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## Feeling Special: A Study Of Local, Named, Need-Based Scholarships For Remediated Community College Students

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FEELING SPECIAL: A STUDY OF LOCAL, NAMED, NEED-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS  
FOR REMEDIATED COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Ronald M. Oler

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## **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of local, named, need-based scholarships on the persistence of remediated, community college students. This study sought to connect the research on college-student persistence, remedial education, and need-based scholarships. Although there is a plethora of research on why college students depart without earning a degree, there is a dearth of such work focused solely on community college students. There have also been a considerable number of studies on remedial education, but none have tied-in how the remedial student's self-efficacy can be increased by awarding them a scholarship, thereby improving their persistence rates. This is likely due to scholarships normally being limited to exceptional students, not the middling community college students who are required to take remedial reading, writing, or mathematics. However, the situation is a little different at Midwest Community College where such practices have become commonplace.

Fifteen participants who matched all of this study's criteria were interviewed for this mixed-methods study after descriptive data was collected about them. These 15 participants were culled from the 4,678 first-time, associate-degree seeking students who began in the fall 2004 term at Midwest. This study used the industry-wide standard measurement of 150% time frame to earn a degree, which is three years for a two-year associate's degree. The overall graduation rate for this cohort was 22%. The graduation rate for the remedial students in this cohort was only 7%. This study sought to locate and interview as many of the 70 remedial

students as possible, who persisted to graduate within the 150% timeframe and who had also received a scholarship. Eventually, over the course of seven months, 15 students were located and interviewed. Their stories shed light on how these, the most at-risk for dropping out, persevered to earn their associate's degrees. It also shed light on how receiving a scholarship boosted their belief in themselves, their self-efficacy.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is the result of countless evenings sitting alone in a chair quietly knitting while watching television or taking the dog for a walk, longing all the while, for her spouse. I'm writing about my loving and patient wife, Sherri, who has been by my side through four different college degrees over the span of our 25-year marriage. "Nevermore," she cries, "nevermore." I suppose she is right, how would one follow-up a Ph.D.? With another one? But alas, she knows more about me than I do, so her cry of "nevermore" will probably go unheeded.

I owe much of this paper to my chair, Dr. Joshua Powers. Without Josh's patient, sage advice, and countless revisions, this document may never have been. Since this was my first dissertation, while he has edited hundreds, it would not be this elegant without his wisdom.

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I also owe many of the insights into college students' minds to Drs. Will Barratt, Mary Howard-Hamilton, and Kandace Hinton: Professors who opened my eyes to the social implications of higher education. Without their wisdom I might have written about something

else entirely. But alas, it is the students who matter most in higher education, and God help us if we ever lose sight of that.

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## CHAPTER 1

### **Introduction**

College completion rates are among the hottest issues in higher education today. A number of higher education leaders and policy makers have commented on the importance of doing a better job helping students achieve their educational goals. Merisotis (2008), president and CEO of the Lumina Foundation for Education stated, "...it is in our collective economic and social self-interest to do so," (p. 27). Of particular concern are the completion rates of remedial students, already disadvantaged by having to take basic courses that do not usually count toward their degrees. Although considerable research literature has been developed on the subject of college persistence and remedial students; little has explored the nexus of those two issues, and the degree to which self-efficacy can be impacted through scholarship aid. Merisotis went on to say, "...we need to start looking in places where we have not looked before for answers and ideas that will result in measurable change" (p. 27). That line of thinking, looking in new places, is the focus of this study.

By way of context, it is helpful to first understand college tuition patterns. The cost of attending a college or university in America continues to rise. Baum and Ma's (2007b) report found that from 1997 to 2007 tuition and fees rose at an after-inflation rate of 2.9% per year at private, four-year colleges, 4.4% per year at public, four-year universities, and 1.5% per year at public two-year colleges. These after-inflation numbers make it startlingly clear that the cost of



earning a college or university degree has been rising faster and higher than most other goods and services in the United States during the past decade. The report, *Action Plan for Higher Education: Improving the Accessibility, Affordability, and Accountability* (U.S. Department of Education, 2006a), stated, “The commission notes with concern the seemingly inexorable increase in college costs, which have outpaced inflation for the past two decades and have made affordability an ever-growing worry for students, families, and policy makers” (p. 6). The report also stated that, “90% of the fastest-growing jobs in the new knowledge-driven economy will require some postsecondary education” and that “...the median earnings of a U.S. worker with only a high-school diploma are 37% less than those of a worker with a bachelor’s degree” (p. 5). This implies that unless something is done to better assure access to postsecondary education, America’s future is imperiled.

Although the evidence is clear that the cost of earning a college or university degree is very high; the report by Baum and Ma (2007a) also found a positive correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings. Furthermore, the cost of not attending when measured by reduced future earnings can be even higher than the initial cost of attending. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that:

In general, a bachelor’s degree provides a net occupational status advantage over a high school diploma of about .95 of a standard deviation (33 percentile points), an associate’s degree confers an estimated net occupational status advantage over a high school diploma of between .24 and .44 of a standard deviation (9 to 17 percentile points), and other amounts of postsecondary education or sub-baccalaureate credentials such as a vocational degree or a license-certificate provide an estimated new occupational status

advantage over a high school diploma of between .12 and .22 of a standard deviation (5 to 9 percentile points). (p. 535)

Nevertheless, the affordability of higher education is a critical, contemporary concern for all higher education stakeholders, most especially the students themselves and their parents. In the U.S. Department of Education's (2006a) final draft report on the *Future of American Higher Education*, the commission stated, "Too many students are either discouraged from attending college by rising costs, or take on worrisome debt burdens in order to do so" (p. 2). This report cited affordability as one of a handful of current, key issues affecting America's higher education system today. Effectively addressing this issue is a much needed task if a better future for higher education in America is to be achieved.

It seems obvious that if earning a higher-education degree was more affordable, more people would pursue postsecondary education. However, there are other factors besides money that either deters students from enrolling or among those that do, to not persist and earn a degree. Yet, research has consistently shown that college affordability, real or perceived, is a central factor in educational attainment. St. John (2000) stated, "Student aid offers have an immediate and direct effect on whether students enroll. They also have an influence on whether students can afford to continue their enrollment" (p. 72). Policy makers at the institutional, state, and federal government levels must carefully, and with valid research on the subject, make informed decisions about the affordability of higher education in America.

Another factor in the persistence of college and university students is remediation and the needs of under-prepared students. The remediation of college students is a complex topic with many causes and effects. The challenge is that under-prepared students are entering higher education at an alarming rate. The U.S. Department of Education's (2006b) report claimed that

too many students are landing on the steps of colleges and universities unprepared for college-level coursework. Furthermore, the report, *Action Plan for Higher Education: Improving the Accessibility, Affordability, and Accountability*, stated, “Among high school graduates who do make it on to postsecondary education, a troubling number waste time – and taxpayer dollars – mastering English and math skills that they should have learned in high school” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006b, p. 2).

Remediation is a concern for students as well. Zusman (2005) reported, “The cost of remedial education is increasingly being borne by the students themselves as America’s funding sources for higher education have shifted away from grants and towards more student loans” (p. 151). Burdening students with the cost of taking remedial courses can have a negative effect on their persistence rate as research shows and is reviewed in Chapter 2.

Remediation is also a concern for academic leaders because it impacts curriculum and the ways in which students move through the institution to graduation. Reed and Conklin (2005) recommended that academic leaders in higher education should, “Insist that admitted students who are not college-ready begin to confront their areas of weakness immediately” (p. B16). In response, many colleges have developed multiple levels of remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Remediation can also be a barrier to access for many students. U.S. Department of Education Secretary Spellings said, “There are far too many Americans who want to go to college but cannot – because they’re either not prepared or cannot afford it” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006a, p. 1). Spellings continued by saying, “To expand access to higher education, we must better educate our students, beginning with high standards and accountability in our public schools” (as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2006a, p. 1).

Remediation can also be a barrier to degree completion. Hoyt (1999) reported, “64 to 72% of students who required remedial education in three areas eventually dropped out of college” (p. 61). Hoyt’s research discovered a correlation which shows that the more remedial courses a student needed, the more likely they were to drop-out of college.

Research on retention can shed light on the issues surrounding persistence and completion. Tinto (1993) wrote, “Decisions to withdraw are more a function of what occurs after entry than of what precedes it” (p. 5). The necessity of taking remedial courses is a key aspect of what college and university students can experience after entry. The U.S. Department of Education’s (2006b) report claimed:

While educators and policy makers have commendably focused on getting more students into college, too little attention has been paid to progressing them through to graduation. The result is that unacceptable numbers of students fail to complete their studies at all, while even those that graduate don’t always learn enough. (p. 14)

Statements such as these indicate that political pressure is growing for colleges and universities to increase their persistence and graduation rates.

Tinto (2007) wrote, “First, students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that expect them to succeed. High expectations are a condition for student success, or as sometimes noted - no one rises to low expectations” (p. 2). Tinto also wrote, “...most importantly, students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that foster learning. Learning has always been the key to student retention. Students who learn are students who stay” (p. 3). When colleges and universities develop their curriculum to meet students where they are and then propel them to where they need to be, more students will persist and graduate.

Higher education administrators have sought to address the problems of remediation with policies and procedures designed to test for placement and then to prepare students for college-level course work. However, policy makers at the state and federal government levels have been slow to understand the implications of remediated students. Many researchers including: Bandura (1977), Carroll (1989), Fike and Fike (2008), Grimes and David (1999), Saxon and Boylan (2001), Venezia (2006), and Zusman (2005) suggested that more needs to be done at the high school level so that college and university freshmen are academically prepared for college-level course work. The issue that needs to be addressed by state and federal legislators is how best to prepare its citizens for college-level studies. They must either choose to demand better preparation at the high school level, fund more remedial courses in colleges and universities, or adopt a hybrid model that seeks to do both. Aid in the form of scholarships for remedial students may be an effective support element as well.

Scholarships are one tool that institutions and policy makers can and have used to make higher education more affordable. Tinto (1993) discovered that even though finances are often cited by researchers as reasons for student attrition, the impact of finances on students' decisions to persist are complex in nature. Some are short-term issues that the students are currently facing while others are long-term issues that students may perceive as potential future problems.

St. John's (2000) study on the impact of student aid on retention revealed that colleges must invest some of their own money in the form of grants instead of loans to students in order to help them overcome financial barriers to persistence and success. St. John wrote, "In fact, there is evidence that students' perception of their ability to pay for college have an influence on their academic and social experiences in college" (p. 69). Hence, when students are required

to pay for remedial courses themselves, they may be less likely to persist and to earn a degree. In potential response to this reality, Sjogren (2000) wrote:

As the gap between the rich and poor grows, due partly to differences in educational attainment, a new breed of millionaires popping up across the American landscape may target their philanthropy toward access to higher education. But will their largesse make much difference? (p. 42)

Of concern, however, is the fact that scholarship aid for remedial students is limited. For example, one of the nation's largest and widely researched scholarships, the HOPE scholarship program in Georgia, requires that students maintain a B average at state universities in order to receive both free tuition and modest book allowances. Furthermore, it purposefully excluded students who required remedial education courses (Dee & Jackson, 1999).

The Gates Millennium Scholarship (GMS), funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has committed \$1 billion over a 20-year period to fund academic scholarships for minorities (Sjogren, 2000). However, this scholarship requires recipients to have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.3 or higher which "keeps this largest scholarship in U.S. history out of the hands of at-risk students who need remedial education and it is also not available to community-college students" (p. 42).

Making higher education more affordable for every student should be a concern for educators and policy makers alike. Scholarships have been an effective tool for the exceptional and for some of the average students, but students that need remedial education have been excluded. Including remediated college and university students in the mix would provide a more balanced approach to educating America's citizens. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Educate

and inform the whole mass of the people... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty” (as cited in Lipscomb & Bergh, 1904, p. 392).

Charles Miller, chairperson of the National Commission on the Future of Higher Education and an early proponent of the *No Child Left Behind Act* said, “It is time now to examine how we can get the most out of our higher education system” (personal communication, November 13, 2006). With the costs and benefits of higher education weighing heavy on all policy makers’ minds, research studies on remediation, retention, and scholarships are vitally important to the future success of America’s higher education system.

### **Problem Statement**

If admission to college is perceived as a vehicle for upward social mobility, as Lucas (1996) suggested, then what occurs after admission should be equally important to society. It seems that even though a student is accepted into a college or university, that acceptance is not a guarantor of their future persistence and success, as measured by earning a degree or receiving a diploma. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2007) report, the three-year graduation rate for community college students with an associate’s degree is a dismal 38%, but the six-year graduation rate for students earning bachelor’s degrees at four-year universities is 60%. Therefore, to preserve their legitimacy in academia, community colleges must find new ways of improving their students’ poor persistence and graduation rates.

Since most community colleges are open-access, limiting admission in any form based upon a student’s ability to persist and succeed may not be appropriate; thus, by definition, they are at greater risk than students at the majority of four-year universities for dropping out. Bok (2006) implied that the ability to think critically about a subject is paramount for college students’ success. But, with their come-one, come-all attitude, community colleges enroll more

students who are under-prepared than do four-year universities that practice selective admissions. The problem then lies in discovering how community colleges can efficiently and effectively prepare their entering freshmen for future success in college-level courses.

As previously stated, many students are enrolling in America's colleges and universities under-prepared for college-level course work. Associate-degree seeking community college students are taking an alarming number of remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics before enrolling in program-level courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Grimes & David, 1999; Hoyt, 1999; Venezia, 2006). According to the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, more than 60% of first-time community college students took one or more remedial courses while at the same time, only 29% of their four-year university counterparts took any remedial courses (as cited in Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005).

Meanwhile, philanthropists are creating more need-based scholarships for community college students (Johnstone, 2005; Sjogren, 2000). Concurrently, community college officials have been developing processes for academically testing entering students and have created remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics to help prepare students for program-level coursework (Grimes & David, 1999; Hoyt & Sorensen, 2001; Patthey-Chavez, Dillion, & Thomas-Spiegel, 2005; Saxon & Boylan, 2001). Therefore, it appears research exploring how community colleges have capitalized on scholarship aid for students, remedial students in particular, holds promise for better understanding and overcoming the challenges of remedial student success.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study investigated the ways in which scholarships for remedial students affect persistence to graduation. More specifically, the study explored the affects of named



scholarships on remedial students at a community college where such practices have become quite extensive. Utilizing a mixed-method approach to the topic studied at a Midwestern community college, descriptive data on the number and percentage of students in a specific cohort across a community college system who did and did not graduate within three years was first examined. Second, the number and percentage of remedial students from that cohort that did and did not graduate within three years was explored. Third, the number and percentage of remedial students who received named scholarships and graduated within three years was investigated. Finally, semi-structured interviews with 15 of the remedial students who received named scholarships and persisted to graduation within three years (i.e., truly perseverant students) was conducted to understand if and/or how these scholarships may have contributed to their graduation achievement.

### **Research Questions**

The specific research questions of interest for this study were:

1. What are the number and percentage of students who began their associate's degree programs in a particular year and persisted to graduate within three years?
2. What are the number and percentage of remedial students that received local, named scholarships that persisted to graduate within three years?
3. How do local, named scholarships affect college students' self-efficacy, a key factor with benefits for persistence?

### **Significance of the Study**

Cohen and Brawer (2003) stated that even though community colleges play a significant role in higher education in America, very little research has been conducted on them. By

limiting this study to community college students, it will extend the current research on what is known about factors that affect student completion of degree programs in this setting.

Students often state that they are not able to persist and graduate in a timely manner due to financial constraints. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) wrote, “Considerable and consistent evidence attests to the vital role educational attainment plays in shaping subsequent occupational, social, and economic status” (p. 373). By measuring the effect of local, named scholarships on students’ persistence to graduation, this study provides insights on how best to disseminate charitable contributions throughout the academy.

Administrators and faculty in America’s community colleges must work to ensure that under-prepared students are provided the right motivational environment, self-confidence, and self-efficacy they need to be successful; in other words, to graduate. This study will help add to the literature on college student success by focusing on arguably the most at-risk college student population — remedial students located in a community college setting with known challenges surrounding persistence. Exploring the unique phenomena of providing named scholarships to remedial students in this educational setting should do much to surface potential ideas for better serving this population.

