she is required to take in order to attain her bachelor's degree:

The class led me to HR in that first reflection paper. When I wrote it I was originally thinking about HR. You gave me feedback and said HR would be a good major for me. Well then ok, so that opening my eyes a lot and I had done the career paper but that probably help[ed] me see more why I chose business. Another thing in the class is hearing about other people's majors and life experiences -- really helped me to realize that business is really what I wanted to do.

Amy shared from her interview, "I thought I didn't want to go to class and I didn't know why I was going to class versus now where I know why I'm going to class and why I'm taking this class."

Campus adult student advocate. Students reported that one of the main ways which aided their adjustment to college life was having a student advocate for adult learners. This idea was

first mentioned in our on-line discussion board and continued into many of the interviews. It was evident that through working with me as the instructor of the course they saw me as their surrogate adult student advocate. Amy stated during her interview:

I almost feel that they need to have one advisor for the adult students that understand what they are going through, understands them on a personal level. Like you! Exactly, like what you did there knowing what we are dealing with in the background versus we aren't chained up in a dorm. We aren't spending our weekends drinking. We spend our weekends cleaning our homes and taking care of our kids and grocery shopping, things like that. So I think that is something that would be very helpful.... One who understands limitations and how difficult it can be to be an adult student, especially here. To not treat you as the same.... Not that we should get preferential treatment, but just an understanding.

Reflective writings through the course seemed to be helpful in assisting students with making the connection to their decision to return to an undergraduate business program and their own personal adjustment. Through reflection in her paper, Faith was able to make the connection between her adjustment to college and her personal growth by way of the FBA course and having me as a supporter:

The class itself has been not only a great source of information, but Prof. Bailey has given me the one-on-one attention that I never had the first time around. This class has made my transition easier and has helped me to grow as a person and realize that I have someone on my side that truly wants me to succeed.

Reflection was such an essential part of her making the connection between her education and personal development that she wrote in the email that she attached her reflection paper to, “Wow...I really enjoyed writing this paper!... I was amazed at what it turned into!”

Sarah shared in her exit interview about how she was going to seek help from various campus resources and holds me to my current role as student advocate: “Hopefully we will get a good bit and even you said you would be here for us and that’s really nice you are helpful.”

A significant number of the participants expressed their gratitude for having the class in the summer and my commitment to assisting them with their transition to college. Clifford said in his exit interview, “I am appreciative of what you are doing or trying to do because I don’t know without the class that you did. I don’t know where I would be at this point coming into next week and not having a clue. I mean, this is all extremely helpful.” Danielle shared in her interview with me, “You have been a big support. You are the only professor I have met yet, but you have been very helpful just in being very easy to talk to.” Her confidence in herself was already apparent in what she posted to the on-line discussion board session on Blackboard:

Thanks a lot April for helping us all feel like we belong and that we are going to succeed. I believe you really care about your students and can only hope they ask you to teach a class like this every year. It was very beneficial being here. Now I feel like we are going to slide right in to our classes with everyone else. Before this class, I thought that this transition was going to be actually scary. I can schedule, go to class, and find things on the campus with confidence, always knowing that you’ll be there if we need anything.

Faith stated in her exit interview, “You have been amazingly supportive and I know I didn’t have that the first time around and I definitely didn’t have faculty the first around to help me.... Nobody ever took an interest in helping me.” During the exit interview, Faith’s

appreciation for my help and kind words was so moving that we both became emotional and we each grabbed a tissue from my desk. She told me,

I was just another kid that was out there and when I was talking to Sandy, I said how April had helped me so much, she really took an interest in me and wanted me to get organized and do well and it makes all the difference to know that you have someone on the faculty that's in your corner even one person. So that was amazingly helpful, I never have expected, and I am so appreciative.

After this remarkable interview with Faith, I wrote in my journal that "having a student like Faith acknowledging your commitment to education gives you the perseverance to continue teaching and doing what you are doing to help students." The objective of being a co-researcher along with the participants proved to be challenging. I often asked the participants to share details about themselves, both personal and professionally. I tried to be equally as open about my own experiences, and often gave into sharing my personal story -- of how difficult some of the prerequisites like calculus were and the discouraging comments that were said to me by administrators or faculty members. When I thought a certain student needed encouraging, I shared my story with those with whom it would resonate the most. Many times, I had mixed feelings about full disclosure of my feelings and experiences and how I should be fulfilling my role as co-researcher.

Perhaps one of the most rewarding aspects of maintaining email communication and office hour visits between each class session with participants was the peripheral items some of the participants would share with me. For example, Faith shared her process of being registered with the University's Office of Social Equity for her ADD. She also stopped by my office to share her experience from the ice cream social held by the Dean's office during a day shortly

after the beginning of the fall semester. At the event, I introduced her to the Dean, and he spoke with her and I for awhile as he proceeded to make her feel welcomed. Each of us went our separate ways at the event, but Faith told me that as she was leaving, the dean was talking with a group of faculty and she said, “He stopped talking to the group of faculty to say goodbye to me! He remembered my name!” I wrote in my journal, “What a difference she is having this time back to the University. This is what I had hoped for all of them [my adult students].”

Amy shared pictures of her new home; she was in the process of going through settlement. I shared with the class that I was going through a kitchen remodel and the nightmare stories of deciding to invest the money in replacing the cabinets or painting them for a more economical and updated look, along with never-ending feeling of having the project completed. Even after the completion of the study, the students and I continued to email. Amy and I ended up working on another research project together and London Izzy emailed to tell me that she and her husband were expecting their third child. Unfortunately, email correspondences were not all positive; Faith had a troubling experience with a faculty member violating ADA as I briefly described in Class Session Six – Thursday, August 7th of this chapter.

Within the first 4 weeks of the fall semester, I received a telephone call on my mobile phone from Faith explaining how a professor embarrassed her in front of the class (minutes before taking her first college exam since her return) regarding her request through The Office of Social Equity (American Disabilities Act (ADA) – protection for individuals with physical, mental, or learning disabilities.) This is the statement submitted by Faith to administration:

Disabilities Dispute:

The incident that occurred on 09/29/08:

After requesting the test from Bethany [name has been changed] in the disabilities center I was not sure what the next step was. I received confirmation that the request was then sent on to Dr. Taylor, [name has been changed] my Financial Management Professor. I entered the class and waited on instruction as to where I was to go to take my exam, (this was the first exam in this class with my diagnosis of ADD). He stood in the front of the class waiting for 2:00 and for everyone to sit. When everyone was quiet he started by saying “I received a request for a test to be sent for someone with special needs”, “I think that it is very immature of you to not contact me a week in advance that you need a test”, “you will have to take the test with everyone else”. My classmates (as a senior) are all aware that I am the one that stays after to take tests and they knew that he was talking to me. I got up from my seat and went to the front of the room. I said “did Bethany contact you requesting the test”, he said” yes she did but you never contacted me so I assumed that you didn’t need it so you will take the test with everyone else and if you need more time the next time you need to tell me 1 week in advance” and he walked away.

The idea of taking a test after being called immature and being embarrassed in front of group of my peers which I have worked hard to gain acceptance from as a non-traditional student, was quite a difficult task. The ADD didn’t help!!

This was an obvious violation of University policy and without going into more details, I assisted Faith in her quest to be sure this never happened to another student again. It was through this situation that Faith demonstrated a great concern for other students with disabilities, more so than for herself, her own situation, embarrassment, relationship with the faculty member, and the grade in the class. For someone who has been given a probationary return, she

has development into a person who wants to help others. She even found humor in the situation in that she states, “This will be great data for your study!” Why I deem this important is that while Faith is no longer a student in my class, I am honored that she has trusted my opinion on sharing this event with me. I wrote in my journal that “it also demonstrates the student centeredness that many times is missing in higher education and a breakdown of communication between administrators and faculty on the zero tolerance policy for not complying with ADA.”

Conflict and Balance

As the study evolved, many of the participants continued to progress in their ability to make connections between their adjustment to college life and balancing the feelings they had for independence and success with the negative feelings of self-doubt and worrying about their age. Many of the students had expressed the support of their families and having the summer course aided in them being able to manage these feelings of conflict and apprehension regarding their return to college.

Independence

While others were looking for independence, Tiff stated in her reflection paper, “I am finding my own way.” Danielle added, “I am doing this all by myself.” Faith’s statement in her reflection paper also demonstrated the new-found desire to become her own person, as she described one of her reasons to return to college as “the ability to move freely about the world and not need to use the family name to get the job that I desire.” Faith mentioned the same viewpoint in her reflection paper: “I want to make myself better and complete better with others in the job market.” In another reflective piece, she creatively titled, “This To [Sic] Shall Pass,” Faith writes about feeling constrained on being completely independent because she has not finished her undergraduate education, “As a young girl who loves her independence, I feel that I

have gone as far as I can go with no proof of a formal education.” Along with wanting something more and security, one of the most notable reasons for returning to school was from what Faith calls “a light bulb moment” or as adult educators in the field refer to as a transformational learning experience. She spoke about the reasons for her return during our exit interview and saw them as “multi-faced.” She candidly shared:

It’s been 11 years since I was here (for the first 3 years) and when I left here I was very young and not very motivated to graduate. I went into the business world and had all these great jobs. I got married, for a day, to a man who didn’t turn out to be the man I thought I married. Who put a gun to my head twice before I finally decide after having a broken nose and two black eyes and a split lip, which it was in my best interest to move away. So I moved to North Carolina and was there happily for 3 years until I met a guy that abducted me and tried to kill me, whose [sic] is now in prison on 13 felony accounts. That was the moment I decided to start an adult life and take charge of my career and so I moved back here and I’m going to finish school.

These statements show the strong desire and motivation of the participants to accomplish their goal of earning an undergraduate business degree.

Age

Many students referred to their age as a concern for returning to school. Danielle stated in her reflection paper, “Many fears took over such as that I was getting to be too old, [and] that I wouldn’t be able to keep up.” She mirrored this statement in her exit interview when she said:

I had taken some classes at a smaller college with people that were younger than me and not to say that I feel old in that group people have just come out of high school.

Sometimes you feel really old and uncomfortable.

Danielle continued to explain in her exit interview how at her previous educational institution, she worked with an admissions counselor on finding a four-year program. When Danielle mentioned her interested in the University, she was told that the undergraduate program was geared more towards younger students. Danielle shared her reflections of her feelings of being discouraged when she stated:

When she [the admission counselor] told me that it kind of scared me a little bit. I thought well maybe I might not be able to do this or maybe I should just do this online or should I try to do something else.

Tiff mentioned in her interview how well she was financially compensated in her current position in hospitality management and how she had started to think about another career since her current position is sensitive to age. She stated, “Someday I’m not going to be young and get tips like I do now.”