## **Definitions**

**Associate’s degree.** Rudolph (1977) defined the associate’s degree as the diploma awarded after two years of study at a community or junior college, whereas a bachelor’s degree is earned after four years of higher education. For the purpose of this study, the associate’s degree is the highest degree offered at Midwest Community College. Therefore, it is the unit of measure that is used in this study.

**Dropout.** Tinto (1993) provided a succinct definition for the term, dropout, from the college or university's perspective.

From the perspective of the institution it can be reasonably argued that all students who withdraw can be classified as dropouts regardless of their reasons for doing so. Each leaving creates a vacancy in the student body that might otherwise have been filled by someone who would have persisted until degree completion.” (p. 139)

For the purpose of this study, a dropout is a student who was enrolled during the first term of the study, then for any reason did not re-enroll before the study was completed and did not indicate to the institution that they intend to return.

**Graduation.** The term graduation for the purpose of this study will be defined by associate's degree seeking students who complete their studies and earn their degree within three years. Graduation rate is defined as the number of associate's-degree seeking students who earn their degree within three years, divided by the total number of associate's-degree seeking students who began their programs during the same term, then multiplying that value by 100 to convert the result into a percentage. The length of three years was chosen because it is 150% of the standard time required to earn a two-year associate's degree. Also, three years is the standard measure applied by the Student Right-to-Know Act, as stated in the Higher Education Amendments of 1991 and further clarified by the Higher Education Technical Amendments of 1993 (as cited in Parsons, 1997).

**Local.** For the purpose of this study, the term local, as applied to the scholarships, refers to the geographic region served by the campuses of Midwest Community College. Midwest Community College is comprised of 14 regional campuses throughout the state.

Therefore, there exist many local, named scholarships within each individual region and throughout the system.

**Merit-based aid.** King (1999) defined merit-based aid as that form of student financial aid that is awarded on the basis of merit. Merit includes outstanding academic, artistic, athletic, or some other special achievement prior to entering college. Other merit-based programs are based upon an expected future benefit to society after the student earns a degree. However, unlike need-based aid, the ability of the student to pay is not usually a major deciding criterion.

**Need-based aid.** King (1999) wrote, “Need-based programs emphasize criteria that measure their recipients’ need and/or their ability to pay for college” (p. 121). Gladieux, King, and Corrigan (2005) further defined need-based aid as helping those who otherwise would not be able to attend college. For the purpose of this study then, need-based aid is providing financial support to students with low ability to pay, regardless of any other merit.

**Persistence.** Birnbaum (1988) defined persistence as: “The willingness to pursue a program over an extended period of time until it is implemented [or completed]” (p. 224). For the purpose of this study persistence is defined as those associate’s-degree seeking students who continue their program area of study beyond the term when they were initially awarded the scholarship.

**Remediated students.** Remediated community college students can be defined by Cohen and Brawer’s (2003) statement, “Remedial and developmental, and less often, compensatory and basic skills have been used more or less interchangeably for courses designed to teach literacy – the essentials of reading, writing, and arithmetic” (p. 262). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, remediated community college students will be used in

reference to those students who were required by assessment to take refresher courses in reading, writing, or math.

**Retention.** Retention was loosely defined by Tinto (1993) as the opposite of early student departure. Students who persist to earn a degree before leaving a particular institution are students that have been retained for the duration of their studies. Thus, retention is correlated with persistence to the end of a program of study. For the purpose of this study, retention is the degree to which students persist to earn an associate's degree within three years.

**Scholarship.** Named scholarship is defined for the purpose of this study as a source of student financial aid that has been donated by a local individual or organization with the scholarship bearing that donor's name.

**Stopout.** Tinto (1993) described a stopout as someone who temporarily withdraws from the institution. For the purpose of this study, a stopout is a student who was enrolled during the first term of the study but then for any reason did not re-enroll before the study was completed, but who has informed the institution they intend to return; are not currently enrolled; and did not earn a degree, but plan to return in the near future.

### **Researcher Perspective**

When conducting a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument for data analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I personally interviewed the participants and did the transcription. Since I completed an internship at Midwest Community College's Foundation Office on the same campus where I am a professor, I interviewed participants from other regions. By not limiting this study to my home region, it includes participants who did not know me before the interviews. Furthermore, as a professor in the School of Business, I have

never instructed reading, writing, or mathematical remedial courses, so even local graduates would not have been my students during their remedial studies.

I am interested in this study, because this state could use a better plan with greater potential to graduate remedial students than what they currently have in practice. The governor of the state has seen many of his proposals for a free community college education shot down over the past few years. But, if the state would just cover the minimal costs of remedial courses for students at Midwest Community College, then I believe that the stigmatism and low self-efficacy associated with remediation could be assuaged.

### **Plan of the Study**

In Chapter 2 of this study, a review of the historically relevant and current literature and research on remediation, persistence, and scholarships are presented, including the key literature that provides a basis for the study's theoretical framework. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach to the study and how it was executed. Chapter 4 presents the study findings while Chapter 5 discusses the meaning and the implications of the findings for both future research and practice while also presenting the study limitations.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature salient to a study of this kind. First, the student persistence literature was explored, including as it has developed in the arena of community college students. From there, the review explored the research focused on self-concept and self-efficacy, key factors as it may affect the motivation and drive of a person to succeed. At that point, the history and research on remedial students in higher education will be discussed, especially as they are manifested at community colleges. Finally, the history and research on student aid, particularly student scholarship aid, as a means of support for students is presented. These combined elements set the stage for a study focusing on named scholarship support of remedial students at a community college.

### **Theoretical Framework: Tinto's Model of College Student Retention**

Many researchers have studied the issue of student retention, although Tinto's work is perhaps the most extensive and well known. Tinto's (1975) early model looked at how students begin their college career commitments and how those commitments are sourced from family and individual attributes as well as their precollege schooling. When students enter a particular institution, they first perceive the system as one characterized by grade performance and intellectual development. However, students quickly realize that their academic endeavor is intermingled with social integration where interactions with peers and faculty lead to further

integration within the entire academy. Students discover themselves in an academic system with social undercurrents. Their successful integration into this system greatly influences their decision to persist at that particular institution, to switch to another institution, to stopout; or to give up on their academic endeavor entirely, in other words, to dropout.

Tinto's (1993) model was similar in structure to his earlier one, but it offered another explanation of student departure: Failure to navigate the rites of passage through the academy. With this revised model, Tinto discovered that students would be more likely to persist if they removed themselves from their family and high school classmates and became fully integrated with their college peers. This integration would occur only after they chose to identify with and adopt the values of the institution's students and faculty, and were fully committed to pursuing this new set of values and behaviors. In other words, if they allowed their self to become fully assimilated into the institution by breaking away from their past, they would be more likely to persist. Figure 1 is Tinto's longitudinal model in diagram form.

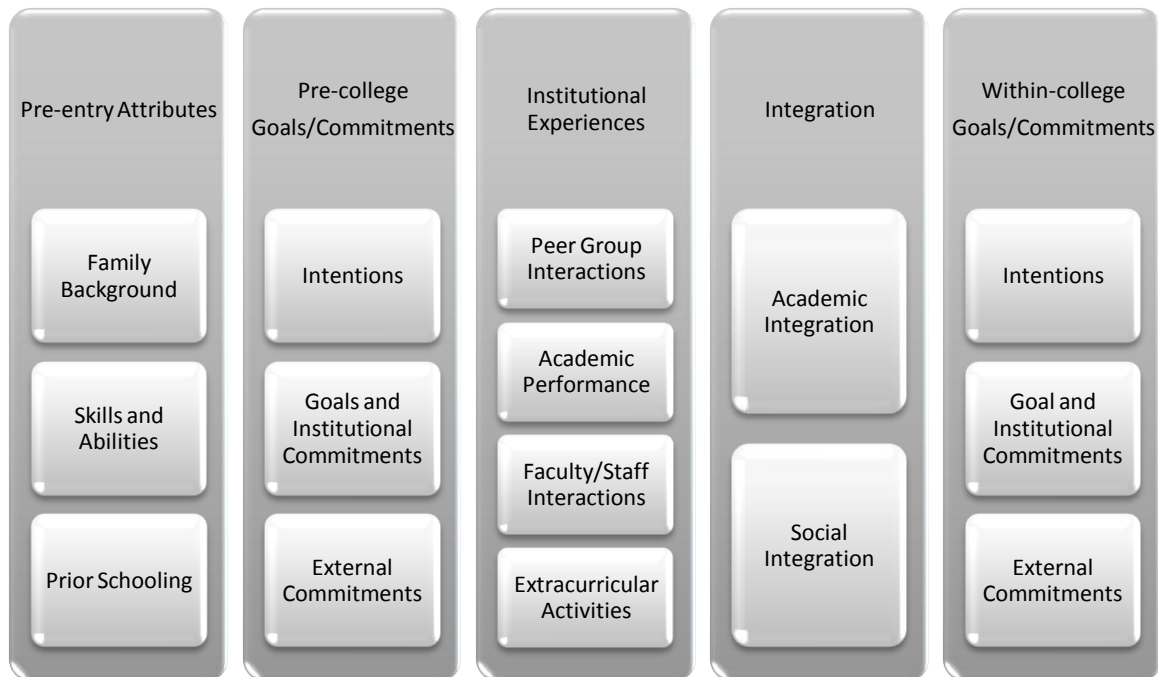


Figure 1. Tinto's model of institutional departure.



To fully understand Tinto's (1993) Model of Institutional Departure, it is important to describe its various elements. First, as shown, it is divided into five elements. These are the factors that have been shown to affect the departure or persistence decision of a college student. These five sets of antecedents are arrayed temporally, in other words, pre-college factors are shown on the left side, followed by pre-college goals and institutional commitments, and then the institutional experiences that a student begins to have after starting college. These experiences in turn lead to feelings of integration (or not) and then ultimately to new or revised goals and institutional commitments based upon those experiences. The sum total of these before college and during college elements ultimately lead to a decision to remain at the institution or to depart. Each of these five antecedent elements to a departure decision will now be discussed.

### **Pre-entry Attributes**

Students arrive on college campuses with many qualities, characteristics, and habits from their previous educational and life experiences. That is an important consideration, because Tinto (1993) stated, "Patterns of entry are necessarily related, in time, to eventual patterns of departure" (p. 8). Even though what occurs after entry is more significant than what occurred before entry, students' previous attributes are nonetheless important factors in persistence.

All pre-entry attributes including students' family backgrounds, their academic abilities, their socioeconomic status, and their ethnicity have a significant impact on their persistence. Tinto's (1993) book revealed that 57.5% of the college students that persisted to earn a bachelor's degree within six years were from the highest academic quartile in their high schools. Furthermore, only 17.6% of the completers were from their high school's lowest

academic quartile. It is clear that the best and the brightest in high school will be more likely to remain the best and the brightest in college, but other factors need to be considered as well.

One of Tinto's (1993) pre-entry attributes, students' socioeconomic status, revealed that 55.4% of the completers had been in the highest socioeconomic quartile in their high schools, while only 30.1% of the completers were from the lowest socioeconomic quartile. Therefore, socioeconomic status before and during college are also significant factors in student persistence.

Ethnicity was another pre-entry attribute in Tinto's (1993) research and it also played a role in college student persistence. Tinto's research discovered that 56.6% of the White students from their highest socioeconomic quartile persisted to earn bachelor degrees within six years, while only 44.1% of Black students from their highest socioeconomic quartile persisted to graduation. Hispanics had an even lower persistence rate of only 22.5% from their race's highest socioeconomic quartile. It is clear that ethnicity is also a significant factor in college student persistence.

Tinto's (1993) research has shown that students' academic abilities, prior schooling, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity contribute significantly to their college persistence. But there are other, even more significant factors to students' college persistence, and they are discussed next.

### **Pre-College Goals/Commitments**

As Tinto (1993) reported, "There are many different paths into the collegiate system" (p. 8). Most first-time college students begin their tenure in the fall having graduated from high school in the preceding spring. Others may begin in the summer immediately following their spring high school graduation, while others may wait until the following spring term.

Furthermore, a small percentage of new students will be older working adults seeking to improve their professional careers with higher education for the first time, or returning after a furlough. Because students enter higher education from all possible angles, with a plethora of credit and non-credit aspirations, some will be traditional full-time students, while others will attend part-time. These various methods of entry will lead to different levels of pre-college goals and commitments. All of which greatly influence students' persistence. It is as Carroll (1989) discovered, students who delay entry into college or who attend part-time are, on average, significantly less likely to persist and earn a degree. Carroll stated, "It is estimated that delayed entrants who enter less than four-year institutions and who enroll part-time are five times less likely than immediate full-time four-year entrants to obtain a four-year degree" (p. 29). Entry point and part-time vs. full-time enrollment statuses are two aspects of pre-college goals and commitments that effect students' persistence.

It is commonly inferred that students' high school academic ranking will be a sound predictor of their academic success in college. Tinto (1993) reported that students persisted and graduated from highly selective institutions that required Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores greater than 1,100 at a rate of 66.2% in 1992. In the same period, the graduation rate was only 45.1% at traditional institutions that required a score in the range 801-930 on the SAT. Furthermore, institutions who accepted students with SAT scores below 700, graduated at a rate of 38.2%. Although the data is valid, there can be other outlying factors that affect high school students' academics that may not carry over to college. For example, involvement in high school sports may have interfered with a student's studies; but they may not continue with athletics in college, choosing instead to focus on a professional career. Therefore, students'

intentions to persist in college may have a greater affect on their persistence than their pre-entry attributes.

Students' intentions to persist greatly affect their likelihood of success. It is generally understood that when a person intends to do something, they are committing to doing whatever is necessary to achieve their goal. However, it may be the intention of some students to attend college rather than commit to some other activity, including work. If persistence to earning a college degree is not their intention, then they will most likely dropout. Especially if the career they are pursuing does not require a college degree, just some college coursework.

Commitment to the institution to achieve their goal of earning a college degree is also a factor in students' persistence. If students are not committed to the institution where they are enrolled, then they will be less likely to persist to graduation. Tinto's (1993) research revealed that when a student's primary goal was to graduate from a particular institution, they would be more likely to graduate from that institution than students whose career goals required no commitment to a specific institution. Therefore, some students would be more likely than others to transfer to other institutions if the next institution was perceived as being better able to meet their career needs. Commitment to a particular institution may arise from family tradition or when a particular institution is perceived as the best avenue for career success. But with almost 4,000 colleges and universities to choose from in the United States, commitment to a particular institution may be difficult to maintain.

Furthermore, students may have external commitments that make it difficult for them to persist. These external commitments may include having children or other family members under their care. It may also include working one or more jobs while attending classes in order to support themselves and their family. Paulsen and St. John's (2002) research revealed that

students' economic circumstances have a significant impact on both their college choice and their ability to persist. Many well-intended students may have to choose between providing for themselves and their families, or continuing their academic aspirations. Also, students may find themselves more committed to external organizations that are better aligned with their gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. Therefore, students' commitments to the world outside academia will have an impact on their persistence.

It has been reported in much of the college student development literature that college attendance is part of the pathway to adulthood, and once a student matures, they may discover that they have stronger ties to organizations external to their college or university. These and other factors all contribute to students' persistence to earning a college degree, including those that will be discussed next.

### **Institutional Experiences**

Once students begin taking classes at a particular institution, they may discover that their previous expectations and actual experiences are suddenly incongruent. Their experiences, including their interactions with peers, faculty and staff, may not go as smoothly as they had hoped. Other experiences including their academic performance, their experiences with extracurricular activities, and their interactions with other groups may cause them to feel disconnected from their expectations. Halpin's (1990) study that applied Tinto's research to 291 community college students found this to be true. Among the most significant factors for student persistence that, "...accounted for 74.5 % of the explained variance..." were areas derived from the student's institutional experiences including: Faculty concern for teaching and student development, academic and intellectual development, and interaction with faculty (p.

6). Therefore, students' preconceived expectations of their upcoming experiences in a particular institution can be a key predictor of their future persistence.

Astin (1975) and Tinto (1993) both agreed that interactions with faculty, staff, and fellow students have significant impact on students' persistence. Positive relationships with their professors and their advisors are positive influencers on students' institutional experiences and level of commitment. However, negative experiences with professors and staff can spoil the experience leading to early student departure. Students' experiences within a particular institution can run through the entire spectrum of possibilities, but other forces, including how students integrate with their college or university also affect persistence; and these will be discussed next.

How well students integrate into their new college environment will also affect their persistence. Integration within a particular institution involves many aspects of campus life and students' development. If students fail to perform as well academically as they and their advisors had hoped, then they will be less likely to persist than those who earn higher marks. As Tinto (1993) said, "Persistence in college requires more than mere adjustment. It also calls for the meeting of a number of minimum standards regarding academic performance" (p. 48). When students begin struggling with their coursework, they will usually follow one of two paths; they will either seek extra assistance or they will slowly give up and stop attending classes. Students who seek extra assistance will be more likely to persist, while those who skip lectures and fail to submit work will most likely leave the institution.

Students' ability to integrate socially will also affect their desire to persist at a particular institution. When students fail to fully integrate into the institution's culture, they will be more likely to depart. Tinto (1993) found that, "Less than 25% of all institutional departures,

nationally, take the form of academic dismissal” (p. 49). When students fail to adjust to life on campus, away from their family and hometown friends, they usually begin withdrawing by isolating themselves from their peers, professors, and staff. Husband’s (1976) study at Spring Arbor College found that students, who voluntarily dropped out of higher education, were much less likely to identify with someone on campus with whom they had a significant relationship than those who persisted. Unfortunately, this self-induced isolation begins a snowball process that compounds their lack of integration to the point of total withdrawal and early departure from the institution.

It is generally accepted by researchers including Tinto (1993) and Braxton (2004) that students who persist through to graduation were either a better fit from the beginning or were flexible enough to adapt to their new environment. Any demand in excess of a student’s abilities will usually result in early departure (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, integration into a particular institution’s culture, both academically and socially, is vitally important to student persistence to graduation. However, the level of commitment to a particular institution may be a more important factor in persistence; and that will be discussed next.

Even if all of the above mentioned areas work out well for the students, they may still fail to persist if their goals and their level of commitment are not aligned with those of the particular institution. Grades are usually accepted as a sign of both the students’ academic abilities and their level of commitment to the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Significant life events may occur during a student’s tenure that suddenly changes their priorities and their grades. When that happens, persistence to earning a degree can become less important to them than dealing with a sudden life change. In that case, their decision to depart

reflects a sharp change in their goals, not necessarily a difference in their commitments; which may have been tied to their personal lives all along.

Students' finances are a significant factor in their commitment to a particular institution. As King (1999) wrote, "Families and students can choose among postsecondary institutions offering different sticker prices" (p. 15). They may have chosen a lower-cost institution as a second or third choice; but once there, the student may not feel very strong ties to that institution because it was not their first choice. When students accept their second or third choice, they are in effect compromising their goals, which may lead to weakened commitments to that institution. Grieving the loss of not being able to attend their first-choice institution, students may not commit as much effort into their studies or their social life thereby sabotaging their chances for persistence. Therefore, choosing a less expensive college may not be in the students' long-term best interest for earning a degree.

Learning also plays a significant role in students' persistence. When students feel they are learning as much or more than expected, they are more likely to persist (Tinto, 1993). However, when students feel that they are not learning very much, they will most likely feel disappointment and will withdraw and isolate themselves from their academic studies. Also, the level of effort students pour into their studies will impact their persistence. Economists claim that everyone makes decisions at the margins (Heyne, 1997). If the level of effort required to be successful is either too low or too high, learning will suffer and students will not persist. A balance must be struck between pushing students to learn but not pushing them so hard that they cannot cope. Students' commitment to their initial goal of earning a degree from a particular institution are one of several factors uncovered by Tinto (1993), all of which are summarized next.



**Summary of Tinto's model.** These five areas that effect student persistence have been studied in great depth by many researchers. All of these factors lead to persistence or early departure and are dependent upon the interactions of students with their professors, peers, and institutional staff. Any incongruence with any of these five areas can lead to early student departure, and it takes significant effort from both the institution and the student to keep them in balance.

### **Student Retention and Persistence Research**

A considerable body of research has developed utilizing Tinto's Model as a framework. However, other research that does not link to Tinto's work directly is also informative to the design and execution of this study. For the purposes of this section of the review, the research on student retention and persistence that does and does not draw directly from Tinto is organized into two sections. The first section is the work that has been done on the four-year college sector while the latter is that which is focused on the two-year or community college.

**Retention and persistence research in the four-year college setting.** Factors contributing to college student persistence have been studied in great depth by educational researchers throughout the world. An extensive body of research exists that categorizes the conditions that promote persistence. Tinto (1993) listed five conditions that support college student persistence including: Expectations, advice, support, involvement, and learning. All five of these factors have been identified as significant causes of student persistence or lack thereof – early departure. But Tinto's research needs to be tested in settings other than his own. Therefore, this discussion will continue from Tinto's work and expand into other researchers' studies.

It is known from Tinto's work that students are more likely to persist and graduate from institutions that expect them to succeed. It is also known from Tinto's work that students are more like to persist, when the advice they receive is accurately connected to their academic and career goals. Furthermore, it is known that when institutions provide the necessary academic, social, and personal support, their students are more likely to persist. Research also shows that students are more likely to persist when they perceive themselves as being valuable contributors to the learning experience in settings that foster learning (Tinto, 1993). What is not so clear is how effective all of these retention programs are when measured through economic and social lenses. A study on the literature that does just that is discussed next.

**Student-faculty informal contact and college persistence.** Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have spent the past 30 years studying higher education through the lens of how college attendance affects students. Connecting Tinto's work with Pascarella and Terenzini's, one can see that students who persist go through significant changes.

Students' verbal skills, quantitative skills, subject matter knowledge, speaking skills, written communications, reasoning, critical thinking, reflective judgment, and conceptual complexity all increase significantly when they persist through to graduation. These changes, as measured by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), are positive outcomes of students' persistence and were identified by Tinto (Year/s) as a key factor in persistence. Learning, which affects cognitive changes, which affects the likelihood of students' persistence, is another snowball process that feeds upon itself.

Students who experience positive cognitive structural growth are also more likely to persist. Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) research shows that most students begin their college careers with a dualistic view of right and wrong. However, under the right circumstances, their

thinking will evolve to one that sees issues and human interaction dynamics in a more complex pattern. The ability to shift their cognitive pattern has a positive impact on their persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In contrast, students who do not wish or are unable to move from a dualist view of the world will find it more difficult to remain at any college or university that is accepting of varying worldviews.

Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) research revealed that students who persist to graduation also go through significant psychosocial changes. Pascarella and Terenzini stated, "Changes in students' relational systems were more apparent, the largest being declines in authoritarianism and dogmatism (.70 to .90 standard deviation [SD]). Modest increases were apparent in intellectual orientation (.33 SD), psychological well-being (.40 SD), general autonomy (.59 SD), and independence from family influences (.60 SD)." (p. 574)

This willingness to change one's worldview is a key factor in persistence at a particular institution. These personal attributes are also affected by how well the student integrates into their particular institution, a factor also found in Tinto's (1993) work.

When Tinto (1993) researched the causes of students' early departure, one area he focused on was student and faculty interaction as part of students' overall institutional experience. Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) also studied the effect of student and faculty interaction on student persistence. They believed that student models of persistence all have two basic elements in common – academic and social integration. They expanded on Tinto's (1993) and Spady's (1970) research and discovered a positive correlation between student and faculty informal contact. The more time students spend interacting with their professors outside of the classroom, the more likely they are to persist at that particular institution. It has

been previously discussed that integration into the institution's culture is a key factor in persistence. Therefore, it seems logical that as their interpersonal relationships with their professors improve, students will be more committed to that particular institution.

**Part-time versus full-time instructors and college persistence.** Burgess and Samuels's (1999) study discovered a positive correlation between whether a student's first course in a series was taught by a part- or full-time instructor. Students who took their first course in a series from a part-time instructor were more likely to be underprepared for the second course than their counterparts whose first course was taught by a full-time instructor. Burgess and Samuels's findings are congruent with Pascarella and Terenzini's (1979), because as they noted, very few part-time faculty have permanent offices on campus and therefore cannot interact with students outside of the classroom as readily as full-time faculty.

**Factors affecting persistence of first-time freshmen at different semester end points.** Boyer's (2005) research on the persistence of first-time freshman at an urban, Midwestern university concurred with Tinto's (1993) as well as Pascarella and Terenzini's (1979) findings. Boyer followed the progress of 286 students for three consecutive semesters, one academic year, and uncovered several variables that contribute to students' persistence.

In their first semester, the significant factors included gender, ethnicity, and ACT scores. Women were more likely to persist than men. Boyer also found that Blacks were 10 times more likely to persist than Whites. Furthermore, students who scored 21 or less on the ACT exam were less likely to persist than those who scored above 21.

In the second semester, the significant factors shifted to the number of credit hours the students earned during their first semester, the total number of grants they received, and whether they were dependents. Students who earned less than eight credit hours in their first

semester were less likely to persist. Students who had received any amount of grants were three times more likely to persist than those who received none. Also, dependent students were three times more likely to persist than independents that had no familial support network.

Significant factors for persistence in the third semester included income, total number of credit hours earned, and whether or not they were state residents. Boyer (2005) found that students who accumulated fewer than eight credit hours in the previous term were less likely to persist. Furthermore, students that were attending an in-state institution were five times more likely to persist than those who were from another state.

Boyer's (2005) findings can be viewed through all five categories of Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of institutional departure. Boyer found that Tinto's pre-entry attributes, were significant factors after the first semester. After the second semester, Tinto's goals/commitments, and institutional experiences are more significant. By the third semester, Tinto's integration played a significant role in persistence. Clearly, Boyer's study is congruent with Tinto's model for student persistence for students attending at a four-year university.

**Instructor-student interaction in the distance education space and student persistence.** Tello (2004) studied the effect of online student and faculty interactions on students' persistence. He observed 1,645 students enrolled in 76 different online courses at the University of Massachusetts- Lowell. We know from Tinto's (1993) research that student learning is a significant factor in their persistence at a particular institution. Tello dug deeply into the student and faculty interactions and discovered some significant factors which led to improved student learning in an online environment and by extension, improved persistence.

Tello (2004) found that students learned more when they more frequently used the same communications methods as their instructors in online classrooms. Whether their professor

preferred e-mail, synchronous online or asynchronous online discussions, as long as the student used that same method more frequently than any other method, then the students were more satisfied and learned more. However, asynchronous discussion threads had the strongest positive correlation to students' learning and persistence in a given course. Tello suggested that was due to the open accessibility of reading all students' and their professors message threads for the entire course. This is just one aspect of Tinto's (1993) model, institutional experience, but it made a difference for the students in Tello's study.

**Reframing persistence research.** One area that some researchers claim to be lacking is the study of the effectiveness of retention programs on college campuses. There seems to be little research on program effectiveness after they are implemented. In the journal report, *Reframing Persistence Research to Improve Academic Success*, St. John and Wilkerson (2006) conducted more pragmatic, applied studies that could be useful for measuring the efficacy of retention programs. They attempted to explore the nexus between research and practice in order to uncover the most effective retention programs at Indiana colleges.

The authors sent 47 individual requests to various college and university campuses around Indiana, and received some type of response from 36 of them. Out of the 36 that responded, 22 campuses actually delivered data. However, only 16 of those 22 campuses provided relevant data in 34 different types of documents.

[The authors] classified the 34 documents provided by the 16 colleges and universities into four categories: Institutional studies, assessments of programs designed to reduce student departure, assessments of the college environment and experience, and reports of policies and programs developed to reduce student departure. (St. John & Wilkerson, 2006, p. 27)

Even though they did not clearly articulate it, St. John and Wilkerson's (2006) classification scheme was largely congruent with Tinto's (1993) model as well. Their research discovered that much is being done to bolster student persistence at Indiana's colleges and universities, and a lot of money is being expended in support of a large number of programs. However, they had concerns. Their first concern was why only 16 of the 47 campuses they contacted were able to deliver real data on the effectiveness of their programs. Since most, if not all of these programs are funded by grants from foundations that require follow-up reports, they wondered what the other 31 campuses were reporting back to their stakeholders. It appeared to them that the other 31 campuses were not taking their retention programs seriously. Thus, St. John and Wilkerson concluded that, "The majority of colleges and universities in Indiana have not conducted campus-based retention studies of sufficient methodological and statistical rigor" (p. 30). Most of the data which was reported to them was not in statistical form. Only 7 of the 34 reports used multivariate statistical procedures to measure their retention programs' effectiveness. That meant that 27 of the reports were submitted without rigorous statistical data, rendering them less meaningful than they could have been.

St. John and Wilkerson (2006) concluded that more rigorous studies needed to be conducted on the efficacy of most college and university's retention programs. The researchers recommend that all colleges and universities conduct studies on student departure. Furthermore, these studies, they argued, should be theory-based and use multivariate statistical procedures to determine which practices are most effective on the campuses.

### **Student Retention in the Two-year College Setting**

Every year, more research is being conducted on the retention of two-year or community college students. Studies on community college student persistence usually evolve

out of Tinto's (1993) research at four-year universities. Although Tinto's work lays a solid foundation for community college studies, the fact that more non-traditional students attend community colleges than four-year universities serves to further complicate those studies. Understanding non-traditional students is paramount to successful retention programs at community colleges.

Non-traditional students, usually commute to campus instead of residing in university housing (Fike & Fike, 2008). Non-traditional students are more likely to attend college part-time while also working full-time jobs to support themselves and their families. Non-traditional students are also generally older, and therefore, less inclined to socialize with traditional-aged university students; and they are also less inclined to be influenced by the tried and true retention programs usually found on university campuses. These and other factors are discussed next as an examination of retention and persistence research in two-year college settings.

**Community college student persistence.** Fike and Fike (2008) studied 9,200 first-time students in a community college over a period of four years. Fike and Fike looked at the impact of remedial coursework, course delivery methods, levels of financial aid, parents' education levels, number of credit hours taken, and the level of students' interactions with support services at a community college in West Texas. The single strongest correlation between all of the examined factors and persistence was successful completion of remedial reading courses. Fike and Fike also found a positive correlation between success in remedial mathematics, receiving financial aid, taking an Internet course, the number of credit hours enrolled, participation in student support services and persistence. Fike and Fike's research supports the supposition that it is possible to cull certain factors in order to predict persistence rates.



**Model for predicting persistence.** Hyers and Zimmerman (2002) provided valuable insights into the issue of student persistence to graduation. They developed a model for predicting graduation rates at a two-year, open-admissions technical college in Ohio. Using segmentation modeling, they built a model designed to predict whether or not students would earn an associate's degree within three years. Specifically, they used a sample of 174 associate of applied science degree-seeking students, 12% of the 1,450 first year students at the Wooster campus of The Ohio State University's Agricultural and Technical Institute. This sample of students represented eight cohorts of students who took one of the author's five-week orientation courses. The authors used four discrete variables in their model including: High school rank (percentile), ACT composite score, earned grade in the required orientation course, and their first-quarter overall GPA to predict both first-to second-year retention, and graduation rates within three years.

Hyers and Zimmerman (2002) found that only 38.8% of their population graduated within the three-year period, but 53.5% of the students who persisted after the first academic year went on to graduate. Furthermore, their model accurately predicted graduation rates using the high school rank variable 69.1% of the time, compared to 55.9% by chance. It also showed that 52.5% of the 59 students with ACT scores over 17 graduated within three years, while only 32.5% of the students with scores below 17 graduated within three years (Hyers & Zimmerman, 2002). Their model was also correct 66.9% of the time for predicting students with a high GPA during their first quarter at the institution as compared to 48.3% by chance. The model revealed that only 12.5% of the students with a first-quarter GPA of 2.24 or less ever graduated, and those with a GPA higher than 2.24 graduated at a rate of 56%. In regards to the final grade for

the required five-week orientation course, Hyers and Zimmerman's model correctly predicted the graduation rates 64.0% of the time compared to 48.3% by chance.

Bringing Hyers and Zimmerman's (2002) segmentation model together in a multivariate form, they accurately predicted the graduation of students 79.9% of the time. The implications for their model showed usefulness to admissions officers, counselors, and faculty as a tool to clearly define subgroups of at-risk students before they register for their second term. Their research also provided support for required orientation courses.