Similarly, Clifford was perceived to be experiencing some sort of discomfort about his age and returning to college with traditional-aged students as he stated in his reflective piece, “My return to school has undoubtedly been an anxious moment in my life. Returning to school as a middle aged man really make[s] you feel old and far removed from what the traditional students consider the norm.” Sarah reflected in her writing on how time is getting away from her, “I need to do it [school] now because I am not getting any younger.” She continued to examine her feelings regarding age and linked it to her self esteem:

I need to prove to myself that I can do anything as long as I put my mind to it. I want to be able to prove to my son that no matter how old you are you can do anything as long as you put your heart and soul to it. This transition in the long run will help me as a better person in that I will have more confidence in myself as well as self esteem. Having confidence and self esteem will be worth it in the end as well as having a better job.

Amy, who had taken summer course at another institution prior to this one, was showing the most progression towards adjustment to the University and had this to say about her experience in those traditional-aged classrooms:

Even though I am not “old,” I felt very out of place when I first started attending my classes, especially when I took a few classes to finish up my general education requirements. The majority of the students in my classes are younger than me, and in a very different place in their lives. So, I sometimes find it very hard to relate to them, especially when assigned group work.

As the researcher and instructor for the course, I wondered if any of the students would feel uncomfortable with the fact that I was younger than them. Faith was the only one who mentioned her concerns about having an educator who was younger than she; while I do not think she was uncomfortable with me, this experience of having a younger professor had her examine her own feelings of age. She was having a different experience this time in undergraduate school and she stated in a reflection assignment, “This return to college having professors that are younger than I am, along with students being younger than I am will be different.”

While all students expressed the return to complete their undergraduate program as “undoubtedly a transition experience,” two students seemed to be handling the change better than others throughout the course, Clifford and Amy. It was not until the end of the semester when I was interviewing them that I learned how Amy actually was diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder and was taking prescription medicine to reduce the symptoms she experiences. During her exit interview she discussed how nerve wracking social situations can be for her: “It is a physical reaction; you hear my voice start to change. It just makes it difficult to ask for things, like when I had to ask my boss to have off work and things like that. It’s just frightening for me.” She continued to explain how in the past, the disorder has made it difficult for her to complete course assignments. She explained the physical reaction she experiences:

It is almost like when you are face in a crowd it’s ok, but when its focused just on me still very nerve wracking. It physiologically nerve wracking for me.... The shaky voice thing -- most people think I’m going to cry, but I’m not. It is very stressful. I remember giving a speech in a class. I look down and my hands would be red because I dug at my hands so harsh.

She continued to explain how her diagnosis with social anxiety disorder almost kept her from going to the interview of the job she is now assigned:

I’m doing my job I feel like I am in control of the situation. I am in a comfort zone and I feel like I am an expert on the situation. In that situation I’m much more comfortable. Just like when I quit my old job and started my new job I all most didn’t go to my interview because I was so nervous. So I’m glad that I did, but I almost didn’t.

Family, Work, and School

Many of the students doubted their ability to return to school and be able to balance work, school, and family. Concerns about scheduling of the required coursework were also addressed by the students. Sarah shared in her reflective assignment:

I am excited about coming back to school but at the same time I am a little scared. I don't know if I can do this but I am going to give it my all. I keep telling myself that it will be worth it in the end. I am a little scared about the work load and how I am going to get along with the professors but I think once I start my classes those fears will be alleviated.

Danielle also made a statement in her reflection assignment about managing time: "I was worried about being able to schedule work and managing my time wisely." Similarly, London Izzy states:

Some of the concerns I have are mostly that I will not be able to finish my degree with night courses or virtual courses. Due to having a full time job and a family, those courses work for my life and I know I'm going to have trouble going to classes during the day.

However, with the negative feelings students were feeling as they reflected on their transition to an undergraduate business program, more positive feelings progressed as the summer semester unfolded. All participants in their own way shared feelings of being proud of themselves and their strong work ethic.

Survey of Student Needs

In addition, to the qualitative findings from the study, notable suggestions for improving the adult business student's experiences on campus were found through an assessment developed by Rollins, Enderlein, and Payne (2000). This assessment is found in Appendix H. From reviewing the literature in Chapter Two, it was recommended from the researchers (Rollins, Enderlein, & Payne, 2000) that a needs assessment of adult students' perceptions of campus resources would be of value. Coincidentally, the assessment was created for the university where this study was took place. Although this was not a quantitative study, I wanted to see how my group of participants would respond to the questions; therefore I administered the assessment the first day of class to measure the value of select campus resources for adult business students. Completing the assessment was something we had talked about as a group, and therefore I included the results from the participants' responses along with some follow-up comments to the questions during our class discussion which was held a few class sessions after taking the assessment. The following section explores the role of campus support and resources and gives insight into potential improvements for assisting adult business student with their educational endeavors.

Overall students indicated that having more resources would be beneficial to them. The most important resources for students was having extended hours for administrative offices, extended hours for the learning center, extended hours for instructional resources (i.e., faculty office hours), extended (computer) laboratories hours, weekend courses, evening course offerings, and extended bookstore hours. The majority of the students ranked (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) all resources between a 3.1 to a 4.2 with a 4 designating "agree".

Table 2 Statistic Summary

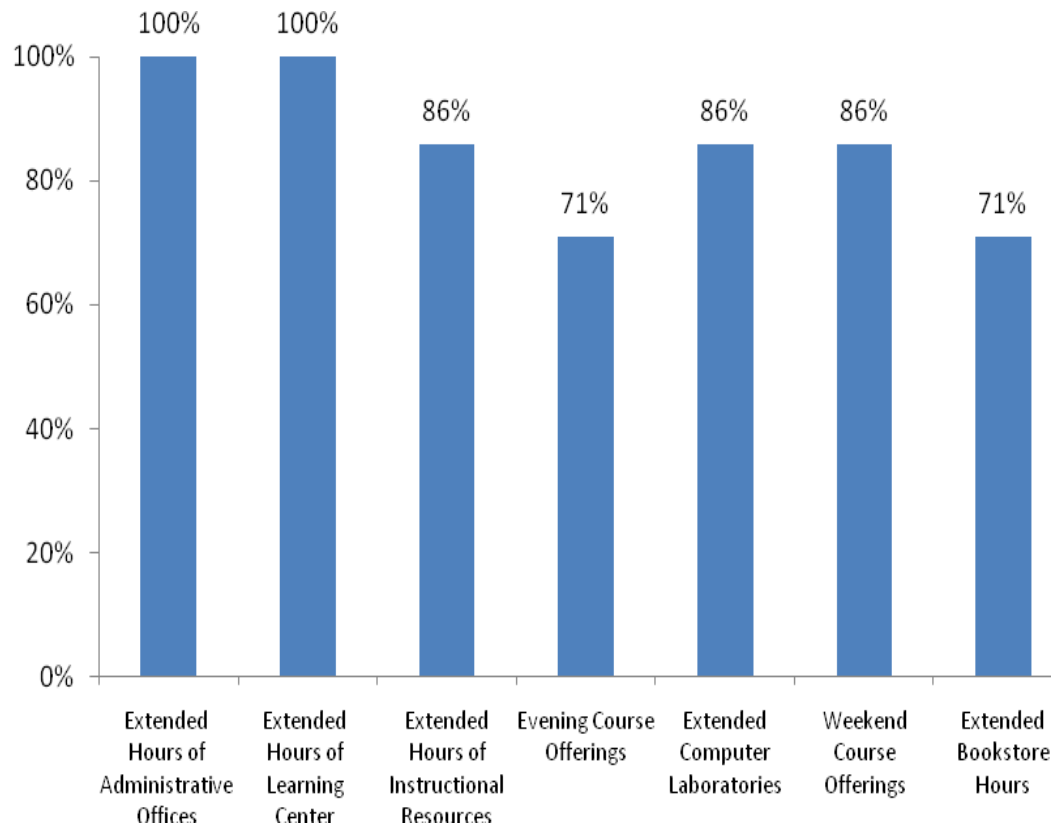
Mean and Standard Deviation of the Responses to Survey Questions Regarding the Advantage of a Campus Resource

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Extended Hours of Administrative Offices	4.57	0.53
Extended Hours of Learning Center	4.57	0.53
Extended Hours of Instructional Resources	4.43	0.79
Evening Course Offerings	4.29	1.25
Extended Computer Laboratories	4.29	0.76
Weekend Course Offerings	4.14	1.07
Extended Evening Bookstore Hours	4.14	1.46

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of each question that was found to be significant to the adult business students, while Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of the findings by percentage of students who stated they strongly agreed or agreed to the assessment statement.

Figure 2. Perceived Usefulness of Campus Resources

Student Response of Strongly Agree or Agree.



Students strongly agreed or agreed that extended hours for administration offices (100%) and extended hours for the learning center (100%) would be advantageous for them. These findings concur with the qualitative themes previously presented in this chapter. In addition, student reported that they strongly agreed or agreed that extended hours for instructional resources (faculty office hours) (86%), extended laboratory hours (computer labs) (86%), and weekend courses would be advantageous (86%). There was a discrepancy in what participants wrote in their recommendations to the University through the on-line Blackboard session.

Students felt strongly about having an adult student advocate, which is surprising that extended hours for instructional resources percentages were not higher. Also, none of the students recommended weekend courses, but many stated the importance of having evening course during our on-line discussion board session. Weekend course offerings ranked higher in the assessment the first day of class than did evening course offerings. The result could further suggest that by having the course and the way it was designed, the students saw the instructor/researcher as the advocate as the course progressed. While, 71% of students indicated they strongly agreed or agreed that extended bookstore hours and evening course offerings would be beneficial to them. Surprisingly, students only mentioned having more evening course in their reflection papers and interviews; holding classes on weekends was not addressed by any of the participants during the rest of the semester as a recommendation to the University. Another interesting finding was that student indicated that having extended laboratory hours would be helpful. As the researcher, this resource was not suggested again and most students told me through their reflection papers or during their interview that they either worked from home using their own computer or were able to complete some assignments during their scheduled work hours. It was puzzling to see the results for data analysis that this resource carried a lot of weight with this group of students. Since this assessment was administered during the first week of class, students indicated on the assessment that extended bookstore hours would be beneficial to them. What was surprising with this resource (extending bookstore hours) was that it was not mentioned again by any of the participants through the rest of the data collection. It is believed that by showing the students the University website, the on-line ordering system for purchasing textbooks from the bookstore, and the various other web-based textbook sites for purchasing textbooks, students no longer required the extended hours for the bookstore because they had learned of the new improved way many

campuses are assisting students with obtaining their books for classes. Again, it is important to note that the results are from a sample of 7 respondents. A larger sample size, if available is always preferred.

One issue that was noticed prior to disseminating the short assessment to adult students was that question 10 was problematic. Question 10 asked, “Evening child care would be advantages to me.” Perhaps prior to the asking respondents’ question 10 and to improve the assessment one would need to add the question: “Do you have children?”