**Predictors of persistence between community college adult and traditional-aged students.** Sorey and Duggan (2008) researched the difference between positive factors of persistence for traditional and non-traditional aged students at Tidewater Community College in Virginia. They randomly selected 350 non-traditional, adult-aged students; and 350 traditional, college-aged students from Tidewater's 34,940 student population during 2003-2004. They found significant differences in the predictors of students' persistence based upon their age groups.

The most significant factors in descending order of magnitude for traditional-age students' persistence were encouragement and support, academic integration, fall GPA, and intent to leave. The most significant factors in descending order of magnitude for non-traditional aged, or adult students' persistence were social integration, institutional commitment, degree utility, encouragement and support, finances, intent to leave, and academic integration.

Sorey and Duggan's (2008) study clearly revealed that what motivates students to persist is partially dependent upon their age and their association with a given demographic group. Adult students are more concerned about the utility of their chosen degree than

traditional-aged students who see college attendance as a rite of passage to adulthood.

Traditional-aged college students need more encouragement and support while non-traditional-aged adult students are more greatly affected by their integration into the social fabric of the institution.

**Community college student persistence influencers.** Cofer and Somers (2001) studied the effect of student financial aid on the persistence of community college students. They used data collected from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Surveys for 1992-93 and 1995-96 on 7,505 students for their study. Cofer and Somers found that controlling for all other non-financial variables from the 1993 data that students were 6.8% more likely to persist for every \$1,000 of grants received, and were only 2.5% more likely to persist for every \$1,000 of loans. From the 1996 data, they found that students were 13.1% more likely to persist for every \$1,000 of grants received, and were only 8% more likely to persist for every \$1,000 of loans. Cofer and Somers also found in the 1996 study that students were 18.1% more likely to persist for every \$1,000 of work study funds.

Debt was also a significant factor in Cofer and Somers' (2001) study. They found in the 1993 data that students who reported a high level of debt, over \$7,000, were 8.3% less likely to persist than students with no debt. The 1996 data revealed a significant shift in the effect of debt on students' persistence. Students who reported low debt, less than \$3,000, were 5.1% less likely to persist than students with no debt. However, the 1996 data also revealed that students who reported high debt, over \$7,000 were 16.4% more likely to persist than students with no debt. This shift implies that when students are conditioned to accept more debt as commonplace practices, they are more likely to continue their studies – they become less debt averse.

**Summary comparison between four-year, and two-year persistence studies.** There are a few key differences between the factors that lead students to persist at four-year and two-year institutions. Tinto's (1993) research uncovered several common factors that affect students' persistence at four-year institutions, which seem similar in nature to factors that also affect students at two-year schools. However, Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) work began to shed light on some differences that may be related to the age of the students. As a percentage, more non-traditional aged (older) students attend two-year colleges than four-year universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Therefore, key differences emerge in the research when the data are disaggregated by age of student. Sorey and Duggan (2008) found that older students were affected more by their social integration, institutional commitment, and the usefulness of their degree than younger, traditional-aged students. However traditional aged students were affected more by the encouragement and support they received from their family and the institution, their academic integration, their GPA, and their intent to leave. Cofer and Somers (2001) found that students attending a two-year community college were more likely to persist when they received more grants and took out fewer loans.

### **Self-Concept and Self-Efficacy**

Another essential set of factors are important for informing this study, namely research on self-concept and self-efficacy. These two overlapping, although domain specific concepts, provide additional useful lenses into an examination of student retention and persistence. Each will be described below as well as some of the key literature on the topics drawn from the academic motivation literature.

Bong and Skaalvik (2003) conducted a study on the commonalities and differences between self-concept and self-efficacy. They discovered that both can be used to predict

students' motivation, emotion, and performance to varying degrees; however, they also found significant differences. One key difference is that self-efficacy seems to act as a precursor to development of students' self-concept. This finding is important because it reveals why students with identical pre-entry and goal/commitment attributes as categorized by Tinto may follow different paths and may respond differently in the same college or university environment.

**Self-concept.** Self-concept is generally defined as a composite view of one's self. Rosenberg (1979) defined it as "...the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (p. 7). How we view ourselves, based upon our thoughts and feelings about ourselves is the basis of our self-concept, i.e. who we think we are.

When viewed through an academic lens, self-concept refers to our individual knowledge about how we perceive ourselves in academic situations. We imagine ourselves in various academic situations and use those images to define who we are without regard to what we can accomplish in them. Our image of ourselves, our self-concept, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, because it provides mental feedback about whom we are and who we are becoming. For example, if we view ourselves as becoming excellent teachers, then we will most likely achieve that goal. However, if we view ourselves as being only mediocre, then we will probably not reach any higher than the middling class of our professional field.

The differentiation between self-concept and self-efficacy was an important introduction to this part of the literature review as a frame for understanding their differences. However, self-efficacy has a more significant impact on student persistence and retention than self-concept; therefore, it is discussed in greater detail next.

**Self-efficacy.** Contrary to who we think we are, which is our self-concept, our self-efficacy explains what we believe we are capable of accomplishing; or in other words, what we are. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy this way, “Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Thus, self-efficacy describes how we feel about our abilities and skills, not necessarily what those abilities and skills can actually accomplish. Self-efficacy is our internal perception of what we believe we can accomplish. It is fueled by past experiences, but because it is internal, it may not be an accurate representation of what we are truly capable of accomplishing.

When viewed through an academic lens, self-efficacy refers to our individual convictions about how we think we will perform at different levels on academic tasks. These include the letter grade we expect to earn on assignments and exams. Based upon our perceived skills and abilities, we construct an image in our mind of how we will complete an academic task and how our work will be graded. Since our self-perceptions are often flawed, it is not uncommon to receive a letter grade different than what we expected. This disconnect sheds light on the inaccuracy of our self-efficacy. But, it should also be used as a future-oriented view of what we can be capable of completing in the future.

Therefore, our self-efficacy is constantly shifting. With every successful scholastic endeavor, one’s academic abilities perception expands into something greater than it was before that endeavor. But conversely, when one is unsuccessful on an academic task self-efficacy drops and he or she must work hard to raise it back up again. It is this constant shifting that motivates one to persist and succeed in reaching our academic goals. Unfortunately, some students who are not able to handle rejection well will fall farther behind from a single

academic event than their peers. It is these students who need extra attention and special retention programs in order to help them persist and graduate. With that in mind, the discussion turns next to several salient studies on self-efficacy involving students.

**Self-efficacy: The exercise of control.** Bandura (1977) set the standards used by self-efficacy researchers since that time. His work revealed that first and foremost, people strive to control events that affect their lives. By using mental imagery people visualize themselves in situations — academic ones for the purpose of this study — and predict the outcome based upon their perceived skills and abilities. Their level of motivation and actions that follow are influenced more by what they believe than what is objectively true. The amount that they believe they can control is influenced by their beliefs.

Our self-efficacy beliefs influence the courses of action we follow. It also controls the amount of effort we put into an academic project and how well we persevere in the face of obstacles and setbacks. Thus, our resiliency to adversity is greatly influenced by our self-efficacy as well as our self-hindering or self-aiding thought patterns. The amount of stress we feel during challenging academic projects and our level of depression afterwards are also affected by our self-efficacy. Finally the level of accomplishment we achieve is also influenced by our self-efficacy. There is very little that a student does that is not influenced by their self-efficacy.

**Student self-assessment.** McMillan and Hearn (2008) studied the effect of self-efficacy on students' self-assessment as a key to understanding motivation and students' high achievements. They found a snowball process of self-assessment that feeds on itself. When a student monitors and evaluates their academic progress, they will discover strategies that can be used to improve their knowledge and skills. Then, they will create their own goals for

improving their academic performance. When students reach those goals, they will become aware that their thinking contributed to their success. Realizing that their positive, self-motivating attitude helped them to succeed, their self-judgment will improve along with the level of their self-efficacy. When that occurs, the cycle begins again and the student continues to learn and grow.

Self-efficacy in the case of student learning plays a significant role in increasing student motivation to work a little harder, which in turn leads to improved academic performance. McMillan and Hearn (2008) discovered that when students told themselves and others, “I am good in math,” or “I do well in science classes,” then they were more likely to persist and perform very well (p. 44). Conversely, when students with low self-efficacy encountered a new academic challenge, they were more likely to avoid those tasks or to give up without fully trying.

The implications of McMillan and Hearn’s (2008) work are that teachers who purposefully create meaningful self-assessment programs for their students are providing positive reinforcement to those students’ self-efficacies. The author’s research discovered that students who were actively involved with their own self-assessment were more motivated and more engaged in academic activities than those who were evaluated solely by their instructor.

**Self-efficacy in a helping profession.** In a study of nursing students, McLaughlin, Moutray, and Muldoon (2008) discovered that a significant difference in students’ final grades correlated to their reported self-efficacy. McLaughlin et al. studied 350 students from 1999 to 2002 by administering a questionnaire that included measures of personality, occupational, and academic self-efficacy. They found that all other factors being equal, students who self-



reported high self-efficacy at the beginning of the academic program had higher persistence rates and finished with higher grades than those who first reported lower self-efficacy.

It seems clear from the collective research explored above that students with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist in their academic programs than those with lower self-perceptions of their skills and abilities. The goal, then, is to identify methods of improving students' levels of self-efficacy because improved self-efficacy naturally leads to improved academic performance and improved levels of persistence through to graduation. However, when a student is advised that they need remedial coursework, because they are academically deficient in some area, their self-efficacy may suffer.

### **Remedial Education in Higher Education**

With the retention, persistence, self-concept, and self-efficacy literature as a backdrop, the review of the literature now turns to remedial education in higher education. A significant portion of America's college-age students are not academically prepared for college-level coursework. In fact, this has long been a concern of college administrators. The 1828 Yale Report (as cited in Herbst, 2004) called for an end to the practice of admitting under-prepared students, and selective colleges and universities have been doing just that ever since. However, there remains a need to educate the masses and thus for some college-bound students to have their reading, writing, and mathematical skills improved so they are prepared for college-level coursework.

Retention and persistence is confounded by the fact that that many college-bound students need some remedial coursework. Grimes and David (1999) reported that 57% of the students entering two-year colleges required remedial coursework in reading, writing, and math. There are many studies that seek to identify the causes of this problem, but few offer practical

solutions. The following synthesis of the research on remedial education provides insights to the phenomenon.

**Costs and returns of remedial education.** Grimes and David (1999), as noted above, report fair to poor academic preparation for 57% of the students enrolling in two-year institutions in the United States. Grimes and David also report that 41% of all first-time freshmen in public two-year colleges enrolled in at least one remedial course. Dismal graduation rates were also reported; only 24% of the students who took three or more remedial courses completed their studies.

Those who oppose offering any type of remedial coursework cite rising costs and burdensome demands on scarce resources (Grimes & David, 1999). Opponents play the blame game by insisting that secondary schools should be held accountable for not preparing all students for college-level coursework. Those who promote remedial courses cite open-door policies and the need to educate all members of our society without blaming the secondary schools as much as holding society in general accountable.

Saxon and Boylan (2001) investigated the cost of providing remedial education to entering college students. They stated that, "Critics argue that remedial education costs taxpayers twice, teaching academic skills in college that students should have acquired in high school" (p. 2). Their research revealed that community colleges spent an average of \$6,709 per FTE on remedial education in 1996-1997. However, they also discovered that no institutions reported losing money by offering remedial coursework. In fact, Onondaga Community College in New York reported revenues of \$1.3 million on every \$1 million spent on remedial education. A different community college reported that tuition for remedial courses generated significantly more revenue than the salary costs incurred; remedial courses generated \$580,000

in net revenue in 1999. Furthermore, remedial education at City University of New York (CUNY) generated \$4,500 net revenue for every FTE in 1999. Therefore, the argument that remedial education costs institutions money falls flat as evidenced by its net-revenue generating potential.

There are other, non-fiscal implications to offering remedial education. Saxon and Boylan (2001) reported that some universities feared that if they accepted remedial students they will *dumb-down* their academic programs. This is also a valid concern for administrators and faculty when contemplating the legitimacy and prestige of their academic programs. However, using calculations from the U.S. Census Bureau, Saxon and Boylan discovered that if 30% of the students who required remedial coursework persisted and earned a baccalaureate degree, they would contribute \$87 billion in federal and state taxes over the lifetime of their work. To be certain, there are costs associated with offering remedial courses. But there is also a follow-up value to remedial education, and that will be discussed next.

**Value of remedial coursework.** In order to understand why some students need remedial coursework; why they were not prepared for college-level courses, a return to Grimes and David's (1999) study is helpful. The purpose of their research was to examine the differences between groups of underprepared and college-ready students using several measures including demographics, students' self-ratings on their abilities, values, and future activities. They followed Tinto's (1975) retention model which suggested that family background, individual attitudes, and pre-college education interact with students' commitment to goals and their persistence rate.

Grimes and David (1999) explored three areas during their research. First, they asked how do underprepared students differ from college-ready students in demographic, experiential,

and attitudinal characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, academic preparation, college enrollment decision, self-ratings, activities, goals and values? Second, they asked how do three-year outcome measures, such as graduation rates, persistence, hours completed, course completion rate, and GPA, differ for these disparate groups of students? Finally, they investigated the program implications of these and related research results.

Grimes and David (1999) sampled 500 of the 8,000 entering community-college students at an open-admission community college in northwest Florida for their study. They chose to use the Student Information Form (SIF) survey developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) for their research instead of developing their own. The CIRP survey included over 200 pieces of demographic, experiential, and attitudinal data. Additionally, they used the Computerized Placement Test (CPT), the national test developed by the College Entrance Examination Board, to test the academic preparedness of the 500 sampled students. This test analyzed students' college readiness in the areas of mathematics, reading, and writing. Students deemed underprepared earned scores at a level set by statewide standards of practice in Florida, but the cut-off points were not divulged in the article. The results of the CPT identified 238 of the 500 students as being underprepared for college-level coursework and the other 251 as college-ready.

Grimes and David's (1999) methodology had the 500 freshmen take the CIRP survey during a one credit-hour orientation course for students specifically seeking any associate's of science or associate's of arts degree at this community college. Inputs and outcomes were tabulated and analyzed separately by variables and categories with separate ANOVAs or MANOVAs. Their results did not reveal significant differences between underprepared and college-ready students in age or several other family demographics. Both groups reported

average family incomes of \$25,000 – \$29,000. However, real differences began to appear in the areas of high school coursework, high school grade point averages (GPA), degree aspirations, and other attitudinal factors. Other attitudinal factors would include concepts from Tinto's (1993) and Bandura's (1977) research on retention and self-efficacy. Significant differences between underprepared and college-ready students also appeared in how many high school math courses they took, whether or not they aspired to eventually matriculate to a baccalaureate program, their personal goals and values, and their reasons for attending a community college.

Grimes and David's (1999) research also revealed that college-ready students had significantly higher reading and writing scores on the CPT exam than underprepared students. Other results of the CPT concluded that underprepared students had a lower self-rating of their academic ability (self-efficacy) – they felt they were not ready for college-level coursework. The underprepared students also reported significantly lower emotional well-being. Furthermore, the college-ready students indicated that they spent significantly more time attending religious services, discussing politics, socializing with other groups, and less time watching television than their underprepared counterparts. A difference in personal goals was also brought to light as college-ready students were more likely to be interested in being successful business owners and showed significant interest in pursuing artistic endeavors. Finally, persistence was also greater among the college-ready students. After three years, 15% of the college-ready students had graduated, while only 5% of the underprepared had completed their degree requirements.

It is clear from Grimes and David's (1999) work that underprepared students differ greatly from college-ready students in how they feel about themselves and their ability to

matriculate fully to earn a college degree. Furthermore, their work suggests that community colleges are not yet fully capable of transforming all underprepared students to be as successful as those who enroll already prepared for college-level coursework. Grimes and David's work also makes it clear that community colleges must also consider their underprepared students' motivations, self-efficacy, attributions, and locus of control. Just helping them with remedial reading, writing, and mathematics courses is not enough to bring them up to the status of their college-ready student counterparts.

Another key quantitative study on remedial education at post-secondary institutions was performed by Hoyt and Sorensen (2001). Their study set out to discover who was at fault when recent high school graduates, who successfully completed intermediate algebra and geometry in high school, received test scores on college entrance exams that showed half of them needed remedial math. One-third of the students in the study who had successfully completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade English needed remedial English in college. It appears on the surface that there is a lack of academic rigor in high school. This study on entering freshman at Utah Valley State College also suggested that high school teachers may be awarding passing grades to many students who have not adequately learned the material. Their study implies that better linkages need to be established between secondary and post-secondary institutions so that each party understands what the other party expects from their students.

To answer the question of how far students get in higher education when they required remedial coursework as entering freshmen, Patthey-Chavez et al.'s (2005) work is instructive. Their quantitative study tracked the progress of 238,032 students who took remedial courses at 9 community colleges over a period of 11 years. They discovered that 39% of the students failed their first remedial course, which lead to high dropout rates. Yet, they also found that

among those who persisted, the more remedial courses a student took, the more likely they were to outperform their peers in college-level courses. Furthermore, they found that students who took remedial courses in the community college and continued on to earn an associate's degree and then transferred to a four-year university started their freshmen year at a university academically ahead of other freshmen who had just finished high school. The implications of the Patthey-Chavez et al. study are noteworthy as it suggests that some remedial students not only eventually compete with those who were prepared for college-level coursework upon entry, but in many instances may even outperform them.

A major concern among educators is the high dropout rate among college students who failed or were marginally successful in remedial courses. Hoyt (1999) in his previously discussed study of students passing through Utah Valley State College found that 72% of the students who required remedial coursework eventually dropped out of the college. His findings concluded that the level of remedial education required by underprepared students was closely linked to their persistence. The implications of Hoyt's findings for college administrators and faculty are that a remedial student's first-term GPA is a strong indicator of their potential to persist through graduation.

**Summary of remedial education.** According to the report, *The Other Dropouts: College Completion Rates at Ivy Tech* (2006), 75% of the students who enrolled at the institution needed up to nine credit-hours of remedial coursework. This alarmingly high number is significant, because research shows that the more remedial courses a student needs, the more likely they will be to dropout.

Placing blame for remediation on the public schools, broken families, and poverty seems to be the standard operating practice in higher education. However, instead of blaming

others, Erisman and Del Rios's (2008) research suggests that proactive strides can help to eradicate the problem. For example, in Indiana, as of fall 2007, all high school graduates were required to meet the CORE 40 (college-prep diploma) requirements before graduating (Erisman & Del Rios, 2008). This should reduce the need for remedial coursework for traditional-age college students, although it will not benefit older students who were passed through under the old system.

According to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2004), students who needed remedial education were less likely to graduate. Furthermore, reading seems to be the largest stumbling block for remedial students. Identifying students requiring remedial coursework through standardized testing is the normal procedure on most college campuses. Hence, offering a prescribed series of remedial courses should help to correct deficiencies.

Even though tools to prepare students for college-level coursework exist, that does not mean they will be motivated to persist nor have the resources to start college. The ability or inability for students to pay for their college education is also a significant factor in their persistence to graduation. Therefore, student financial aid is discussed in the next section of this literature review.

### **Student Financial Aid**

Sjogren (2000) reported that only five to eight cents of every dollar given to a higher education institution from donors is actually used for financial aid to support students. According to Sjogren, that meant that 92 to 95 cents of every dollar goes to administering programs, constructing buildings, funding programs or positions, and purchasing equipment.



Most large donations create endowments that “draw-down the interest earned at a 5 to 15% rate and the interest is spent, not the principal” (Sjogren, 2000, p. 43).

In a report from the U.S. Department of Education (2002), researchers reported that nearly 50% of all college-qualified students in America could not attend due to financial constraints. The report showed that 400,000 high school graduates in America could not afford to attend a four-year university even with federal and state aid. Because of that, 170,000 of them would never attend any college.

This loss in human capital is expected to be a significant burden on taxpayers over the next 50 years. The average shortfall for low-income students receiving federal and state aid was \$3,800 in 2002, which was enough to keep half of them at home (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The implications of this report are especially worrisome for state treasurers as these once capable people may eventually require financial assistance to support their families because without a college degree, workers in the United States face dismal futures in low-wage jobs.

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon declared, “No qualified student who wants to go to college should be barred by lack of money. That has long been an American goal; I propose that we achieve it now” (as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 1). That was 32 years before this report. Today, with the downturn in the economy and literature which suggests the problem is getting worse, it appears that President Nixon’s goal is not being realized. Therefore, student financial aid as a means of funding one’s higher education will be discussed next.

**Funding college with financial aid.** Students pay for their college education with funds from their savings, their current income, their future income (borrowing through loans),

grants, and scholarships (King, 1999). The U.S. government provides financial aid to college students through the state where their college is located which includes federal monies funneled through to the states. Institutions also provide financial aid to their students in the forms of tuition discounts, grants, and scholarships.

The growth of financial aid as the most significant source of funding for college students began when congress authorized the first federal student financial aid program in 1965 (King, 1999). Within 30 years, the U.S. Department of Education was funneling \$43 billion per year into student financial aid. In light of this reality, King (1999) wrote, “Students and their families now have more postsecondary purchasing power, as a result of financial aid, than the states” (p. 9). Therefore, when a financial-aid eligible student selects a college, that college will reap the financial rewards of federal financial aid policy.

Of particular interest to this study is the finding that more federal financial aid is distributed to undergraduates than graduate students (King, 1999). This is due partially to the fact that there are more undergraduates than graduates attending college; and the gap is further widened by graduate students who are more often gainfully employed, and are receiving financial support from their employers (King, 1999). Therefore, by limiting this study to a community college without graduate programs, the largest population of college students will be studied—undergraduates.

Some form of financial aid is received by the majority of community college students nationwide. The *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: 2004* (2006) report stated that, “In 2003-2004, the majority, 63%, of undergraduates received some form of aid, averaging about \$7,400. About one-half received grants and 35% received loans” (p. 109). The executive summary of the *Community College Survey of Student Engagement* (Ivy Tech Community

College, 2005) reported that 48% of the students attending the institution were either “likely” or “very likely” to withdraw due to a lack of finances. With the majority of community college students relying on financial aid and almost half of them on the verge of withdrawing due to insufficient financial resources, financial aid is a critical factor in student persistence.

Student financial aid is distributed on the basis of either need or merit. King (1999) wrote, “For as long as financial aid has been available to college students, aid programs have had to establish eligibility criteria for their awards or assistance” (p. 120). The criterion for determining eligibility is generally divided into the two categories of need-based and merit-based aid. Students and their parents, if the students are still dependents, are asked a series of financial questions to determine their financial need, which could lead to need-based aid. The prospective student’s abilities, talents, athleticism, and high school grades are audited to determine if they merit a financial award (merit-based aid). Finally the typical formula, college costs minus expected family contribution equals financial aid is calculated and the resulting amount is awarded. However, if that amount is insufficient to meet all of the student’s needs, then they have to choose between securing a loan or choosing a lower-priced college or not attending any college. This becomes a difficult decision for the student and/or their parents.

Economists generally propose that we make decisions at the margins. Heyne (1997) wrote, “The economic way of thinking is a marginal way of thinking. It assumes that demanders and suppliers pay attention to the marginal (additional) benefits and costs of the actions they are considering” (p. 120). Thus, community college students are sensitive to minor fluctuations in financial resources, including scholarships. Therefore, an increase in aid as small as 10% in the form of a \$1,000 scholarship towards a degree that costs about \$10,000; could be a significant factor in their persistence.

King (1999) summarized how families pay for college by stating:

Student financial aid traditionally has had two purposes. The first is to improve access for students from low-income families, and the second is to ensure that students have the opportunity to attend a more expensive institution if it meets their needs. Access remains an elusive goal. Given the same general ability, low-income students are less likely to attend college than those with more wealth. Student financial aid may not be the only answer to this persistent problem. (p. 25)

**Summary of financial aid.** Financial aid for university and college students comes in many forms. Some aid is based upon need, while others are based upon merit. Because economic decisions are often made at the margins, a small amount of financial aid can have a great impact on students' ability to enroll, persist, and graduate from a particular institution. Therefore, postsecondary administrators would be wise to carefully consider their financial aid programs in light of how it affects their students' persistence.

Scholarships are one form of financial aid that typically does not have to be repaid, and like grants, they can be the tipping point for students at the margin. Therefore, scholarships are discussed next.

### **Scholarships**

Scholarships are one piece of the total student financial aid package. As an important source of funding for college students, there are generally two basic types: Need- and merit-based. This section of the literature review will discuss the research on nationally-recognized scholarships, and will begin with the single largest scholarship in American history, the Gates Millennium Scholarship (GMS).

The GMS, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has committed \$1 billion over a 20-year period to fund academic scholarships for minorities (Sjogren, 2000). However, the problem with the GMS model is that recipients must have a cumulative GPA of 3.3 or higher, which keeps this largest scholarship in U.S. history out of the hands of at-risk students who need remedial education. Furthermore, students must be enrolled or accepted to accredited four-year institutions or specific areas of graduate studies. The GMS is not available for community college students.

The GMS is managed by the United Negro College Fund with the assistance of the Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers who ensure that only minority students are benefited (Sjogren, 2000). Four thousand students received a GMS scholarship in 2000-2001, but this represents a very small percentage of the 400,000 needy college students in America as reported by U.S. Department of Education (2002). Sjogren (2000) stated that “A college degree has become a prerequisite for social and economic mobility, particularly for members of minority groups, and enrollment of minority groups is expected to increase” (p. 43). Therefore, the GMS program is helping, but it is not necessarily helping underprepared students.

Hammer (2003) reported that students who receive GMS funds come from high schools that offered four or more advanced placement courses, had an equitable distribution of African American students, and low participation rates in special education classes – definitely not the typical low-income, inner-city high school. Hammer also discovered that GMS recipients are not students from poor, marginalized, inner-city, impoverished, public secondary schools; they are from well-funded, middle- to upper-class high schools. Furthermore, Hammer reported that GMS recipients took the most challenging high school courses, demonstrated leadership

potential, showed high motivation and initiative, and had a higher potential for success than their peers.

A sound argument for supporting all students is found in Campbell's (1999) study. This study showed how colleges and universities can do a better job of recruiting minority students into engineering programs, which could be applied to any program. Campbell reported that in 1971, 98% of American engineers were White males.

A 1973 symposium led to the creation of the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (NACME). In the last 25 years, NACME has collected and distributed more than \$100 million for scholarships. The NACME has supported 10% of all minority engineering students from 1980 – 2000. But even with all of this support, 25 years after the symposium, minorities comprise only 6% of the employed engineers in the U.S.

Dee and Jackson's (1999) study of the HOPE scholarship program in the state of Georgia provides an example of a program with mixed results. This study looked at the state of Georgia's lottery-funded HOPE Scholarship program for in-state students who maintain a B average at state universities. "The HOPE Scholarship offers both free tuition and modest book allowances" (p. 379). The HOPE program is working well for students in all programs except, science, engineering, and computing. Students in these three programs show a significantly higher incidence of attrition due to poor math and science skills when their grades fell below a B. The HOPE Scholarship is also not funding students who require remedial education courses.

Ehrenberg, Zhang, and Levin (2006) studied the effects of enrolling lower-income students who are known to have lower test scores. They compared students in the National Merit Scholarship program (NMS) with those receiving Pell Grants. Their quantitative research discovered that at institutions with NMS recipients, there were four fewer Pell Grant recipients

for every ten NMS recipients. This means that as the number of merit-based scholarships rises, the number of Pell Grant recipients falls and that may lead to fewer underprepared students ever attending a higher education institution.

Research has suggested that merit-based scholarship programs may discriminate against African-Americans (Redd, 2003). Redd's (2003) research discovered that since academic merit-based scholarships are awarded on the results of tests, on which African Americans have historically scored lower than their White counterparts despite other academic evidence of strength; this is a discriminatory practice. Also, merit scholarships generally target traditional-age students who enroll full-time in colleges and universities immediately following high school. This could be considered discriminatory as a greater proportion of racial and ethnic minorities opt to work or join the armed forces between their high school and college years over their White counterparts. One answer to Redd's dilemma would be to make more scholarships available to older, underprepared students.

**Financial aid affects on persistence.** St. John (2000) suggested that early persistence models based upon institutional fit, specifically Tinto's 1993 work, did not adequately account for the effect of aid. However, more contemporary research by Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (as cited in St. John, 2000) showed that students' perception about their ability to pay influences their persistence decisions. It is now widely accepted in the Academy that finances are no longer a polite excuse for dropping out of college but rather are a valid predictor of student retention.

Student debt has as a negative effect on persistence at both private and public colleges and universities. St. John (2000) cited, "One recent study of persistence in a private college found that debt had a negative influence on within-year persistence in 1993-1994..." (p. 69).

St. John also wrote, “Further, a recent study of persistence by students enrolled at one large public university found that the negative effects of debt increased as students progressed through college” (p. 70).

It seems that the greater debt a student incurs, the less likely they are to persist. This case was true for two of the author’s nephews and the perception of it greatly affected a third. The author’s oldest nephew attended Ball State University for two academic years (2000 – 2002) but decided to join the U.S. Marine Corp in summer 2002 as a means of paying off the \$10,000 in student loans he had accumulated. He hoped to return in 2009 with his student loans paid off and the G.I. Bill to fund his remaining two years. At the time of this study, he had five more months of active duty to serve and was planning to locate in the Chicago area with his new wife and to continue his studies at the University of Chicago, debt free.

St. John’s (2000) research also revealed that student aid is an affordability factor that affects all types of institutions: Public four-year, private four-year, public two-year, and private two-year. The implications of his research are that the institutions themselves must use more of their own money to attract and retain students because government-provided aid is inadequate.

St. John (2000) also discovered that student aid also makes a difference in college choice. The author’s second oldest nephew, after seeing the debt his older brother had accumulated, joined the U.S. Army immediately following high school instead of attending a college or university. However, within four years he had earned an associate’s and a bachelor’s degree. At the time of this study, he had been accepted into a master’s degree program at Indiana University while still fulfilling his active duty service. In the meantime, he had amassed a significant amount of savings, had no student loans, and the U.S. Army paid all of the costs for his master’s degree.



St. John (2000) said, “The early institutional-fit persistence models did not give adequate treatment to the effects of student aid in persistence” (p. 63). This had been witnessed by the author’s third oldest nephew who attended Ball State University for one year (2007-2008) immediately following high school. But, instead of returning to Ball State, he enrolled in Indiana University’s commuter campus in Richmond (IU-East) to avoid racking up more student loans for housing. He had amassed almost \$6,000 in student loans while attending Ball State for one year. Yet, one year later he had paid off that loan, saved over \$2,000, and was a happy sophomore at IU-East.

If Ball State University adjusted its financial model in a way that would slash housing costs for returning sophomores, they should improve their second-year retention and six-year graduation rates. A recent report revealed that Ball State’s six-year graduation rate at 58% is third among Indiana’s public, four-year institutions while Indiana University-Bloomington was highest at 72% and Purdue University-West Lafayette was second at 69% (Indiana Commission on Higher Education, 2008). These are three known examples where students’ perceptions about the debt burden of attending or persisting at a particular college at a particular time greatly affected their decisions.

**Summary of scholarship research.** The availability of scholarship funds has a significant impact on students’ persistence rates. Many scholarships are for the exclusive use of over-achieving students, while a few are available to academically average students. As one piece of postsecondary institutions’ total financial aid package, scholarships play a key role in both student selectivity and student persistence. Students often choose one college or university over another based upon the amount of scholarship funds awarded to them.

Therefore, scholarships should be carefully administered by the academy to ensure their effectiveness at student retention.

### **Summary**

In this chapter a variety of literature was reviewed to set a context for this qualitative study. The literature ranged from four-year universities, from which there exists a larger quantity of research, compared to the limited number of studies conducted on two-year colleges. Of particular focus first was Tinto's (1993) model of student retention as the foundation for student persistence studies in higher education settings. Second, studies conducted at four-year universities on student persistence were presented followed by a review of a limited number of similar studies conducted at two-year colleges. Third, the literature on self-concept and self-efficacy as related to students was reviewed. Fourth, a survey of the literature on remedial education in higher education was conducted, especially as it relates to students' academic success. Finally, salient literature on student financial aid, including scholarships as a source of funding was reviewed, especially as it relates to student persistence.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which scholarships for remedial students' affects their persistence to graduation. More specifically, the study explored how named scholarships affect remedial students at a community college where such practices have become quite extensive. In this chapter, the mixed-method approach to data collection is discussed.