From our conversation in class about the assessment, I was able to get more details from the students’ responses. Students marked strongly disagree or disagree either for question 10 because they did not have children or had someone else that kept their child(ren). I was interested in gaining more information about question 5, which asked the question, “Extended hours to instructional resources would be advantages to me” and 20, which asked “Nontraditional student organizations would be advantages to me.” The students expressed the importance of faculty having office hours that were varied and accommodating to their schedules. One student gave the example, of not 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays, which is of course during adult student normal scheduled working hours. While the second question, question 20, was not found to be significant, many universities suggest having adult student organizations so I wanted to see more information regarding the participants’ answers to the survey. Students explained how they received an invitation to a nontraditional student organization on campus but in the email it said 2:00 p.m. was the meeting time. The participants said that they may have attended if it would have been in the late afternoon or evening; otherwise, they would had to take leave from work to attend. It is important to note that this was the feedback from the students who strongly agreed or agreed to the statement.

Summary of Findings

The preceding thematic descriptions of the study's findings explained how participants experienced university life, their identities, and work as they returned to an undergraduate business program. The stages of planning, acting, observing, and ongoing reflection progressed as expected during the study. Participants were enthusiastic to be part of the study and contributed to the process attending class, posed to Blackboard for our on-line class discussion, completed reflective writing assignments, and finished the study with an exit interview. The themes presented in this chapter concentrate on the participant knowledge construction as it relates to the two research questions. This chapter revealed key findings about how to foster a first-year seminar classroom for adult students to facilitate transition, adjustment, and development. The key factor in bridging the uncertainty the students were experiencing the first day of their return to college was tailoring the course to their individual needs, having the sense of belonging through faculty (adult student advocate) and administrative support, and having a strategy or plan for accomplishing their educational goal. The introduction to the campus resources, program directors, and administration expanded the participants' awareness of the amount of support offered to them and deepened their understanding of their own transition and development through reflection and conversation within the group.

Therefore, since this was an action research project, participants' suggestions for practical implications are just not "results" but as participants were co-researchers, they also had an active role in determining implications of the study. The participants shared many significant insights about how they perceive the return to college and in Chapter Five will offer ways to improve other adult adjustment to college for three particular levels: University, College of Business, and the first-year seminar program.

Finally, the findings offer a tailored first-year seminar course for adult students. Chapter Five will discuss these findings in relationship to their significance to action research, adult and business education, the Schlossberg et. al. transition model, and future research, along with a new model for transitioning adult (business) students successfully to college.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The intention of this chapter is to interpret the findings presented in Chapter Four and discuss the implications of the research. The purpose of this action research study was to explore how a first-year seminar course could be improved to better assist adult business students and to understand more about adult learners' experiences returning to undergraduate business school. The research study was guided by two research questions and two sub-questions:

1. How can we best meet the needs of adult business students?
 - 1a. What are the reasons for the adult business student deciding to attend or return to an undergraduate program?
 - 1b. What is the relationship between personal development and adjustment for adult returning business students as they complete a first-year seminar course?
2. How do adult business students experience university life, their identities, and work as they return to an undergraduate business school?

In order to consider a new approach for designing and teaching first-year seminars, specifically for adult business students, the study utilized an adult development (transition) theory and an action research methodology to highlight the significance of adult business students' experiences within the course to the research objectives.

In this chapter, I applied an adult development (transition) theory lens to analyze the significance of a first-year seminar course, student adjustment, and personal development for adult business students returning to college. The findings of this study can inform practice in higher education, adult education, and more specifically business education by engaging the Schlossberg et al. (1995) model explained in Chapter Two to explore how the study informs and provides a new understanding about the model. I highlight the implications for theory and

answer the research questions, provide implications for practice, and implications for future research. Finally, I reflect on the experience of conducting the study of assisting adult (business) students' transition to college.

Findings Related to Adult Development Theory

Adult development (transition) theory informed the findings of this study in several aspects. Adult developmental theory served as a theoretical framework for understanding adult students' experiences as they returned to college. In some cases, the adult students were experiencing life transitions, which was often the catalyst for their return to undergraduate business school. Transition theory is a facet of adult development theory, which "studies the systematic change within an individual or a group of individuals that results from a dynamic interaction of heredity and environmental influences" (Lerner, 1998, as cited in Bee & Bjorkland, 2004, p. 14).

In the following sections, four main components were found in my research regarding the participants' development, which are not found in other studies: (a) a tailored first-year seminar experience, (b) adult student advocate, (c) student engagement, and (d) reflection on student transition, learning, and adjustment. These four components were applied in a new model to explain what institutions may want to consider integrating to be inclusive to adult students as they transition to the college environment.

First-Year Seminar Experience

As many theorists reviewed in Chapter Two have suggested, involvement is an essential part of student learning and persistence toward graduation. While many of the participants in the study had multiple life roles they were balancing--work, family, and other commitments--and were unable to attend club meetings and activities, they received similar benefits from having

close involvement with faculty and other students through the action research process. The participants reported repeatedly that the sharing of experiences among peers provided a great deal of value to the experience and offered a sense of validation and assurance that adult business students from vastly different backgrounds and education experiences share similar frustrations, concerns, and fears. For this group of participants, the significance of designing a first-year seminar class for adult learners allowed for trust and group cohesion to be established in six face-to-face class sessions. The students appreciated having a first-year seminar course (tailored to their needs) to assist them with getting organized for their upcoming semester.

The next section explores the importance of placing adult (business) learners at the center of the learning experience, which includes understanding their reasons for returning to college and integrating their lived experience into the classroom learning as much as possible and having one faculty member or administrator to assist adult students with questions and concerns regarding educational processes and procedures.

Adult Student Advocate - Learner-Centeredness

The importance of learner-centeredness is reflected in the findings, especially within the excerpts from personal communications, Critical Incident Questionnaires (CIQs), and reflection papers. A critical component of action research is including the participants as actively as possible in the research process so they become co-researchers. In order to emphasize that the participants from the study were co-researchers for the project, one of the key methods I used to foster collaboration and student engagement was to bring to the next class a summary of the participant voices on the CIQ. Through the short questionnaire, participants had the opportunity to give their individual feedback, while the CIQ served as a way for each participant to communicate with me anonymously. It also was a way for us to reflect on the classroom

activities and make changes to the remaining class sessions. It also provided a way for the participants to reflect on their own learning for the day.

The reflective assignments provided another method of fostering learner-centeredness because participants were able to privately share their thoughts and questions, and I was able to share feedback and questions individually to each participant who needed particular responses. The large amount of data collected and the extensive participant quotes shared in Chapter Four speak to the interest, commitment, and openness of the adult business student participants. It also reveals that, if asked, adult business students have an extensive knowledge to share about ways to improve the transition for all adult learners.

The participants were especially fond of the experience of having one person who could assist them with their transition to college life and referred to me as their “adult student advocate.” Students felt more comfortable knowing that they had a centralized person for them on campus. The students saw this resource, an adult student advocate, as one of the most important resources for assisting them with the transition to an undergraduate program. The first-year seminar course in which they were enrolled was their primary contact, since it was held late in the afternoon during the summer term. Many faculty members had not yet returned to begin the fall semester, and most staff and administrators had already left their offices for the day; therefore, I was seen as not only the educator and researcher for the course, but their advocate.

By engaging adult students to be part of the learning process and the designing of the first-year seminar curriculum, higher educational institutions can better meet the needs of adult learners. The literature suggests that in-class learning time and interactions with faculty have a powerful influence on an adult’s campus experience and personal development:

Adults value and seek out classroom experiences that are based in relevancy, respect, adult dignity, and reciprocity of adult-to-adult relationships. The connecting classroom metaphor suggests an environment that embraces the value and worth of adults as knowledgeable learners, and which also values adult life experiences and perspectives as part of the learning process. (Graham et al., 2000, p. 12)

Other authors are in agreement by suggesting that classrooms are the center stage for adult learning (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Donaldson et al., 1991; Graham et al., 2000; Kasworm & Blowers, 1994; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997). Students will become connected with their college if they feel the institution cares about them and their success.

The contributions from my study integrated Schlossberg's et al.'s model of understanding the students' individually (self), their situation, support, and strategies to reach their education goals while adding the learner-centeredness of designing a first-year seminar course. This led to each student feeling higher levels of self-efficacy and ultimately indicating that he or she was more prepared and organized for future semesters. Using the techniques of the Schlossberg et al.'s 4Ss model, student-centered teaching (learner-centeredness), having an instructor that was willing to serve as a student advocate, student engagement with other adult learners, and students reflecting on their learning and adjustment led to students making a transition to college life through a first-year seminar course.

My findings indicated that the participants immediately recognized the intersection of education and the learning experience as playing a role in their personal development. All participants explained their return to college through obtaining a lifelong goal and bettering their lives and their families' lives. In every reflection paper, interview, and personal correspondences, the participants used repeatedly the word "learn" or "learning." Research in

the area of student involvement identifies the importance of learning through active engagement. Astin (1993, 1999a, 1999b) believes student learning occurs through students developing key relationships with faculty, collaborating with other students, and participating in an active learning environment that continues to design programs that promote success for students in college. Astin et al.'s (2002) 35-year study (1966-2002) concurs with the findings from my study.

When reviewing the literature on adult motivations for returning to higher education and comparing them to the findings from my study, the participants gave three of the four reasons listed in the literature for their return. According to the literature, there are primarily four reasons for adults deciding to return to higher education: major life transition, accomplishing career goals, a combination of a life transition and planning, and socialization; however, the most commonly cited reason is a personal or major life transition (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Butler, 2005; Compton et al., 2006; Kasworm et al., 2002; Merriam et al., 2007).

The findings from my study on why students return are consistent with the literature from the past 40 years, but these results have been ignored in the context of first-year seminars. What is unique about my study is that these results pay attention to this group of students.

Unlike what the literature has shown, the adult business students in my study valued the experience of working with other adult learners, but socialization with others was not given as a reason for their returning. The participants from my study were more interested in accomplishing career goals, which concurs with one of the reasons given in the literature review on why adult students return to college. It may also suggest the nature of the degree the participants were seeking and personality traits of business students, which are often noted to be goal-oriented.

Much of the research supports the assumption that adult students want what they are learning in the classroom to be relevant and applicable to their current day-to-day activities (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Donaldson, Flannery, & Ross-Gordon, 1993; Ross-Gordon, 2003). This was similar to the findings from my study when participants were able to apply what they were learning in the classroom to their past work history or to their current position. For example, with the business etiquette class discussion, Faith had taken what she had learned in the classroom and was teaching others at a business-related function.

Student Engagement

The concept of fostering student-to-student informal relationships can be found in the adult education literature. While adult students are as less involved in or not involved at all with on-campus programs, Graham and Donaldson (1999) suggest that adults are much more involved with caring for family and have less time to participate in campus activities due to the family requirements, full-time jobs, and other sources competing for their time. While, students who participated in my study were not able to participate (due to time constraints) in extracurricular activities, this class seemed to have substituted the class environment and interaction with other adult business students for participation in campus activities and organizational campus involvement. Graham and Donaldson suggest that educators along with educational institutions find a way to gain student involvement:

team projects with other adult students, with problem-based learning activities, with novel ways to increase their interaction with faculty, with action research projects, with enhanced student-to-student interactions that foster informal relationships, or in integrated themes that address those broad outcome factors identified. (p. 7)

Active and collaborative learning assists adult “students with problem solving and has students deal with the messy, unscripted situations they will encounter during and after college” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 68) and will increase the amount of time students spend learning. Feedback, which was provided to all participants in my action research study, was found to be positively associated with student learning and success in college, similar to the findings of Kuh et al. The feedback provided by me was to assist students with confirming they were on the right track and giving them additional comments to reflect more deeply on, as with the case of Danielle and London Izzy, who made decisions on declaring their majors. Discussing the study plans with each student and having students work with a faculty member doing a research project has been a significant factor for participant learning. Kuh et al. consider student and faculty interaction through a research project as a “life-altering experience” (p. 42). Many of the students’ descriptions of their experiences in the course demonstrate that tailoring a first-year seminar course as an interactive learning activity has a positive effect on student learning, development, and adjustment to college life. The students expressed working on a research project and interacting with other adult business students was a valuable experience for them.

In this next section, the significance of the findings is discussed in relationship to the Schlossberg et al. (1995) model presented in Chapter Two and how the participants in the study were able to understand more about their own transition to college life, learning, and adjustment through reflection.

Reflection - Adult Student Transition, Learning, and Adjustment

At the beginning of the study, most participants regarded the transition to college as a nerve-wracking, stressful endeavor, which is similar to what the literature states about adult

learners being apprehensive about returning to college and oftentimes expressing self-doubt about their abilities (Kasworm, 1993a). Many of the participants in my study stated they were fearful and nervous to return to college. It was through the course that a transition occurred for many of the participants. For many it was the reflective writing assignments that had them examining what in their lives has led them to return to college, what has influenced them to select business as their major, and has asked them to think about their adjustment to university life. For others, it allowed them to think about and apply what they were learning in the class and know about the campus resources to change their perceptions of themselves in becoming a student again. The reflection assignments, which were designed from the 4Ss of Schlossberg et al.'s model (1995) (Situation, Self, Support, and Strategy), allowed them to see how their adjustment to university life is connected to their transition and to their own personal development. In addition to the reflection assignments, the exit interview questions were designed using the model. It was through using the Schlossberg et al. model that I was able to evaluate participants' adjustment to college life, their identities, and their work lives as they returned to the University. Schlossberg et al. (1989) state that adult learners need to feel a sense of belonging and a belief that they are important, and they must feel able to cope with the demands of other responsibilities by managing their energy while mastering new skills both professionally and personally in order to complete their degree requirements. I began to see a shift as participants' negative feelings were replaced with feelings of relief, understanding, and support unlike at the beginning of the study where students were apprehensive about their ability to make it in higher education. According to the research on adult persistence, the student feeling a connection to the university is an important factor in whether or not he or she will succeed at reaching his or her educational goals (Kasworm, 1993a; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

The participants in my study showed their feelings of being connected to the university by their language and actions. During the study, participants started to use the school's name and abbreviation as well as participate in the taking of a group picture with their College of Business t-shirts. Additionally, in their reflection papers and exit interviews, they used the names of administrators and program directors they had met through the 4-week course.

From the literature review in Chapter Two, only a handful of studies in first-year seminar courses were completed with the adult learners in mind. Rhoades and Carifio (1999) suggested that adult students need a seminar designed specifically for the adult learner and recommended to educators and administrators to make changes to content and requirements for adults enrolled in a first-year seminar. From their findings, adults gave negative responses regarding the first-year seminar stating "they already knew" or "did not need" the course. These findings go against what the purpose of the first-year seminar is designed to do, which is to meet student needs. Welch (2004) examined adult learners' perceptions of a one-day orientation program, and his findings were similar to Rhoades and Carifio's, who said that adults need a different kind of first-year seminar or orientation to assist with the adjustment to college life. The findings of these studies are consistent with the findings from my study.

A summary of a participant's experience was written in by London Izzy in her reflection paper and could be shared with future students:

Through this course I have learned so much about my degree and the college. The course was so much more than I expected. This course has helped develop my confidence in continuing to work towards my new degree, in my ability to get the support I will need in the many years I am here and the ability for me to earn a better job and future for me and my family. The study plan that was completed during the course has helped me determine exactly how my years are going to be spent at the University and I know exactly what

courses I will be taking each semester. That's something that I won't have to worry with each semester now. As a non-traditional student going to a college geared towards traditional students, this class and all the staff who has visited the class, has made me feel like I have the support I need to accomplish my goals. I have set long term goals, besides my bachelors' degree, since I've started this class.... Taking this class in the summer has prepared me for the fall semester and was geared towards the individual person, rather than a whole.... The class has made me more confident about all my choices, including the school I chose, my major and continuing this long process of getting my degree.

The participants from this study have given colleges and universities insight into the reasons they have returned to an undergraduate program, the components needed in a first-year seminar for them to adjust to college life, and the campus resources needed for a smoother transition. In the next section, by using the experiences of the participants in my research, a new model for understanding adult students' transition to university life is introduced.

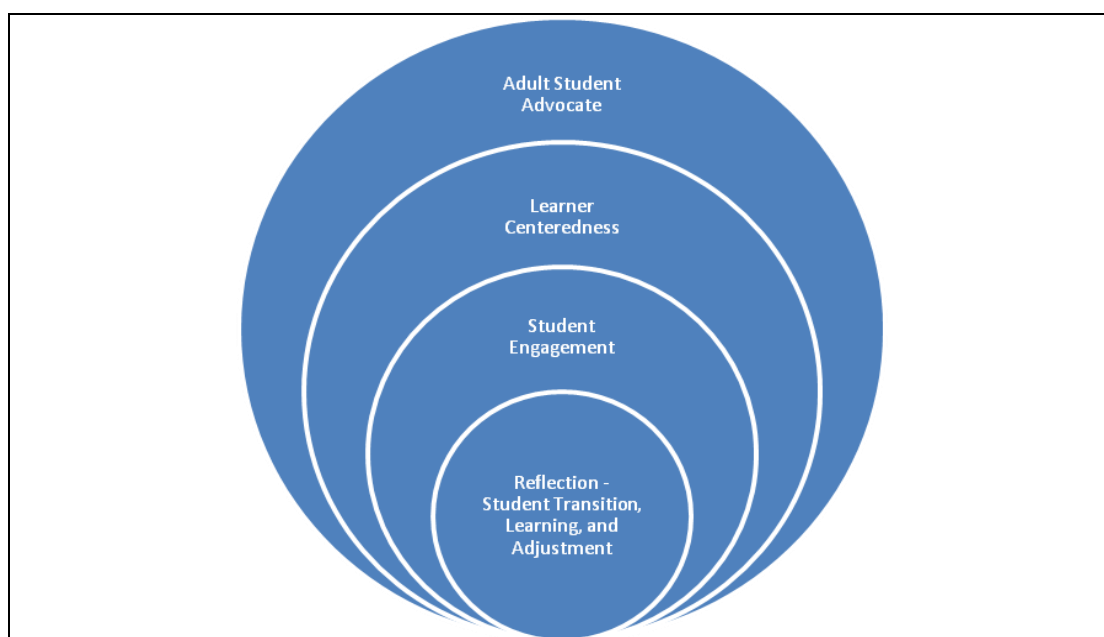
A Transition Model

The model is required to understand how adult students transition to university life by visually demonstrating how campus programs intersect with student learning and development. Cognitive development, dialogue, and reflection are all ways that student learning is created. While the findings did not mention these aspects of the student's experiences directly, there are implications of their existence from the data collected and through students saying they went through a transition and adjustment after having enrolled and completed the class. The interaction with other adult business students in the class was found to be a substitute for the organizational participation and campus activities. The Schlossberg et al. (1995) model of transition implied that understanding the 4Ss regarding the students' experiences of the transition would assist with their adjustment, but did not mention a first-year seminar, the importance of

engagement, an advocate for students, and learning and development through reflection. An outcome of this study shares the participants' experience by integrating the understanding of adult transition with the tools, strategies, and learning as a group to meet their needs.

From this study, a model (see Figure 3) was designed to aid other researchers, educators, and administrators in higher education, toward a student-centered approach to fostering adult (business) student transition to college. The model was designed based on my beliefs as a researcher and was inspired by the 7 participants who demonstrated excellence among returning adult learners, voiced a desire to use their business degrees to help others, and described how the first-year seminar program and the action research project helped them.

Figure 3. Adult Students' Transition to University Life Through a First-Year Seminar Course



As part of the participants' way of expressing their experiences of college life, their collective identities as adult business students, and as full-time employees, they came up with

recommendations from their own experience, which will be shared following the next section as implications for practice.

Implications for Future Research

The opportunities to build upon this study are immense. The findings of the research illustrate that there is still much to learn about what adult students need in returning to higher education regarding campus resources and activities as well as a first-year seminar program and orientation program. As an under-researched population, adult business students present a demographic ripe for further in-depth research concerning their personal and professional development. Also, business education can learn much from this study's application of action research to engage students in learning, adjustment, and development. As a research methodology, action research is not widely utilized within adult or business education, and this study provides an opportunity where the concerns and experiences of adult business students were a focal point of the research. Today, traditional business classes are still taught from more of a behaviorist philosophy of education and a teacher-centered methodology.

Due to the collaborative nature of the study, the participants made decisions about the content, structure, and format of the class sessions. Additionally, the cyclical nature of action research is demonstrated and described throughout Chapters Three and Four and illustrates the four phases of the model: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Kemis & McTaggart, 1988). The participants and I planned new topics from week to week, completed class discussions, and tried new structures and formats as the study progressed. As collaborators in the research project, the participants were highly involved in decision-making throughout the study and felt valued as co-researchers.

Several recommendations for future research stem from this study. First, evaluations of the first-year seminar programs and services for adult undergraduate students could be extended to colleges where students are not only majoring in business. Other colleges and universities may want to learn how their student body perceives their own campus programs and resources. Further research in this area could lead to finding model programs for first-year seminars or orientation programs for adult learners. Second, the research undertaken in this study has broken new ground for researchers focusing on the first-year seminar experience of adult undergraduate students at institutions of higher education. Using this model with other groups of adult students at institutions of higher education is suggested. To foster adult student transition to college life, this model serves as a guide for future research seeking to learn more about the adult learner in a first-year seminar course. Third, an opportunity exists to conduct a study that investigates the differences between adult students and traditional students who have attended specialized programs and those who attended a typical first-year orientation program. Variables of interest could be grade point averages, retention rates, student perceptions of college life, and the usefulness of campus resources. Fourth, this study could be replicated to include people of color and other minorities. This would enhance educational institution understanding of a more diverse group in terms of race, ethnicity, class, and gender for a more in-depth understanding of these groups regarding their first-year seminar or orientation experience. Fifth, a larger group of participants based on the primary findings of this study may serve to validate adult business students' apprehensions of the typical first-year seminar program and orientation. Sixth, the relationship between adult students' learning and the interaction of faculty and student conducting research is worthy of further research. One could examine if interactions with faculty and other students is a substitute for organized participation. Seventh, an action research

study of engaging students in creating a welcome packet for their university to be used during orientation or within the first-year seminar would be a follow-up to this study. Findings from these seven recommendations for further research would ultimately help modify existing programs or aid in designing new initiatives.