### **Research Design**

Much of the retention literature has employed the quantitative paradigm, usually using logistic regression in which a set of independent variables are regressed against the dichotomous measure of retention (student retained or not). Although such an approach is legitimate and reasonable, it lacks in its ability to understand the root causes or antecedents that lead students to choose to either persist or to stopout or dropout. St John and Wilkerson (2006), authors who studied student retention and related topics, wrote, "In higher education, researchers cannot rely exclusively on empirical research methods. Ideally, both quantitative and qualitative methods should be used in research on educational outcomes" (p. 98). Furthermore, as Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) suggested, "...Research approach follows research problem; the appropriate research approach is the one that best fits with your research problem" (p. 7).

Given these arguments, in this study, a mixed-method approach was utilized. On the quantitative side, simple descriptive statistics were utilized in order to get a basic perspective on the number and percentage of remedial students with named scholarships that persisted to graduation in three years. This quantitative finding then helped offer insights to a qualitative element seeking to answer how, if at all, named scholarships may impact the persistence of remedial students who receive them.

The value of the qualitative paradigm is well documented. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that this orientation to research can be traced to , “... the work of the ‘Chicago School’ in the 1920s and 1930s establishing the importance of qualitative inquiry for the study of human group life” (p. 1). Qualitative research is scientific research, because it draws out the lived experiences of the participants through their comments, something that quantitative analysis lacks. Although quantitative analysis can and should be used to uncover causal relationships between processes, it cannot give meaning to participants’ lived social experiences (Charmaz, 2005).

**Phenomenology.** Generally credited to Husserl (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), phenomenology was developed as a research tool to gain an understanding of participants’ lived experiences. It was further developed by Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Schutz, and other philosophers; and it has evolved into a complex system that seeks to fully understand how people consciously respond to different phenomena. Heidegger (2002) wrote,

Phenomenology retained experiences of consciousness as its thematic realm, but now in the systematically planned and secured investigation of the structure of acts of experience together with the investigation of the objects experiences in those acts with regard to their objectivity. (p. 77)

Therefore, by chronicling participants' perceptions, emotions, and judgments, phenomenology writes an objective case that is subject only to the participants' memories of their experiences. It involves studying a small number of participants to uncover patterns and meaningful relationships (Moustakas, 1994).

However, there are critics to this approach. Husserl (1962) foresaw much criticism when he wrote, "...there prevails a hostility to ideas which must eventually prove dangerous to the empirical sciences themselves..." (p. 73). Critics of phenomenology generally cite its reliance on participants' memory as a source of error. It is generally accepted that the human memory can be inaccurate, but probably no more inaccurate than third-person observations. Therefore, the practice of phenomenological research causes the researcher to ask leading questions that probe the participants' memories for connections to other experiences and memories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002).

It is beyond the scope of this study to measure the minutiae of the three main schools of phenomenological research: transcendental, realist, and existential (Moustakas, 1994). However, because this study relied upon first-person reporting (participant interviews), it leans toward Sartre and Barnes' (2001) existential side of phenomenology. The value of the participants' phenomenological experiences cannot be understated. Only the participants have lived their lives and experienced their feelings. Therefore, understanding how they reacted to their environment is paramount to developing a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences, in this case, graduates of a community college who were formally remedial students with named scholarships.

Understanding the lived experiences of study participants is the objective of phenomenological research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Creswell (2003) suggested that

phenomenology is attempting to identify, qualify, and quantify if possible, the essence of the participants' experiences through extensive interviews. Creswell also stated that by uncovering commonalities during the interviews, "The researcher can develop patterns and relationships of meaning" (p. 15). Therefore, it is the best methodology for this study.

### **Population and Sample**

By way of description of this community college (hereinafter referred to as Midwest Community College), it was established in 1963 as this state's first vocational school. By 1968, it had 13 regional campuses serving 3,233 students. By the end of 2008, the institution had become the largest college in the state with 23 regional campuses serving 120,000 students (Ivy Tech Community College, 2009b). The college's mission statement reflects their purpose:

Midwest Community College prepares this [state's] residents to learn, live, and work in a diverse and globally competitive environment by delivering professional, technical, transfer, and lifelong education. Through its affordable, open-access education and training programs, the College enhances the development of [this state's] citizens and communities and strengthens its economy. (§ 1)

The college's strategies explain how it plans to fulfill its mission, namely:

- (a) to increase the educational attainment of [this state's] residents; (b) to provide workforce education and economic development for [this state's] communities; (c) to provide support systems and development opportunities that assure student success; (d) to serve as [this state's] provider of choice for personal and professional enrichment; (e) to support community development through civic engagement and community service; (f) to complete the transformation of Midwest to a nationally recognized comprehensive

community college system; and (g) to build institutional capacity to support our mission. (Ivy Tech Community College, 2009a, ¶ 1)

Midwest Community College currently offers more than 150 programs and concentrations statewide, all of which result in an associate's degree or certificate. Students can also take advantage of the cost-savings of first attending this community college, then second, transferring their degree or credits to other four-year colleges and universities around the state to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Remedial education has been a concern for this community college since its early years. The college began offering remedial courses as part of what it termed, "Pre-technical curriculum" shortly after its charter. The college began listing remedial courses in its 1968 catalog; and it listed reading, English, and mathematics among other pre-technical preparatory courses (Brown, 2008). The college intended for these courses to "fill-the-gap" between high school and college-level coursework. By 2008, the college had an entire catalog of remedial courses it now called, "Academic skills advancement (ASA)" (Brown, 2008, p. 6). With 38 different ASA courses currently being offered at Midwest Community College, they now represent a significant portion of their total course offerings (Brown, 2008).

At this institution, all new students (not transfer students) take the ACT CompassQ placement test. Students' writing, reading, and mathematical skills are first assessed by the test and then they are enrolled in appropriate courses. Table 1 demonstrates how students' abilities are matched to appropriate courses.

Table 1

*CompassQ Test Scores and Course Matching*

Writing		Reading		Mathematics	
ATB	< - 32	ATB	< = 62	ATB	< = 25 (pre-algebra)
ENGL 024 Intro to College Writing	3 - 51	ENGL 031 Reading Strategies for College I	4 - 65	MATH 044 Mathematics	27 - 53 (pre-algebra)
ENGL 024 Intro to College Writing II	52 - 69	ENGL 032 Reading Strategies for College II	66 - 79	MATH 050 Basic Algebra	> 53 (pre-algebra) or 0 - 44 (algebra)
ENGL 1xx College-level English ready	> 69	ENGL 1xx college-level English ready	> 79	MATH 1xx college-level algebra ready	45 – 65 (algebra)

*Note.* ATB, ability to benefit: Students who test below this level are not permitted to enroll in remedial or any courses at Midwest Community College. These students are referred to community educational services centers to develop basic reading and writing skills.

The remedial program is designed to strategically match students' abilities to appropriate courses, rather than just enrolling them directly into college-level courses and hoping for the best. In this study, students who took at least one remedial course and who started in 2004 will be counted as a "remedial student."

In order to differentiate remedial students with a named scholarship from the cohort under study, further honing of the remedial student participant sample was necessary. It had become common practice on Midwest Community College campuses to solicit scholarship monies from local donors. These local, named scholarships are used as need- or merit-based aid for students who: (a) Apply for them; (b) meet the donor's and the college's criteria; and (c) are selected by local committees to receive the money. By way of example, there are currently



12 local, named scholarships available for students enrolled at this author's regional campus, one of the smallest regions in the system.

After students are selected to receive a local, named scholarship, the monies are made available to them through the financial aid office on their home campus. They are then notified with a postcard that they have received a scholarship as part of a total financial aid package. A sub-set of scholarship winners are contacted directly by the college's Foundation Office for follow-up documentation as directed by the donor. For example, some donors require that photographs be taken of student recipients for posterity.

Also, some donors require that students who receive their named scholarship meet with them to discuss their futures. Furthermore, recipients are often invited to a donor/recipient gathering in the following spring term. It is the population of remedial students that are formally notified by the Foundation Office that the researcher attempted to contact first, since it is clear that they are aware that they received a named scholarship and that it was uniquely named for an individual or an organization.

### **Procedures and Data Analysis**

This study proceeded in steps. Step one focused on collecting and analyzing the descriptive data collected from the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at Midwest Community College. This data was used to identify participants based upon their fit with the study's criteria. The descriptive statistical data was represented using aggregate numbers of students who graduated within the requisite three-year time frame. Totals and percentages are presented.

Participants for interviewing were selected in step two using the following procedures:

1. Prospective participants must have met all of the study's criteria, and received at least \$500 in scholarship monies. Receiving \$500 is a significant amount when the annual tuition averages approximately \$2,000.
2. Further selection was based upon whether or not their home campus provided at least five scholarships to remedial students while they were a student. This rubric enhances the researcher's ability to surface themes relevant to campus practices.
3. A letter was sent to prospective participants inviting them to take part in the study. They were asked to respond to the researcher via e-mail or telephone about their willingness and availability to participate.
4. In response to this letter, students were asked whether or not they had a personal relationship with the donor or if they attended a formal ceremony. Every effort was made to have a critical mass of these types of students since personal relationships may enhance the chances for improved student self-efficacy (i.e., the donor made the effort to meet and support the recipient).

In step three, the 15 remedial student graduates who had received named scholarships at the institution, persisted to graduate within three years, and responded positively to the initial letters, were interviewed. These interviews were conducted at the location of the study participant's choice. A semi-structured interview protocol was used (Appendix B), one in which the researcher could opt to deviate from the questions as circumstances might warrant. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Field notes were also taken during the interviews in order to capture greater nuance of understanding than the recordings alone could do. Furthermore, supplemental thoughts/observation notes were taken immediately after the

interview was concluded in order to help make sense of what was heard and observed during the interview while it was fresh on the researcher's mind.

In step four, member checks were conducted in which interviewees had the opportunity to review the notes and their interpretations for accuracy of meaning and intent. Efforts at triangulation were also employed (i.e., corroborating evidence that may be obtained from news stories about the students, archival material that may be obtainable on a participant such as a personal journal that an interviewee may have kept during their time in school).

Step five involved the data analysis of the interviews. This included a process for identifying major and minor themes as well as divergent ideas or issues that were raised in particular interviews. The data were chunked into categories for the purposes of the write-up and discussion and mapping of patterns.

### **Study Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of this study was garnered through its validity and reliability. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) stated, "If research is valid, it clearly reflects the world being described" (p. 76). By using quantitative analysis first, then interviewing the participants second, the results provided a strong reflection of their lived experiences.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues surrounding this study and the researcher were addressed by adhering to established standards for quantitative and qualitative research for the behavioral and social sciences. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) claimed, "In any research study, ethical issues relating to protection of the participants are of vital concern" (p. 85). The participants were protected from harm by adhering to usual and customary research guidelines, including the storage and retrieval of research-related records.

First, all interviewees were notified of the purpose of the study and they would be volunteering their participation. No participants was coerced, cajoled, compensated, or manipulated in any way; either before, during, or after their interviews. Their informed consent remained a priority throughout this study and they were also required to sign voluntary consent forms (Appendix A).

Second, the participant's rights and interests were protected at all times. Safeguards to protect their confidentiality were employed throughout the research process by the following: (a) Participants were assigned code numbers that only the author had access to that connected them to their true identities; and (b) the audio files of the participants' interviews contained only their pseudonyms to further ensure their privacy.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the overall design of the research was first discussed. This included a discussion on phenomenology because that is the overarching method by which this study was conducted. Following the discussion on research design was a section on the population and how the sample was identified. Next, procedures for conducting the study were laid out along with a discussion on how the resulting data would be analyzed. Trustworthiness and ethical issues were discussed next as they relate to this study. Finally, limitations of this study and an overview of the researcher's perspective were addressed.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which scholarships for remedial students' affected their persistence to graduation. More specifically, this study explored how named scholarships affected remedial students at Midwest Community College, where such practices had become quite extensive.

Utilizing a mixed-method approach to the topic studied at Midwest Community College, descriptive data on the number and percentage of associate-degree seeking students in a specific cohort across the statewide, 23-campus system who did and did not graduate within three years was examined first. Second, the number and percentage of remedial students from that cohort who did and did not graduate within three years was also explored. Third, the number and percentage of remedial students who received named scholarships and graduated within three years was investigated. Finally, semi-structured interviews with 15 of the remedial students who received named scholarships and persisted to graduate within three years (i.e. truly perseverant students) were conducted in order to understand if and/or how these scholarships may have contributed to their graduation achievement.

The population ( $N$ ) and the sample ( $n$ ) for this study were identified by Midwest Community College's Office of Institutional Research (OIR) after they approved this study. They have a database of over one million students who have attended all of their 23, statewide

campuses over the past 20 years, and it was from this list that the dataset was collected. The OIR provided the sample (*n*) participants' names, their identification numbers, the campus where they had been a student, and the term when they graduated. The researcher, who had access to the database, culled it for the name and the amount of the scholarship each participant received, the students' mailing address, e-mail address, telephone number, and the title of the degree they received.

The first two research questions dealt with quantitative data, while the third question could only be answered through qualitative analysis – personal interviews. The first question asked, “What are the number and percentage of students who began their associate’s degree programs in a particular year and persisted to graduate within three years?” This question was impressed upon the data provided by Midwest and it was discovered that in the 2004 cohort, 4,678 students began pursuing an associate’s degree. It is important to note that the associate’s degree is the highest degree offered at Midwest Community College, thereby stressing the limits of this study within its confines to its furthestmost boundary. Twenty two percent or 1,009 of the 2004 cohort earned their associate’s degree within three years (150% timeframe) (this number includes both remedial and program-ready, non-remedial students).

The second question was comprised of two parts that can be divided into separate answers. The question is: “What are the number and percentage of remedial students that received local, named scholarships that persisted to graduate within three years?” The total number of remedial students in the 2004 cohort was 3,325 or 71%. Only 337 or 10% of the remedial students earned their associate’s degree within three years. Out of those 337 timely graduates, 70 of them also received local, named scholarships totaling at least \$500 or more. Subsequently, only 1.5% of the students in the 2004 cohort that took remedial courses and

received scholarships persisted to earn an associate's degree within three years. Ninety percent of the remedial students in this cohort failed to graduate within the 150% timeframe of the degree.

Turning to the qualitative side of this study, it is from this group of 70 students that 15 were interviewed to answer the third research question: "How do local, named scholarships affect college students' self-efficacy, a key factor with benefits for students?" The 15 study participants selected from within this group were interviewed and ranged in age from 21 to 56 years old at the time of their graduation. Demographically, they were a mix of 5 males, 10 females, 5 were single while 10 were married, one was Hispanic, and all others were White.

A first set of prospective participants from the 70 available for choosing was contacted by invitation letters (see Appendix C) mailed to the addresses that Midwest Community College had in its database. They were chosen because they had graduated from several of the larger regions of Midwest Community College where the practice of rewarding scholarships to remediated students was more prevalent. There was no response; however, except for some letters being returned from the postal service for incorrect addresses with no forwarding information for the recipients. Before the second batch of invitation letters were sent, participant addresses were checked using the *Yellow Pages* from the telephone book. By the third mailing (Appendix D), the researcher changed his approach and began inviting participants to interview sessions conducted via telephone instead of face-to-face. Finally, the researcher followed up those mailings with telephone calls a few days afterward the letter was mailed. This approach to finding amenable study participants resulted in success.

**Participants.** As noted, the final sample of 15 participants were contacted via letters and telephone calls. The researcher sent approximately 100 letters (some were follow-up

letters) and placed as many telephone calls requesting interviews during the period of October 30, 2009 through June 22, 2010. Some responses, as previously mentioned, were from the U.S. Postal Service by way of returned letters stating that the recipients had moved and had not left forwarding addresses. Some responses were oddly signed consent forms returned without indication that they wanted to be interviewed.