Participants' Recommendations for Practice

Throughout the study the participants' awareness deepened their understanding of their reasons for returning to school, why they had chosen business as a major, and their understanding of the next years in an undergraduate program. The data reveals the need to revise the model and expand it exclusively to include a first-year seminar course, an adult student advocate, and reflection to aid in student personal development, learning, transition, and adjustment.

Since many of the participants are managing multiple life roles, researchers have suggested the need for increased hours for university services (i.e., library, bookstore, tutoring assistance, and computer labs), more flexible class schedules (i.e., evening and weekend classes), an increased number of offerings for general education and upper-division courses, along with extended hours of administration offices (Coppock, 1998; O'Conner, 1994; Rollins, Enderlein, & Payne, 2000). Many of the participant learners from my study were required to take time off from work to attend class or take care of administrative tasks during the day. Similar to the findings of Rollins et al.'s, many participants preferred weekend classes and asked for student service offices such as admissions, student accounts, financial aid, and the registrar's office to be open later in the evening. In their research study, Rollins et al. gave excellent suggestions, which were similar to the suggestions the participants had made during the course. These recommendations include:

1. Developing [sic] a single point of contact for non-traditional students seeking information on admissions, financial aid, and fundamental university procedures. (Rollins et al., iv)
2. Prepare and make available a basic information booklet to be distributed to all interested and enrolled non-traditional students. Include in that booklet of information relating to all special and regular services that are available to students. (iv)
3. Develop and offer a comprehensive, separate orientation program for non-traditional students at a time that is convenient for them. (iv)
4. Extend the hours during which students can obtain identification cards during the first two weeks of classes. (v)

All of the suggestions from the Rollins et al. study and my study are from what adult learners said that they needed from higher education institutions to better assist them with their adjustment to college life.

Observation and reflection was ongoing throughout the study, but the participants specifically discussed their overall observations and final reflections during the on-line discussion board and the exit interview conducted during the last two class sessions. The Foundations of Business Administration course, FBA, and BSN101 were used interchangeably by the participants, but it is the same course being referred to by the students. Recommendations are given in three sections on ways to improve this particular University, its College of Business, and First-Year Seminar programs in general. The participants of the study were delighted to take part in creating new ideas, which are listed below as recommendations, to better assist other adult learners with their overall experience at the University. As an action research study with

the intention of designing a curriculum specifically for other adult business students who will in future semester take the BSN101 course, the participants were engaged as co-researchers and poured their hearts into completing this research project with me. Therefore, since this was an action research project, participants' suggestions for practical implications are just not "results"; as participants were co-researchers, they also had an active role in determining implications of the study. Because the students felt engaged in giving recommendations and it was part of their learning, I decided to give it space in this chapter instead of Chapter Four where it is typically found.

Participants' Recommendations for the University

Many of the students shared recommendations, especially during the exit interview, when they felt that they had a good grasp of the institution's culture, policies, and procedures through their involvement in the course and the action research study. This finding of participant learning concurs with the findings of Arnold, Kuh, Vesper, and Schuh (1993), who found that relationships with faculty and interaction with other students were important factors related to student learning. Some authors have made a call for action research as a part of campus involvement (Graham & Donaldson, 1999) and for a two-way communication and involvement between adult students, faculty members, and university administration in order to better assist adult students with the transition to college (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

This research used an action research study, and the participants felt valued from feeling as if this were their project as well. The following section shares many of their ideas for recommendations for the University, the College of Business, and the first-year seminar course.

Orientation day more tailored to student needs. A prevailing theme concerned the ineffectiveness of the current student orientation. Participants wanted a program that was

designed more exclusively for transfer or adult students. As Sarah stated in her exit interview, “Orientation could have been geared more towards non-traditional students instead of traditional students.” London Izzy added in her exit interview, “Orientation had nothing to do with us.” I asked her to elaborate, and she said:

Except for meeting the Dean that was the only part, actually if I had to do it over that’s the only part I would have come to. Especially taking a whole day off and people work and take a whole day off to something that you didn’t get any information out of.

More directly, Sarah stated in her on-line discussion board posting, “I believe they should have a non-traditional orientation.”

Many of the participants listed topics that were important to them but were not covered during the orientation and were covered in the class. What was most frustrating to this group of students was that many topics, such as touring the dorms, had no applicability to their status as transfer or adult students. Sarah stated in her exit interview:

It would be nice if they could do an orientation just for the non-traditional students. The one that I went to [was] just for transfers and seemed like it was geared more towards being here as a resident and I’m not going to be doing that....so I just walked out, I thought I don’t need to go there! I’m not living here.

Clifford’s sentiments were that the Foundations of Business Administration course needed to be offered by the College of Business regularly as a supplement to the orientation offered by the University:

I feel that the school should be able to have a specific adult student orientation that will specifically address the needs of the adult students. April’s [BSN101] class has been very

informative and has served as a good introduction to the school; this is something that needs to happen on a regular basis.

While it is important to note that the students did not express a need to be segregated from the traditional-aged population, the participants were asking to be included only in activities that were relevant to their life experience and their return to college. Despite the consensus that the orientation did not meet the needs of the participants in the study, the participants did acknowledge certain aspects were seen as beneficial, like being instructed to the Associate Dean and learning about the summer course offering of the BSN101 course.

Extended hours of administrative offices. London Izzy stated during her exit interview:

The extended hours even if it's not an everyday extended hour at least people can come and pay their bills, get financial aid taken care of, get classes and meet with the instructors. That's one thing is more classes geared toward adult students and what I said that the university isn't for adult students, so that's why a lot of people don't come here. If there was more for them, they would have more adult students here.

The student union building, where the bookstore is located, also was a comment worthy as a recommendation for operating hour adjustments. Sarah stated in the blackboard discussion forum, "The bookstore should have longer hours as well."

On-line classes and night class offerings. London Izzy shared the importance of offering more on-line courses for adult students in her exit interview:

If they [administration] had classes in the evening and if they had class[es] that you would be able to take in your major and actually be able to finish you major by taking night courses part-time. There would probably be a lot more because most of the community colleges you go to have a lot of online classes also online and evening course

for all sorts. That's why I think they get most of the students because they are more gear towards them.

Amy shared a similar view in her exit interview: "I think that the university needs to consider more on-line classes." Sarah added from her posting to Blackboard, "They should have more evening classes." Danielle expanded the discussion and said on her posting to Blackboard:

I think [University name removed] has some later classes, which are good, but I know that if it wasn't for this opportunity to take BSN 101 in the summer that I didn't know when I would take it. I think they should try to offer all the classes at least one day at night to accommodate working adult students or people who have families and children, and maybe that's the only time they can come. They deserve a chance to further their education just like a student coming right out of high school.

Coordination of billing and campus requirements. Another grievance that students had was their perception of the lack of coordination of needed campus documents. Adult students were concerned with managing their time wisely since their time needs to be divided between many responsibilities. Additionally, students resent the University assuming that they are full-time students, which is evident from their own words that they felt marginalized and distanced from the procedural elements of returning to college. London Izzy mentioned in her interview,

It's taking the tour and they could have gone over how to get our decals. Doing stuff that we would have to do, unfortunately they send out your schedules then we get our bills. After we get our bills we could go over and take care of things we need to take care of all in one day.... They do the billing as a full semester. I know it's only about 20 people, but still. We have to sit here and figure out our whole bill. I mean, can't they just look at what our credits are and figure out our bill from there?

Clifford shared a similar complaint to London Izzy's by way of the Blackboard discussion board:

The one area that I feel could be improved because of the minimal number of adult students, would be the way that the adults are handled with administrative end (admissions, billing, orientation, scheduling, etc). Concerning paperwork and billing it would be extremely nice if the adults did not need to worry about getting into the admissions or student accounts offices to address issues that are dealt with generally across all of the students on the campus.

Tiff replied to Clifford's comment on Blackboard and stated:

They [University admissions and other processes] need to be more applicable to adult students. Examples of this would be on-campus housing paperwork that we receive and being billed for full time tuition when you are only taking one or two classes. Adults do not have families and jobs that do not leave them a lot of time to be running to the school to handle minor issues like this.

Preferential scheduling. Students mentioned the scheduling process, and while much of the class agreed on many of topics for discussion, both in class and on-line, the issue of preferential scheduling raised mixed feelings among the group of participants. Clifford shared his view for his having suggested the notion:

With the limited ability to attend school and that adults have and the minimal number of adult student on campus, I feel that adult students should have an opportunity to schedule there [sic] classes before all of the traditional students start the normal scheduling process. Adults may not be able to be at the computer at 8:15 on Tuesday morning, ready

to register for the classes that they will need for the next semester and may miss out on opportunities to take the course that they need because of "life".

Faith is thoughtful of the traditional-aged students and came back with a posting on Blackboard: "The scheduling issue may cause a bit of a 'conflict' among the 'traditional' students."

Adult student liaison/advocate. A reoccurring theme through the on-line discussion board postings and the exit interviews was having a centralized person for the adult students on campus. Clifford states in his interview, "There are a lot of things that could be more tailored to adult student[s], without having a whole new stuff or anything like that. Maybe look at the idea of a liaison for just the adult students." Amy recommends from her interview that one advisor is needed for the adult students, "one that is more keyed into the needs of adult students and understands the programs or can help develop programs to help get adult students involved." London Izzy wrote in her posting to Blackboard, "I think having someone staffed to help the non-tradition[al] students is a great idea. They would be more in tune with the students' paperwork and issues, due to their not being as many at the college."

Furthermore, Danielle stated during the on-line discussion forum:

I like the idea of a student advocate for adult students. I think it would help the adult students feel more at home at [University name removed]. I know that even at my old school I felt overwhelmed with feeling like I was the oldest one in the classroom and that the school catered more towards young freshmen.

Administrative understanding of adult student experiences. I chose to include this recommendation in a separate sub-theme from the next sub-theme, Faculty Understanding of Adult Student Experiences, since there needs to be more attention paid to word choice when

speaking to adult students. As previously discussed in Chapter Four, adult learners had much apprehension regarding their return to a university setting. Universities and colleges that invite students to participate in orientation programs need to use gentler words with not only this group of students but with all students in general. I was disheartened to hear what I consider “scare tactics” used to express the commitment level that must be made by incoming students. A friendly, more thought-out way is suggested as the negative, discouraging, comments shared by one member of the administration speaking to the students at the orientation was quite haunting to my study participants. Four weeks after the comment was made, students, who were able to have time off from work to attend the orientation, were still talking about it during a Blackboard discussion in the class:

During orientation I remember someone saying if you have a job, you’re not going to make it as a full time student. School needs to be your number one priority. That is very discouraging. I have always worked while going to school full time and did fine. I know that [University name removed] is a lot harder than community colleges, but I shouldn't feel like I’m going to fail before I start. I can understand that statement applying to a traditional student who has a lot of other priorities on their minds besides school, but I feel as an adult student that statement doesn't apply to me. I know how to manage more than one thing at a time and manage my time evenly. That statement made me very nervous, like “oh no I'm not going to be able to do this”.

London Izzy’s posting on Blackboard regarding the negative comments made clearly showed her understanding of universities needing to know more about their students and that general stereotypes are not helpful to student persistence toward learning, graduation, and ultimately personal development:

I do remember them making that statement and totally agree it was a bad statement for the older students. For us working folks who have their priorities straight, our priorities might come different. Family might come first work might come first or school might come first, but we make the time needed for the other areas of our lives and do what needs to be done. The only thing that suffers in my life is sleep and I can see others having that problem too.

Faculty understanding of adult student experiences. Tiff candidly shares her frustration with being in a traditional-aged classroom where faculty members do not understand adult student needs are different. In her interview she told me:

I think that one of the biggest things for me is one of my pet peeves that in one of my previous classes are being with younger students. Sometimes the instructors need to realize that we are not 18 [year old] kids coming into school. They need to realize that some of the stuff that they have us do is really like I get into it and having to waste time on some of the things that I don't need to do that I have already done. We have life experiences that some of them don't. We don't need some of that stuff. So that is one of the things I hate is having to waste my time. Sometimes you feel like you are wasting time with some of the projects that they have you do just seem very childish.

Participants' Recommendations to the College of Business

Welcome packet for adult or transfer students. The participants came up with the idea of a welcome packet, just like many universities give to their incoming faculty members, with campus information and related needs for adjustment. This information packet could be consolidated at the university level or at the college or student's declared major program level. Faith's recommendation from her interview was:

Just a map, just send me a map. Send me a listing of phone numbers of my department. Send me a list of my advisor and of his numbers and the career development center and who runs it and what their number is and what they have to offer me.

Faith expanded upon the idea of a welcome packet of information for adult students when she reflected back to the on-line discussion board postings we had as a group:

I had also said when we did our discussion on our black board [sic] that when we come in at the beginning of the semester that maybe instead for all of the normal hand outs that they give all of the 18 year-olds that maybe they could give us a handout that's more geared towards us whether it be information for day care in town. Or the rates for the closest day care centers. Or these are the extended hours of operation for the career development center. Or these are certain days that the career development center will have extended hours. Like a packet of information, something that is geared towards an older student something that would help us.

In agreement with Faith, London Izzy, in her interview, mentioned that packet could be an alternative for working adult students, who are unable to come to the orientation: "Putting a packet together people wouldn't have to come to orientation, get a packet together because they don't have to do a campus tour or anything like that. Maybe a campus tour would be good for incoming students and a packet for what they have available."

More directly Faith summarized the participants' viewpoints from the on-line discussion forum on Blackboard and makes a recommendation to the University:

Universities and colleges should have a packet ready for adult students. This packet should contain all of the essential information pertaining to that school but also information geared toward adult students. This packet might include information on non-

traditional lounges hours of operation, day-care, commuting information, car-pooling numbers, parking information. It should be a wealth of information that an adult student could use [as] a tool.

Clifford added in his interview that the information he did receive in the mail was not relevant to him. He said, “As a non-traditional student we received information about housing, on campus housing, when they should be sending us information about where to buy parking permits and things like that because we are going to be commuters.”

Convenient office hours. Many times students suggest the flexible hours for office hours. While some could include times that would be conducive for someone who has a job to be able to make, students are often unaware of the commitments to teaching, service, and research that faculty must do. Danielle shared in her interview:

I know a lot of it maybe the professors like to be here in the day, but do more office hours in the evening where it would be more possible for more adults to get in to meet with professor and advisors.

Amy shared that her advisor does not have any evening hours and that when she visited him; she had to take vacation from work. Sarah concurred with this suggestion when on the Blackboard discussion forum she stated, “Faculty and staff should have later hours to accommodate us.”

From reading the participant recommendations and quotes from the data collection throughout the semester, this group of adult business students experienced their return to the University as a stressful time that caused them a lot of frustration because the University still operates on the traditional-aged paradigm. Balancing life roles of spouse or partner, parent, and employee were just a few of the responsibilities held by this group of participants. What needs to

be taken into consideration is that the adult business students participating in this study committed to completing the summer course, which was more time-intensive due to the condensed term, while managing all of their work and life roles. All participants successfully completed the course, found it to be the main reason for their adjustment to the college, and said it helped them get organized and acclimated to university life, their new roles as adult business students, and their future careers.

Participants' Recommendations for First-Year Seminar Programs

By overwhelmingly positive comments by study participants regarding the adapting of the BSN101 course to adult business student needs, the participants had suggested a few notable changes if the course were to be offered again in the future to another group of transfer or adult population without a “concrete syllabus,” as Clifford’s respectful reference in the action research process to our syllabus, which we designed together as a group during the initial planning stages. Throughout the course students reflected and acted and saw need for adaptations to class sessions. All students except Clifford were comfortable with the action research process. Clifford’s previous educational experience in college, approximately 14 years ago, may have made him used to more traditional (behaviorist) ways of teaching where the educator would lecture and there was a set syllabus decided by the educator who held the decision making power within the classroom. Additionally, I speculate that Clifford’s need for structure could be simply a part of his personality. However, he did understand that it was the only way to follow the study’s methodology and truly have the student perceptions honored as equally as mine as both the researcher and the educator. His mixed feelings came through in his Blackboard posting:

I feel that the idea that April had leaving the class extremely flexible was a great idea considering the dynamic needs and time constraints of the adult students. One area that I

feel this could have been improved (and made the class more organized) is to have a list of the things that are potential discussion topics at the first class and go through and pick out what you would like to accomplish based on the specific needs of the students. The reason for the list comes from the fact that I specifically had no idea of what to ask on the first day because I had been so far removed from college in the last 14 years. Once a list of topics is determined, a concrete syllabus would be able to be created for the next 7 classes. I also feel that the summer course for the adults is perfect because it allows the students to become semi-acclimated before all of the traditional students overwhelm the campus.

Since I was participating in the on-line discussion board session on Blackboard with students, I decided to respond (non-defensively) to Clifford's dialogue regarding his perception of the course needing to be more organized:

Yes, if this class is ever taught again in the summer time for adult students -- a list would be appropriate. I actually thought about it before class, but I was concerned that you all would think that I had a predetermined way I wanted the classes to be planned. I truly wanted the class to be as participatory as possible. I guess that is why I brought in the syllabus for the traditional class in the fall -- to give you an idea of what takes place, but I agree a list of possible activities would have been better and setting an overall outline for the course would have been beneficial for planning purposes. I just wanted you to all know that I could be flexible with dates, etc.

After each student completed his or her exit interviews, I prepared each participant a handwritten note and a copy of the group picture we had taken earlier in the semester and gave the small token of my appreciation at the end of each participant's interview. I often think that I

wish I would have held an end-of-the-semester reunion, but I would not have wanted the students to have known that a party would have been held prior to their receiving their grade for the class. (All students passed the course.) I was concerned that knowledge of a social event would have influenced their exit interviews. I would, however, recommend a way for other educators who are teaching the course as a regular course and are not using it as part of a research study to select an activity (i.e., meeting for coffee as a group after class) that will help adult students become more connected. The notes and pictures were a way for me to show my appreciation to them and to let the students know that I will always be available as a resource for them. Here are some other suggestions I would recommend for instructors:

- Have a student-centered faculty member familiar with the campus and available resources instruct the first-year seminar course. Ideally, for a first-year seminar course, classes should be small numbers. If possible, have smaller class sizes.
- Invite key administrators – especially the dean(s) -- to introduce themselves and welcome the students. Faculty members many times assume that their dean is too busy. All deans have full schedules, but they are usually willing and generous with scheduling their time. Students are important to them, and educators may blur the lines of distinction of separating administration from faculty.
- Consider a hybrid model for the course – mixing on-line and face-to-face.
- Don't overlook the basics – parking, IDs, campus tour, University website features, on-line course management tools, setting up usernames and passwords, and helping students find important information such as locating contact information for their academic advisors.

- Invite Library instruction, Career Services, Counseling Center, and Learning Assistance Centers to meet the students.
- Allow the adult students to assist in planning the course and, if possible, offer the class meeting time later in the afternoon or evening. Some may even prefer a Saturday course, but check with other campus offices to see the feasibility of this recommendation.

Students have an easier time with transition if they are able to get involved and are aware of the campus resources and offerings to assist them. If students are planning the course, consider providing them with a list of possible topics to aid students that have a stronger need for structure. The participants suggested that allowing the students in the class to help tailor the curriculum gave the students the ability to get the one-on-one help they needed, since many were at different points in their academic endeavors.

- Consider what Brookfield and Preskill (2005) consider “letters to successors.” When any communication goes to students to inform them about the class, include statements from past students who have taken the course. If the course is a regularly scheduled session, perhaps on the first day of class, give a slip of paper to volunteers from the class and have them read feedback “letters to successors” to the other students. Below is an example given by Tiff during her on-line discussion board postings on Blackboard:

When I seen the flyer at orientation I immediately jumped on the idea. I thought it would be a great start at [University name removed]. I was very nervous about starting here this fall. This class was a footstep for the rest of our classes. I got everything I wanted out of the class and a whole lot more. I came in just wanting to know what classes I needed to take while I am here, but what I got out of the class was more information than I believe I wouldn't have come in contact to having not been in this class. The different programs

and assistance offered at the campus totally blew me out of the water. I didn't have a clue that they offered things like help with papers, resumes, or even etiquette for that matter. I hope that this class is offered in the future for other incoming students. I feel lucky to have been a student in the first class offered. I have to admit that I had no clue what this class was about prior to the first day. It has been a great class to take, especially without all freshman [sic], and it was great to take in the summer because we are now better prepared for the fall. It is probably the only class I will take that is geared towards us non-traditional students and it was nice getting the one-on-one help.

- After the course is over, check in on past students every once in a while; consider sending an email to them as a group. I sent emails to the students to see how their semester was progressing, sent the participants updates to the program, shared the acknowledgement page where I wrote something to them as a group, filled them in on my dissertation defense date, and final pictures of my kitchen remodeling project.