Eventually, by August 8, 2010, the researcher had interviewed 15 participants and received their signed consent forms. However, none of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. All interviews were conducted over the telephone because participants lived and worked in several Midwestern states, and none would agree to meet with the researcher in person. Maybe, if the researcher had offered to reimburse their travel expenses or provided a small honorarium they would have agreed to meet in person, but this study had been approved without promise of remuneration to the participants.

As mentioned, the participant sample was quite diverse, although not by race or ethnicity. The participants are described in the following sections via three age group brackets at the time of graduation from Midwest Community College. The first bracket is defined as traditional-aged college students (21-23 years old) a group of six graduates; older-traditional (24-28 years old), a group of three participants; and older students (40-56), with that group consisting of six participants.

**Traditional-aged participants. Laura.** Laura was one of the youngest participants, and she graduated with an associate's degree in business administration from the West Central campus in May 2007 when she was 21 years old. She was a single, White female who lived in an apartment in a medium-sized city within 10 miles of her parents, but she did not state whether or not she lived alone. Even though she worked full time while she was a student at



Midwest, she still lived with her parents, but had since moved out on her own. She lived with her parents because she had received a scholarship from the steel mill where her father had a longtime career. When the researcher interviewed her, she had been continuing her studies as a full-time student seeking an Organizational Leadership degree from a nearby state university. Laura expected to graduate with a bachelor's degree the following year.

**Teresa.** Teresa, the youngest participant was a White female who graduated with an associate's degree in Nursing from the South Central campus in May 2008 when she was 21 years old. She resided with her husband in a rural county approximately 20 miles from where she attended Midwest Community College. Teresa married her high-school sweetheart when she was only 18-years old, during the summer between high school graduation and the following fall when she began taking classes at the college.

Teresa's first college choice was a faith-based institution in the state where she had received a full scholarship, but her new husband convinced her that they should remain in the rural county where they lived so she opted instead to attend Midwest. She was able to transfer the scholarship from the faith-based institution to Midwest through the college's foundation. She also said that as a newlywed trying to spend more time with her husband, she would ride with him on his utility company job and do her homework during his stops.

**David.** David, another of the youngest participants was a single, White male who graduated with an associate's degree in Business Administration from the West Central campus in August 2006 when he was 21 years old. Even though David graduated earlier than anyone else in this study, he still met the selection criteria because he began his studies in the fall 2004 term. He received the Thorntown Businessman's Scholarship, something he applied for while in high school with his father's nudging. Sometimes he resided in the capital city of the state

where he attended Midwest, because he was now a student at a one of that state's research universities where he is studying business. His permanent mailing address was still his parents' home where he lives during the summers and weekends.

**Jake.** Jake was another of the traditional-aged participants. He was a single, White male who was 21 years old when he graduated with an associate's degree in Business Administration from the West Central campus in December 2006. He received scholarships through the county foundation in his hometown where Midwest has a campus in a neighboring city 20 miles away. Jake would not say whether or not he lived alone now in an apartment within the capital city of the Midwest's state, probably because his permanent address is still his parents' home. However, he is now a graduate student at the state university in the capital city where he recently earned a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice. He is trying to fulfill a lifelong dream of having a significant career in law enforcement and is considering applying to that university's law school following the master's degree.

**Jimmy.** Jimmy was another one of the White, male, traditional-aged participants. He graduated with an associate's degree in General Studies while also earning a certificate as a Medical Lab Technician (MLT) from the Western campus in May 2007 when he was 21 years old. He received two scholarships: One from the Seeker Memorial Foundation and the other from St. Vincent's Hospital where he had kept in touch with the local administrator, because he went to work for them after he earned his degree. Jimmy said he has lived the "American dream," because he met a girl during his first year at Midwest, they fell in love, were soon married, and had their first child while he was still seeking his degree. Furthermore, they bought a home in the same neighborhood as the administrator for the hospital where he works, and his wife will soon graduate from a nearby state university with a degree in Nursing.

**Nick.** Nick, another of the traditional-aged White males, was 21 years old when he graduated with an associate's degree in Nursing from the South Central campus in May 2008. He received a scholarship from Bartholomew County as well as grants from Midwest. Nick now resides with his wife in Seymour, Indiana where he has a "pretty exciting" career as an Emergency Room (ER) nurse. But he was quiet during the interview and shared very little personal information. It was probably because of his quietness/shyness that he struggled in the Obstetrics and Gynecology classes. However, he was the only participant who openly stated that they were raised in a very poor family. He said that because his family was poor, all they could give him was a strong work ethic and that he had lived by that ethic ever since.

**Older-Traditional Participants. Cindy.** Cindy was one of the older, traditional-aged participants. She was a married, White female who was 26 years old when she graduated with an associate's degree in Business Administration from the West Central campus in May 2008. Cindy lives with her husband and children in the same city where she attended Midwest. She had a difficult pregnancy with her first child about halfway through the program and had to drop several courses, but she persevered. After her daughter's birth, she took only online classes so she could spend time with her child and study from home. Cindy stated that it was easier to study and to take online tests when the baby was asleep, which made her study schedule very erratic. One of the reasons she was successful was that she received support from her mother. Whenever she was working against a deadline for submitting online assignments, her mother would tend to the baby.

**Shirley.** Shirley was another one of the older, traditional-aged participants. She was a single, White female who graduated with an associate's degree in Radiology Technology from the East Central campus in May 2007 when she was 23 years old. Shirley currently resides and

works in a large city in the northeast corner of Midwest's state, but was living in smaller community 25 miles away when she was a student. She received a full scholarship through her local office of the [State] National Guard where she was serving part-time.

Shirley initially began her studies taking prerequisites classes at Midwest then, she transferred to the large state university in the same city. But she was not comfortable with the state university's large class sizes, because she never had one-on-one time with the faculty. Therefore, Shirley transferred back to one of Midwest's smaller campuses closer to her home after one semester at the state university.

**Trina.** Trina was the other older-traditional-aged participant. She was a single, White female who graduated with an associate's degree in Office Administration from the Southern campus in May 2008 when she was 28 years old. Trina lives in a rural area 24 miles from the Midwest campus where she was a student. But she did not state whether or not she lived alone. The researcher sensed that for the time being, her career was more important to her than a family. Even though she was not a traditional-aged student, she graduated Summa Cum Laude with a 4.0 GPA. On the surface, that may seem impressive for a remedial student. However, it is worth noting that grades earned in remedial courses at Midwest do not affect students' GPA, which is calculated only from program-level courses.

Trina stated during the interview, that she had recently returned to Midwest and was pursuing a second degree – this one in Human Services. She felt that both degrees will be beneficial to her career, because she works in the office of a health care company. She also stated that she came to the realization that she can do “pretty much anything” she wants to do. This may explain why she spoke more about her professional life than her personal life.

**Older-aged participants. Betsy.** Betsy was the oldest participant and is a married, White female who had graduated from high school in 1969. She graduated with an associate's degree in Human Services from the Northeastern campus in July 2007 when she was 56 years old. This was the first college degree that either she or her husband had earned, but the researcher sensed that this was just their beginning into higher education.

She resided with her family in a small community 15 miles south of the campus where she attended Midwest Community College. Their grandson, who was abused by his biological father, lived with them too. Betsy's compassion for abused children and women led her to continue her education by pursuing an online bachelor's degree in Psychology and Counseling from a faith-based university located in an Eastern state. Her long-term plan is to become a licensed counselor, and she has begun working in the field by volunteering her time and talents through a local faith-based agency.

**Jane.** Jane was another of the older-aged participants. She was a married, White female who was 40 years old when she graduated with an associate's degree in Business Administration from the South Eastern campus in May 2006. Jane lived with her husband and four children on their farm 14 miles from the Midwest campus where she was a student. Jane was a very busy woman with little time for herself. While she was a student at Midwest, she not only drove a school bus twice a day, her children were very active in 4-H, and she worked on their farm. She received several scholarships and grants. Also, she took up to 15-credit hours of courses per semester and graduated in less than two years.

Even though Jane graduated from Midwest with a Business degree, her long-time dream had been to be a school teacher. By the time of her interview, she had just graduated from a faith-based, women's college with a bachelor's degree in Secondary Education. Even though

Jane began college late in life, she excelled, graduated early, and is already employed as a high school teacher. She switched from delivering children to the school to teaching them geography and psychology in the classroom.

**Joanie.** Joanie was one of the most interesting participants because she stated, “I felt like going to [Midwest] saved my life.” She is another one of the older-aged participants, and another married, White female who had graduated from high school 30 years prior to attending Midwest. Joanie graduated from the Office Administration program at the East Central campus in May 2007 when she was 52 years old and now resides in a small town 35 miles from the campus. While she was a student, she joined that city’s chapter of the International Association of Administrative Professionals and received a scholarship from them.

Joanie was married, but she did not share much information about her family, because she spent a lot of time discussing her disability. She had been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and still suffered from acute panic and anxiety attacks. Sudden onset of symptoms would make it difficult for her to walk and talk, which would have been a tremendous challenge to being a successful college student if not for the compassionate faculty that taught her classes (according to her).

Joanie found a full-time position immediately following graduation with the state’s Department of Family Social Services. This new position paid twice as much as she had been earning while working in sales positions most of her adult life. However, she was terminated within 18 months for e-mailing confidential information about a client to a judge. But she did not let that dampen her spirit, and she still thought highly of the education she received at Midwest.

**Stacy.** Stacy was another older-aged, married, White female participant. She graduated with an associate's degree in Office Administration from the South Eastern campus in May 2007 when she was 49 years old. She lived with her husband five miles from the campus, but their children were all grown and all living on their own. Stacy did not state how often her grandchildren stayed with them, but the researcher sensed it was most weekends.

At the time of her interview, Stacy had just graduated from the state university in the same city as Midwest with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. She stated that by starting at Midwest first, where she received several regional scholarships, and transferring credit to the state university, she saved a lot of money on the bachelor's degree. But she also stated that faculty and staff at the state university were slower to respond to her requests for assistance and there were no tutors available like she had at Midwest. She thought if she had begun pursuing a college degree at the state university first, she would have quickly dropped out and never earned any degrees.

**Tammy.** Tammy was the last married, White female, older-aged participant interviewed for this study. She was 51 years old when she graduated with an associate's degree in Early Childhood Education program from the Northeastern campus in May 2007. Tammy resided with her husband and one of their daughters in a small town 51 miles from the campus she attended.

Tammy received scholarships through her county's foundation, which she could have applied to any public institution, but she chose Midwest for its low cost and high quality. Also, two weeks before the interview, she graduated from the state university in the same city as Midwest's campus with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. She said she was finally fulfilling her lifelong dream of becoming a school teacher.

**José.** José was the only non-White, Hispanic male in this study, and another one of the older-aged participants. He graduated with an associate's degree in Nursing from the Eastern campus of Midwest in May 2007 when he was 40 years old. José resided with his wife, who was also nurse, in a small city 34 miles away in a neighboring state. José's wife worked at the hospital that funded his college scholarship at Midwest. But ironically, he worked as a nurse at a competing hospital and his wife attended a different college.

**Participant summary.** Table 2 lists demographic information about all of the participants in tabular format. This list includes their race, gender, age, and marital status. In summary, all except one of the participants was White, 67% were female, 67% were married, and they ranged in age from 21-56 at the time of graduation.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

Traditional-aged Participants				
Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Age at Graduation	Marital Status
Laura	White	Female	21	Single
Teresa	White	Female	21	Married
David	White	Male	21	Single
Jake	White	Male	21	Single
Jimmy	White	Male	21	Married
Nick	White	Male	21	Married



Table 2 (continued)

Older Traditional-aged Participants				
Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Age at Graduation	Marital Status
Cindy	White	Female	26	Single
Shirley	White	Female	23	Married
Trina	White	Female	28	Single
Older-aged Participants				
Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Age at Graduation	Marital Status
Betsy	White	Female	56	Married
Jane	White	Female	40	Married
Joanie	White	Female	52	Married
Stacy	White	Female	49	Married
Tammy	White	Female	51	Married
José	Hispanic	Male	40	Married

## Themes

After reviewing the transcripts and field notes, six themes appeared intertwined in this complex study of the forces, which led these students to overcome many obstacles in order to earn an associate's degree within the 150% timeframe (three years). The first theme revolved around the students' level of commitment to their college studies during their remedial courses. The second theme exposed the factors which motivated them to persist through those remedial courses. The third theme revealed how receiving the scholarship affected their level of commitment. The fourth theme uncovered how their belief in their ability to be successful

affected their persistence to graduation. The fifth theme delved into how receiving a scholarship helped them overcome obstacles to earning their degree. The sixth theme discovered how their experiences at Midwest affected them in regards to furthering their education.

**Level of commitment during remedial courses.** The level of the some participants' commitment to college was taken down a notch when they were notified after assessment testing they would be required to take remedial courses. Two of the participants were surprised they would have to take remedial courses. Two others said they were disappointed in themselves and even depressed about it. Four were ambivalent or neutral about the idea of taking remedial courses. However, seven of the participants were not surprised and were expected the need for remedial coursework. This range of participant's comments was reflected in these quotes, organized by age group of the student.

"I felt fine," stated Laura about taking remedial courses, even though she was a traditional-aged student and might have experienced cognitive dissonance as it regarded her assumption she would be prepared for college having completed high school. She said, "I thought I only had to take the math one... I knew that I wasn't good at math, so that was fine with me." Even though she was a recent high school graduate, and one of the six traditional-aged participants, she admitted math was not a strong subject for her in high school.

Teresa stated that it was her recollection she took the remedial math class as a filler course, not that she was required to take it. She was a traditional-aged student who thought she knew it all when she graduated from high school. Her memory had faded, because the researcher discovered she was required through assessment testing to take remedial math.

A sense of surprise was how David responded to the outcome of the assessment test. As a traditional-aged student, he had been very successful in all of the advanced placement mathematics courses in high school. He said, “I was under where I should be. I was a high school graduate testing into Math 050 (remedial math).” He also said, “I wasn’t upset, I was just surprised.” David’s situation is a good illustration of the disconnectedness between what high schools’ may consider acceptable learning and the knowledge that colleges often demand of their incoming freshmen.

Jake said he did not really remember how many remedial courses he took or how he felt. He was the only traditional-aged student who did not remember the remedial courses. But he did say he was motivated to persist because he wanted the degree and he would do whatever it took to earn it.

As a traditional-aged college student and recent high school graduate, Jimmy was disappointed because he would have to take remedial reading and math courses before he could enroll in college-level classes. He seemed disappointed in both himself and his high school. He said he felt, “a little disappointed at first. I was thinking I could bypass the remedial courses and go right into basically what I was there for.” He also said, “I just had a goal and I knew that to obtain that goal and that was the first step in front of me. So I just took it step by step.”

Nick, the last traditional-aged participant and recent high school graduate, said, “I felt I should have done better. I had had the highest grades in math in high school, so I didn’t know I needed it. But, oh well, I guess.” His experience was similar to others who excelled in high school algebra only to be told they did not have enough knowledge of math to take college-level courses. He also said he wanted to “Move on in my career and I knew that I had to do

well in college to get a better job.” He went on to say, “I was in a poor family growing up so I have to live by my work ethic.”

One of the older-traditional aged participants, Cindy was not surprised when told she needed to take one remedial math course. She said, “Well it had been four or five years since I had graduated from high school. So I knew that my math skills needed to be brushed up a little bit.” She went on to say, “I didn’t feel bad about it, I just knew that I needed to, you know, get to where I needed to be.”

Shirley said, “It didn’t really bother me, because I’m not the greatest in math.” She went on to say she was motivated to persist because, “I wanted to graduate from college, to make a life for myself.” She was motivated to “better my life.” As one of the three older-traditional aged participants who had been out of high school for five years, she was not surprised she needed one remedial math course.

“Honestly, I wasn’t surprised,” proclaimed Trina. She continued with, “I mean, it has been a while since I was in school. So I kinda thought that, you know, I would have to take some of those remedial courses.” She was on the cusp of moving from the older-traditional aged to the older-aged participants. She had been out of high school for nine years before enrolling at Midwest, so she was not surprised when she had to take remedial English and math courses. She persisted because, as she said, she was motivated by “the desire to better my life.”

Betsy was one of the six older-aged participants in this study. She put it succinctly when she said, “Seeing as how I had been out of school for 35 years, I rather figured – when I had bombed on the first test questions. So I knew it was coming.” She also said,

I was ready for anything. I knew nothing about college...and I just went in for the initial sign up and I was told I would have to take the assessment test. So I just took each step as it came. I did not get rattled about anything.”