Summary of the Discussion

While Faith's story of her return to college is a transformational learning experience due to a catalyst event that brought her back to school, Clifford's impending loss of his accounts, along with Amy, London Izzy, and Tiff coming to the realization that they were not accomplishing a lifetime goal could be considered to them as a disorientating dilemma, as is being intolerably unhappy in a current career could also be a disorienting dilemma such as Sarah and Danielle were experiencing. All participants made a decision to change their lives by gaining more education to turn away from something else – low self-esteem, unhappiness, fear, and regret. From reviewing the findings and the literature on why adult students return to college, one difference was noted: only one of the participants from my study experienced a

“trigger event.” Many believe returning to college is caused by a “trigger event” (Aslanian, 1989), career transition (Aslanian, 2001), marital discord (Chao & Good, 2004), life transition (Aslanian, 2001; Chao & Good; Redding & Dowling, 1992), or a reassessment of goals and priorities (Justice & Dornan, 2001; Mezirow, 1978). Others see adults who have decided to return to the college environment as looking to update skills (Barker, Sturdivant, & Smith, 1999), enhance personal fulfillment and growth (Bauman et al., 2004; Hermon & Davis, 2004), and simply an intrinsic reason (joy of learning) (Chao & Good; Shields, 1993). As it relates to transition, for example, Aslanian’s (1989) study of 2,000 adult students found that 83% of the students were coping with a change in their life, while the other 17% noted wanting personal growth, socialization with other adults, and continual learning and development. Almost 60% listed that a career transition was the reason for their return to higher education. Of the 83% who said they were going through a transition, they said it could be attributed to a trigger event.

The participants in my study had reasons for returning to college that were mostly tied to career advancement, which has been found in the literature. Most students wanted to fulfill a lifelong goal and to advance in their career. The conclusions of this study vary from the literature mentioned in the previous paragraph regarding adult students’ reasons for returning. None of the participants had gone through a separation, divorce, or job loss.

Adult students need a strong support system, as noted by participants who explained the importance of support from family, friends, and their professors. The participants negotiated work, family responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships to re-evaluate and reassign household responsibilities because of the desire to return to school. Adult students responded similarly during an in-depth interview that they were juggling many roles and that they needed

emotional support, approval, and assistance, which were similar to the findings of the studies by Redding and Dowling (1992) and Chao and Good (2004).

While this class and study was offered in a summer term that has ended, the understanding of the 7 participants' experiences in this course does not have an ending but continues. Students will continue to learn lessons from the course throughout their journey through college and their experience in the business world. Showing students a participatory leadership style has given them their first chance of demonstrating a research methodology only beginning to be used in areas of business, such as human resources and management, to solve problems. As they graduate with the skills to be excellent managers and experts in their area of business, they will have been a part of something larger than themselves, worked as a team, been given an experience of doing something more for the higher education community to make improvements for future adult business students, and added another layer to their own personal development and growth as business professionals and as human beings. My research study revealed that over the course of 4 weeks, the participants' understanding of their original transition and transition within the course deepened. It is perseverance the students have shown in returning to an undergraduate business program to fulfill a lifelong goal and by adjusting to university life. Their development has brought them to the realization of the value of education and the journey to continue seeking a lifetime of learning. Although not part of this research, I plan on following up with these students to determine if they completed their program and will report these findings.

Reflections from the Research

A major objective of the study was to have tailored a traditionally designed first-year seminar course to allow participants a way of reflecting on and voicing their experience of

returning and adjusting to an undergraduate business program. As a medium for fostering this connection, reflection and dialogue through class discussion was the most practical approach for me as the researcher. After several years of teaching a first-year seminar course, I had a feeling of confidence about leading a group of new adult business students to acclimate them to the campus and resources by providing a relaxed environment conducive for learning. As also shared in the Findings section of Chapter Four, Amy's reflections from her experience as being a co-researcher summarized it best:

The motivation for the adult students returning to school seemed to be very different than that of the "traditional student." They were returning to school with very specific goals and expectations, and also with some anxiety. Some were returning for financial reasons, some in order to advance within a career field or to pursue a new career field, and some in order to fulfill a life goal. When the syllabus for the standard First-Year Seminar was presented to the adult students, they felt that the course content would not be adequate to meet their individual needs. All felt that a large portion of the curriculum was irrelevant to them as adult learners and most proposed additions to the curriculum that would be more beneficial to them as adult learners. Also, it was especially helpful for each student to become acquainted with similarly situated students and a faculty member who understood each of their unique situations. This allowed them to create a social network within the school for which they could turn to for support and advice. All of the students in this section of the course were enthusiastic to have the opportunity to be part of this course that was so accommodating to their unique needs. Through this research project I have gained an appreciation for the dedication required of an adult student who makes the decision to return to college to complete their education. The choice requires the

rearrangement of every other aspect in their life, and it requires them, as well as their families, to make significant sacrifices in order for them to make the choice possible.

Considering the nature of this study, there are a few changes I would make for a future study. First, the number of class sessions could easily be extended to lengthen the action research study. As a researcher, I often experienced feelings of uncertainty about the process. While I believe in integration of the topics, exploring other ways of conducting a first-year seminar course outside of traditional boundaries was not always simple. The experience of completing the study has given me the confidence about the credibility of my research and the role of discussion and reflection in student learning and development. There is a strong need for more research devoted to adult business students and adult students in general. The privilege of working with this talented, dedicated group of adults has been energizing. Being able to facilitate student adjustment through the synergy and dynamics within the group of adult business students has been incredibly rewarding. The action research showed a promising solution to improving the first-year seminar experience for these adult business students.

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Appendix A: University Approval for the Study

Date: July 10, 2008

From: Jodi L. Mathieu, Assistant Director – IRB Operations

To: April E. Bailey

Subject: Results of Review of Proposal - Expedited (**IRB #28486**)
Approval Expiration Date: June 1, 2009
 “Exploring Adult Business Students' Transition to College through a First-Year Seminar Course: An Action Research Study”

The Social Science Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your proposal for use of human participants in your research. By accepting this decision, you agree to obtain prior approval from the IRB for any changes to your study. Unanticipated participant events that are encountered during the conduct of this research must be reported in a timely fashion.

Enclosed is/are the dated, IRB-approved informed consent(s) to be used when recruiting participants for this research. Participants must receive a **copy** of the approved informed consent form to keep for their records.

If signed consent is obtained, the principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed consent forms along with the IRB research records for this research at least three (3) years after termination of IRB approval. For projects that involve protected health information (PHI) and are regulated by HIPAA, records are to be maintained for six (6) years. The principal investigator must determine and adhere to additional requirements established by the FDA and any outside sponsors.

If this study will extend beyond the above noted approval expiration date, the principal investigator must submit a completed Continuing Progress Report to the Office for Research Protections (ORP) to request renewed approval for this research.

On behalf of the IRB and the University, thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established for the protection of human participants.

Please Note: The ORP encourages you to subscribe to the ORP listserv for protocol and research-related information. Send a blank email to: L-ORP-Research-L-subscribe-request@lists.psu.edu

/JLM

Enclosure

cc: Patricia A. Cranton

Appendix B: Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)

Please respond to the following questions at the end of class. You may refer to the class discussions, readings, guest speakers, and activities that occurred during this week's classes. You may answer with short phrases if you wish.

1. A time in class that I felt most engaged was...
2. A time in class that I felt least engaged was ...
3. The thing that surprised me the most was ...
4. The most important thing I learned was...
5. The thing I hoped we would talk more about was...
6. What I hope we will talk about in future classes...

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form



Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research The Pennsylvania State University

ORP USE ONLY: IRB# **28486 Doc. #1**
 The Pennsylvania State University
 Office for Research Protections
 Approval Date: 07/10/2008 – J. Mathieu
 Expiration Date: 06/01/2009 – J. Mathieu
 Social Science Institutional Review Board

Title of Project: Exploring Adult Business Students' Transition to College through a First-Year Seminar Course: An Action Research Study.

Principal Investigator: April Bailey
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Advisor: Dr. Patricia Cranton
 Penn State Harrisburg
 W331 Olmsted Building
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 Middletown, PA 17057
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1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this action research study is to explore the transitional experiences of adult students during their return to higher education through an adapted first-year seminar course. Since many institutions design their curriculum based upon a student who has just graduated from high school (typically age 18-20), a new approach is needed to account for adult students' experiences to aid in their transition to higher education.

2. **Procedures to be followed:** Participation includes completion of one exit interview, 16 class sessions (fall 2008 semester) or 8 class sessions (summer 2008 semester) and writing reflective assignments. Only the individual exit interviews will be audio taped. You will also have the opportunity to participate in an online discussion board (Blackboard) to discuss issues that emerge from the class sessions, ask questions of other participants, and in general, maintain the cohesiveness of our in person sessions. The discussion board will be available to participants as a way to further discuss the workshop topics between sessions. Participants will not be required to participate on the discussion board but it will be available to them as way to communicate with other participants and the principal investigator. Blackboard will be set up and managed by the

Principal Investigator. All class activities are required as part of the curriculum for the course and will occur regardless of consent, however student data will only be used for research purposes if you sign a consent form.

3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no known risks to participating in this research.
4. **Benefits:** The benefits to you include learning more about yourself by participating in this study. You will have a better understanding of the campus resources available to you. In addition, this research could also help you understand how qualitative research is completed and can inform your future role as a business leader. This study may also have an impact on University curriculum planning for future adult business students.
5. **Duration/Time:** The exit interview will take approximately 60 minutes (during finals week) and will be audio taped. Your writing assignments will be completed at the conclusion of each 50 minute class session (if fall 2008 semester) or 120 minute class session (if summer 2008), for a total of 16 sessions (fall 2008) or 8 sessions (summer 2008). Actual writing time should take between 20-45 minutes per session. Since participation on the discussion board is optional, so time spent posting responses or questions will vary between 10-30 minutes per session. No additional time is needed since all activities listed here will happen regardless of your choice to take part.
6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. If this research is published, no information that would identify you would be written. The researcher and her primary advisor may read the reflection papers. Audiotapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's office and will be destroyed 2 years after the research is completed, in December 2008. Only the PI will have access to the actual recordings. Along with the PI, the advisor (Patricia Cranton) will have access to the transcripts. Transcripts and files will be kept on a password protected computer. The PI is the only person who has access to this password.

Your confidentiality will be safe to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

The following may review and copy records related to this research: The Office of Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Social Science Institutional Review Board and the PSU Office for Research Protections.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact April Bailey at 717-477-1057 or Dr. Patricia Cranton at 717-948-6405 with questions, complaints, or concerns about the research. You can also call these numbers if you feel this study has harmed you. If you would like to learn more about your rights as a research subject, please call the Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775.

8. **Payment for participation:** You will not receive monetary compensation for participating in this study.
9. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise. Your choice to participate or not to participate will have no influence on grades and class standing.

You must be 24 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix D: Exit Interview Guide

Situation

1. What responsibilities are you balancing in addition to being a student?
2. Discuss the decision to pursue your undergraduate degree in business?

Self

3. As an adult student, describe your experience(s) in this class?
4. Tell me about your personal development focusing on self-efficacy, coping, and learning.

Support

5. Tell me about the support you received from family, friends, colleagues, faculty, staff, etc?
6. As an adult student, describe your experience(s) with the College of Business and the University overall and how have these services and program assisted you with strategies for a successful educational experience?

Strategies

7. How can your instructors, the College of Business, and the University meet the needs of adult students?
8. How has this class helped you in meeting your needs to prepare you for the career of your choice or graduate school?
9. What additional comments would you like to add regarding your experience as an adult student?

Appendix E: Study Plan Template

College of Business

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT STUDY PLAN ASSIGNMENT**FOUNDATIONS OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

My Professor for this course is _____

Prior to meeting WITH YOUR ADVISOR, FILL-IN THE APPROPRIATE INFORMATION FOR THE
FOLLOWING SPACES

Advisee Name: _____

Date: _____ Year in School: _____

Degree: Bachelor of Science in Business Administration **B.S.B.A.****MAJOR** used in this plan: _____**Declared** **Undeclared** **ADVISOR =** _____Advisor's **OFFICE LOCATION:** _____***ADVISOR'S MEETING***

We met and reviewed the study plan. Date: _____

Advisor's *Signature:* _____

ACADEMIC YEAR ONE					
FALL SEMESTER			SPRING SEMESTER		
COURSE #	COURSE NAME	CATEGORY	COURSE #	COURSE NAME	CATEGORY

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES PLANNED:

Summer - First					
Course #	Course Name	Category	Course #	Course Name	Category

Extra-curricular activities planned:

ACADEMIC YEAR TWO					
FALL SEMESTER			SPRING SEMESTER		
COURSE #	COURSE NAME	CATEGORY	COURSE #	COURSE NAME	CATEGORY
EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES PLANNED:					

SUMMER – SECOND					
Course #	Course Name	Category	Course #	Course Name	Category
Extra-curricular activities planned:					

ACADEMIC YEAR THREE					
FALL SEMESTER			SPRING SEMESTER		
COURSE #	COURSE NAME	CATEGORY	COURSE #	COURSE NAME	CATEGORY
EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES PLANNED:					

SUMMER – THIRD					
Course #	Course Name	Category	Course #	Course Name	Category
Extra-curricular activities planned:					

ACADEMIC YEAR FOUR					
FALL SEMESTER			SPRING SEMESTER		
COURSE #	COURSE NAME	CATEGORY	COURSE #	COURSE NAME	CATEGORY
EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES PLANNED:					

SUMMER – FOURTH					
Course #	Course Name	Category	Course #	Course Name	Category
Extra-curricular activities planned:					

Legend	
<u>CODE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
M	MAJOR
ME	MAJOR ELECTIVE
C	CORE COURSE
T	TRANSFERRED COURSE
FE	FREE ELECTIVE
GE(A), GE(B), GE(C), GE(D), GE(E)	GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES
GE SKILLS	GE SKILLS FROM BSBA WORKSHEET — EXAMPLE: WORLD HISTORY I

Appendix F: BSBA Worksheet

Name: _____

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS BSBA WORKSHEET

____ Credits Transferred
 ____ Credits Pending
 ____ Total Credits Transferred

BUSINESS CORE COURSES

Freshman/Sophomore Years		Grade			Grade
ACC200	Fund. of Financial Accounting	_____	* ECO280	Managerial Economics	_____
* ACC201	Managerial Accounting	_____	* SCM200	Statistical Appl. In Business	_____
* BSL261	American Legal Environment	_____	ISM142	Business Computer Systems	_____
BSN101	Found. of Business Adm.(1 cr.)	_____	MAT108	Finite Math	(1) _____
ECO113	Principles of Economics (4 crs.)	_____	* MAT181	Applied Calculus I	_____

Junior/Senior Years

* SCM330	Supply Chain & Operations Mgt	_____	* MGT305	Organizational Behavior	_____
* FIN311	Financial Management	_____	* MGT447	Business & Society	_____
* MKT305	Principles of Marketing	_____	* MGT497	Strategic Management	_____

*Refer to the back of this page for prerequisite requirements.

MAJOR COURSES

Please Note: Refer to page two of this worksheet for major course requirements.

GENERAL EDUCATION

GE SKILLS ENG106 Writ Int First Year Sm	_____	+ GE CAT C	_____ (3)
GE SKILLS HCS100 Hum Comm Studies	_____	GE CAT D	ECO113 Prin. of Economics (4 crs.)
GE SKILLS HIS105 World History I	_____	+ GE CAT D	_____ (4)
GE SKILLS HIS106 World History II	_____	+ GE CAT E	_____
GE SKILLS MAT108 Finite Math	(1) _____	+ GE CAT E	_____
GE CAT A MAT181 Applied Calculus I		FREE ELEC	_____ (5)
+ GE CAT B (Lit.)	_____	FREE ELEC	_____
+ GE CAT B	_____ (2)	FREE ELEC	_____
+ GE CAT B	_____ (2)	FREE ELEC	_____
+ GE CAT C	_____ (3)	FREE ELEC	_____
+ GE CAT C	_____ (3)	FREE ELEC (1cr.)	_____

+Refer to university catalog for a listing of acceptable GENERAL EDUCATION courses.

- (1) A student who is not required to take MAT108 is required to take a free elective in lieu of MAT108.
 A student who placed at the "Pre College Level" on the Math Placement can count MAT120 Basic Mathematical Models as a free elective.
- (2) Must complete two courses in two different disciplines.
- (3) Must complete three courses in three different disciplines.
- (4) Must be chosen from a discipline other than Economics.
- (5) May be a business internship, or any business/economics/or non-business elective -- except Accounting Majors must take ISM300 and Personal Financial Planning Majors must take ACC306.

Appendix G: Advising Quiz

ADVISING QUIZ

1. How many credits must a student carry to be considered full-time?
2. What options does a student have if s/he becomes ill and cannot complete the semester?
3. What GPA does a first year student need to have at the end of the first year to remain at Shippensburg?
4. How many credits must a student complete in one year to maintain financial aid?
Athletic eligibility?
5. What math course does a business student who tested at the pre-college level on the placement test need to take?
6. What courses are students not permitted to drop?
7. A student fails a course at SU and decides to take it again at a community college. Will this help the students GPA? Do the credits transfer?
8. A student is dismissed from SU for academic reasons. What must s/he do if s/he wants to return?
9. A student has a 515 on his/her math SAT. Does s/he need to take the placement test?
10. If a business student earns a “D” grade in MAT 108 College Algebra, is the student required to retake the course?
11. Can a student count both BIO100 Basic Biology and BIO145 Problems of the Environment under GE Category “C”?
12. If a student is an accounting and finance major, can the student count his/her finance courses toward the nine free electives required for business students?
13. What are the maximum number of credits a student can take in a semester without incurring additional fees?
14. How many weeks into the semester may a student drop a course with a “W” grade?
15. How does MAT 120 Basic Math Models count toward a business student’s curriculum?
16. How many repeats can a student have where the higher grade will replace the lower?
17. What GPA is necessary for students to earn “dean’s list?”

18. How many credits may a student take using the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory option?
19. A student reveals that s/he has a learning disability. What should the student do?
20. What are the procedures for a student to declare or change a major?
21. How much does tutoring at the LAC cost?
22. If a business student tests at the advanced level in math (i.e. MAT181 Applied Calc), what does that student have to take in lieu of MAT108 College Algebra?
23. How does a business internship count within the curriculum? (check all that apply)
☐ major elective ☐ free elective ☐ general education elective
24. If a student is double majoring in business, how many courses can be “double counted” between majors?
☐ none ☐ one ☐ two ☐ no limit
25. In order to fulfill graduation requirements, a business student must (check all that apply)
☐ earn a 2.0 or higher cumulative GPA.
☐ earn a 2.0 or higher major GPA.
☐ earn a 2.0 or higher GPA in all required business courses.
☐ earn a “C” or higher in all business core courses.
☐ earn a “C” or higher in ENG101 College Writing.
☐ earn a “C” or higher in all major courses.

Appendix H: Nontraditional Student Assessment

Nontraditional Assessment

Each question can be answered with:

SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, U-Uncertain, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree.

1. Evening courses would be an advantage to me.
2. Weekend courses would be an advantage to me.
3. Early weekday classes would be an advantage to me (before 7:00a.m.).
4. Extended hours for administration offices would be an advantage to me.
5. Extended hours to instructional resources would be an advantage to me.
6. Extended hours to the learning center would be an advantage to me.
7. Extended hours in the writing center would be an advantage to me.
8. Extended laboratory hours would be an advantage to me.
9. Child Care during the day would be an advantage to me.
10. Evening child care would be an advantage to me.
11. Workshops for study skills would be an advantage to me.
12. Transportation between campus buildings would be an advantage to me.
13. Adult intramural programs would be an advantage to me.
14. Evening hours for computer training would be an advantage to me.
15. Career counseling for changing careers would be an advantage to me.
16. Placement services would be an advantage to me.
17. Evening bookstore hours would be an advantage to me.
18. More flexible food service plans would be an advantage to me.
19. Health services to meet NT-needs would be an advantage to me.
20. Non-traditional student organizations would be an advantage to me.

VITA

April Elizabeth Bailey

Prior to her doctoral studies, April earned her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania. After working for a Fortune 500 company in the field of marketing, she returned to graduate school to earn a Master of Business Administration from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania.

April is a business educator with seven years of experience teaching undergraduate business classes. She teaches courses related to marketing, sales management, and first-year seminar. She was also a consultant for the Small Business Development Center (Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania Campus) and conducted seminars and training sessions for clients and assisted small business owners within Central Pennsylvania with their business plans. She has taught at The Pennsylvania State University (Mont Alto Campus) and Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania as an adjunct. In 2005, April began working as a full-time, tenure-track faculty member at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania where she currently works with incoming first-year business students. She serves on various committees assessing student retention and student development in addition to serving as chair for the First-Year Seminar Committee. She also serves as the faculty advisor for Beta Gamma Sigma, an honor society for undergraduate and graduate business students who achieve academic excellence at AACSB institutions.

Within the fields of adult and business education, April has written papers for *NACADA Journal - National Academic Advising Association*, *Academy of Business Disciplines*, *Northeastern Association of Business, Economics, and Technology*, *American Society of Business and Behavioral Sciences*, *The Pennsylvania Economic Association*, *Association of Management and International Association of Management*. She has presented at The Decision Sciences Institute National Conference, The Pennsylvania Association for Adult and Continuing Education Conference, and The Pennsylvania State University Graduate Research Conference.

Since 2006, April has received the John L. Grove Summer Fellowship Award for her work with service learning and was awarded The Blue Sky Scholarship from The Pennsylvania State University for her academic achievements in her doctoral coursework. She was selected by the students and faculty to receive the 2008 Valley Quarries Advising Award and received an endowment from the Dale Kann Faculty and Student Research Grant Award for her work with adult business students.