Betsy had a great attitude in regards to the remedial courses, and her experiences could serve as an attitudinal bellwether for future students.

Another of the older-aged participants, Jane was not surprised she had to take some remedial courses. She said, “I was out of school for way too long before I decided to go to college.” It had been more than 20 years since she had left high school and she was surprised she did not need even more remedial courses. She said, “I had always wanted to go to college, and never did take the opportunity to go.”

“It did not offend me in any way, because I had been out of school for so long,” was Joanie’s reply. She went on to say, “I knew I was gonna have to take remedial. I had been out of school over 30 years, so I knew I was gonna have to brush up on some courses.” As another of the older-aged participants, Joanie was 52 years old when she graduated, but since she had always been an avid reader, she needed only remedial math courses – she was ready for program-level English courses.

Stacy was another of the six older-aged participants and was 49 years old when she graduated from Midwest. She said the following when asked about taking remedial courses, “I was not surprised about math, because it has been so long since I had had any math.” But she went on to say, “I was surprised by the reading, because I read about one or two books a month.” Her situation was a little different from Joanie’s. Even though she said she read a lot of books, she still needed a remedial reading course to prepare herself for college-level coursework.

Even though Tammy was 51 years old when she graduated from Midwest, and one of the six older-aged participants in this study, she was initially depressed about having to take remedial courses. She said, “At first, I was kind of depressed about it. Cause I felt like I should have been able to get up where I needed to be right at first.” But she went on to say, “After I had attended the course, I felt very good about it because it was very helpful.” Tammy is a good example of the value of remedial courses and how they can be very helpful to get students’ skills up to the level needed for college-level coursework.

José said, “I pretty much figured that was gonna be the case, because, shoot, it had been 25 years since I had been to school.” He went on to say, “You don’t use it, you lose it.” José was the last of the six older-aged participants, and since he had been working in a factory for the past 25 years, he expected to need some remedial courses. His “use it or lose it” comment appears to be partially correct from the results of this study.

**Motivation to persist through remedial courses.** Even though almost half of the participants expected to take remedial coursework, all of them had different motivational factors which propelled them through those first courses. Two cited external variables, one was neutral, and 12 cited internal or personal reasons for persisting through the remedial courses.

The external variables included interactions with faculty and faculty support. The internal factors included personal goals, finances, determination/perseverance, excitement, and a desire for a better life. The participants stated the following in regards to what motivated them to persist during the remedial courses, an orientation to their future came prior to receiving their scholarship.

With exhilaration, Laura exclaimed, “I was excited to be in college! I knew that I started right out of high school, so I was excited to be at college.” She also said, “It was something new.”

Teresa did not remember the truth about why she took remedial courses. Therefore, she was categorized as neutral on what motivated her to persist through them. David said, “Just the fact that I wanted to make sure that I had mastered those skills so I could move on [to my program courses].” He also said he wanted to “Graduate and go on to bigger and better things.” “Wanted a degree,” was Jake’s reply. His comments were very short and to the point, and were counted as either goal or internally driven. Jimmy said, “I just had a goal, and I knew that to obtain that goal, that was the first step in front of me.” He went on to say, “I took it step by step.” Seeking to improve his financial standing in life, Nick said, “I knew that I had to do well in college to get a better job.” Cindy said, “You know a lot of it was my instructor...and he bent over backwards to make sure every single person in the class understood everything that was going on. He was so encouraging...” Citing the desire for a better life, Shirley said, “I wanted to graduate college – make a life for myself.” Trina said, “Just the desire to better my life.”

“I am a born-achiever,” stated Betsy. She also said, “I am a first-born, I am persistent, and I will accomplish that which I set out to do.” She went on to say, “...there was no question in my mind, I was going to do what I had to do to get what I wanted.” Having always wanted to attend college, Jane said, “I had always wanted to go to college, and never did take the opportunity to go. So, personal motivation was there, it was something I wanted to do, and fear of failure.” Joanie said, “I think a lot of it was goal-driven. I wanted to succeed at getting my

education, period. And I was very focused on succeeding, and so I reached out for extra tutoring.” Citing financial reasons, Stacy said,

Basically my financial situation at home [led me to persist]. I had left a job, because I wasn’t able to do it anymore for physical reasons, and my husband had just retired because he was ill. So it was something I had to do, I had to find a new career.

Clearly driven by desire, Tammy said, “Most of all it was my desire, wanting to learn and to do better. The biggest part was my own desire...I had instructors that were very good at helping me reach my goals. ...they [the instructors] really encouraged me.” José said, “Well, the fact that I had to get through this class in order to start the nursing courses and continue building a career for myself and my family [were my reasons].”

The internal factors which motivated the participants to persist and to be successful during their remedial courses were based upon their goals. They wanted to achieve something, they had a desire for a better life, the promise offered through higher education. They had created for themselves a career plan and were willing to take it step by step, even if that included the surprise of needing remedial coursework.

**Level of commitment after receiving scholarships.** Students who persist to earn a college degree have by definition demonstrated a higher level of commitment to their studies than those who do not. After receiving the scholarships, 10 of the participants reported an increase in the level of commitment to earning a college degree. Two of the participants stated receiving the scholarship had no effect on their level of commitment, because they would have found another way – they were already 100% committed. Three of the participants stated receiving the scholarship had some effect on their level of commitment, but they did not feel it was very significant. The 10 participants who stated their level of commitment to earning a



college degree was positively affected by receiving a scholarship made the following statements.

Laura said, “I was pretty excited, because I didn’t have the money to pay for it myself. I was pretty stoked about that.” She went on to say, “It made me work harder, because I knew I had the money for a certain amount of time, so I couldn’t be messing around.” “I knew I wouldn’t have to worry as much about how I was gonna pay for it, I could just focus on achieving academic success,” stated Teresa. She also said, “I didn’t have to worry about picking up extra hours at work...it really did help me to focus on what I needed to do.” Jake said, “Yes, it made me work a little harder.” Note that Jake was the least talkative of all the participants. He was a man of few words.

“Here I am summing things up in one word – relieved,” proclaimed Jimmy. He said, “I wasn’t sure how I was going to afford college, and receiving those scholarships was a blessing.” He also said, “Receiving the scholarship kind of takes that burden off of working so much, so I think it affects academically greatly. You have more time to focus on studies rather than working to put forth going to college.” Cindy said, “It came at a good time. Amazing! I think we received notification of it in January, when money was a little tight anyways.” She went on to say, “It gave me a huge boost to continue going. It definitely gave me an end-of-semester drive.” “I knew that I was doing something right,” stated Trina. She also said, “It just made me want to keep going.” Jane said, “I felt proud of myself.” She went on to say, “I wanted to prove that I deserved it. So I wanted to do extra well from there on out.” She also said, “I never thought that I was smart, and because I worked hard, I earned that scholarship.” “It made a significant difference in being able to finish college,” exclaimed Joanie. She used the funds, which came precisely when needed the most, to purchase a new home computer. She

said, “Because of that scholarship, I was able to purchase a computer so I could finish my college and do my homework here from home.” She also said, “I was pretty focused and I was determined to be a success.” Stacy exclaimed, “I was excited! Because you know, I wasn’t eligible for Pell Grants or anything else.” She also said, “It made me feel like I was doing a good job and I was on the right track.” “It was definitely motivational,” proclaimed Tammy. She also said, “I was excited, because it helped me pay some of the expenses. It encouraged me and I applied for more scholarships and grants.”

All 10 of the participants who responded positively to how the scholarship increased their level of commitment stated how they felt more motivated and more committed to performing well academically. They felt because someone had believed in them, they did not want to let them down, and they had to work harder to be even more successful. Conversely, the two participants who claimed it had no effect either expected the scholarship or were not aware they had received one. Furthermore, the three participants who claimed its effect was neutral stated they would have found another way to pay for college, because they were determined to earn a degree no matter what.

**Belief in their ability to be successful.** The level of confidence a student has about their ability to be academically successful has some effect on their ability to persist (Bandura, 1977). How significantly a student’s confidence level contributes to their ability to persist, however, varies from student to student. Yet it can be measured by several factors including how hard they are willing to work and how much or how little they believe in their abilities.

Each participant in this study had something to say in regards to how receiving a scholarship affected their belief in themselves. Ten of the participants said because the

scholarship was a positive influence on their self-efficacy; three said it was a moderate influence, and two said it had no influence. Responses in this arena are presented below:

Laura stated that receiving a scholarship motivated her to work harder than before. She realized that there was a time limit to how long she would receive the scholarship and she did not want it to run out prior to completion. Hence, the scholarship reinforced her confidence and focus. She said, “I couldn’t be messing around, cause I didn’t have the money to pay for it myself, so I didn’t want to waste somebody else’s money.” The scholarship was a confidence boost for Teresa. She said, “I was more confident. I felt like people were giving me a chance to do what I knew I could do.” David stated he had already made up his mind that he wanted a degree in business, and the scholarship pushed him in that direction even more. He said, “It reinforced what I thought I wanted to do.” He also said because he was from a small town, there was a very small pool of applicants for this scholarship, and little competition for it. But, he also said, “I don’t know, I’m being too hard on myself.” This latter comment affirms how a student’s level of confidence can be affected by receiving a scholarship.

A man sparse with words, Jake said this about receiving a scholarship, “It made me work a little harder, I guess.” He claimed receiving the scholarship had little effect on his ability to persist and be successful. However, later in the interview, he talked about how the scholarship made it possible for him to earn a degree, which has led to more successes in his life.

Jimmy proclaimed receiving the scholarship, “Gave me a boost of ego!” It definitely improved the level of confidence he had in himself and his ability to persist. He went on to state that receiving the scholarship gave him more time to focus on his studies, because he did not have to work as much and he could put more effort into college. He continues to work for

the hospital that gave him the scholarship, because they believed in him and that in turn, boosted his confidence.

Nick's level of confidence was increased when he felt like someone cared about his success as a college student. He said, "I suppose it was like they were willing to help people come there, you know, by giving some of their own money through gifts. It seems like they cared a little more."

"It gave me a huge boost to continue going," Cindy said with strong animation in her voice and expression. Prior to that, she said she was doubtful about her ability to be successful in college given her older age than most of the students attending Midwest. However, after receiving the scholarship, she said, "I was definitely seeing myself walking down the hallways now, and it was kind of nice to know that I could keep up with all the people that were fresh out of high school."

Shirley expected the scholarship, so it had little effect on her level of confidence. As a member of the National Guard, who had recently completed boot camp, her level of confidence in her abilities was already high. She said receiving the scholarship made her work a little harder though, because she had to be successful.

"It just made me realize that I could do it," stated Trina. She said after she became aware she had received a scholarship and felt great about it. She said, "It just made me want to keep going. I knew that I was doing something right." This positive reinforcement appeared to be a definite boost to her confidence in college. Betsy was not aware she had received a scholarship until this researcher contacted her and indicated that to be the case. Jane said receiving the scholarship caused her to believe she was smarter than she previously thought. This increase in her level of self confidence helped her to persist. She said, "I never thought I

was smart. And because I worked hard, I earned that scholarship, and it just made me feel better about myself.”

“It gave me more confidence... and I felt a little bit more self-assured,” announced Joanie. She said receiving a scholarship helped improve her focus and gave her more confidence. Joanie went on to say:

I felt like going to [Midwest] saved my life. I was 100% determined to finish and yet every small item or every small step that I took encouraged me to take that extra step towards finishing it. So that scholarship was just like I took a step forward. That scholarship pushed me out forward to where I could continue to finish.

Stacy stated that she received the scholarship because of her good grades, and that it gave her even more confidence. She said:

It made me feel like I was doing a good job and I was on the right track. It gave me a little more confidence that I could do more than I thought I could. It gave me more confidence.

Receiving a scholarship was definitely motivational for Tammy who discussed how it improved how she felt about herself. She said, “I would say it was definitely motivational, in addition to financial aid. It made me feel good about myself. It helped motivate me to get my degree.” José said he felt less stress over how to pay for college after receiving the scholarship, but it had only moderate effect on his confidence level. He said, “Because I had already been going to [Midwest] for a while [one term] before I got the scholarship, it did not have a direct effect on his confidence level. However, he also stated, “I was very pleased and thankful that they were kind of taking an interest in my future career.”

Only 2 of 15 the participants said receiving the scholarship had no effect on their level of self confidence. Three of the 15 participants claimed it had a moderate effect. In sum, a considerable majority felt it made a difference in their confidence to persist to completion.

**Overcoming obstacles to goal attainment facilitated by the scholarships.** Most participants were able to follow through with their original degree plans. Ten of the participants did not change their goals over time – they finished the degree they started. Five of the participants, however, did change their degree programs either during or shortly after their first semester – following receipt of the scholarship. Even though internal and external forces were pulling them in multiple directions, all of these participants persevered to earn an associate's degree.

Laura, like many archetypical students at a community college, assumed it would take two years to earn an associate's degree. But because she did not receive any financial support from her parents, she had to work full time while pursuing a degree and wound up taking three years to graduate. However, she still needed the scholarship and indicated she would not have been successful without it. She said:

Yea, absolutely, I mean it – the scholarship was the whole reason I was able to go in the first place. I wouldn't have been able to go at all because my parents wouldn't have been able to pay for it, and I definitely didn't have money fresh out of high school. So the scholarship was the whole reason I went, and then it was something I wanted to do, and I didn't want to waste my time or the money. So it definitely was a huge motivator. And I had to maintain a certain GPA to receive the scholarship, and had to keep my grades up.

When asked whether or not there were any times when she felt like giving up. She said:

I don't think there was ever a point that I wanted to like honestly give up. I'm sure I said that sometimes, but I never did it. I kept the big picture in mind. I wanted more for my future.

And she attributes her future to the generosity of the donors who funded her scholarship.

Teresa planned to attend college straight through the two-year associate's degree program in Nursing after completing one year of prerequisites. But she was not accepted into the two-year Registered Nursing (RN) program, so she opted instead to finish the one-year Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program first, then the RN second. She said:

Really looking back though, I'm really happy that I didn't get into the RN program first off. Getting into the LPN program I was able to complete all of the coursework, I went ahead and passed my boards, and then I started working as an LPN, and by that point I needed to make more money in order to support for the things the scholarships didn't pay. Some of them [scholarships] had stipulations that they would only pay tuition and not books. So that was the only thing I ran across.

For Teresa, the change in her original plans made it possible for her to earn the associate's degree in Nursing within her original three-year plan, albeit via a different route. If she had been accepted into the Registered Nursing program the first time, then she would not have had enough money to persist. However, since she completed the Licensed Practical Nursing degree first, then began working in the field, the scholarship went a longer way towards helping her achieve her goal.

David continued through with his original plan of earning an associate's degree in Business Administration. He said, "I was one of those rare students who hasn't changed their majors since high school graduation, and going to college. I am kinda rare." Actually, David

was in the majority not the minority; twice as many students in this study stuck with their original degree plans than those who did not. David also commented on the challenges he faced and how he overcame them. He said he struggled through the accounting classes and although he took advantage of tutoring, he still struggles with that subject while attending a four-year university in a larger city. But, because of the scholarships he received while attending Midwest, he did not have to work a full time job. He said:

I was working 20-25 hours, not a whole lot. And I still lived with my parents. I had a little income, but not a whole lot. I was a full-time student and a part-time employee.

But I envision most people that go to that school like [Midwest] do work full time, have a family to raise, so maybe school is not their number one priority. It may be their number one priority, but other things compete with it.

David also said the scholarship had a positive impact on his motivation and ability to persist. He said, "I already had a reason, but it gave me more reason, to not let those fine folks down who gave me that scholarship and gave me that opportunity." When someone believed in him enough to help pay for his higher education, it motivated him to put forth his best effort.

Jake not only stuck with his original plan of earning an associate's degree in Criminal Justice, he completed a degree in Business Administration too. Jake said, "I had scholarship money leftover, so I went for the Business Administration degree second." Jake was in the minority, insofar as it is rare for a student to have unused scholarship dollars after earning one degree. He also stated how he was able to just "push through" any challenges he confronted while pursuing both degrees.

Jimmy had his mind and degree aspirations changed for him. He spent 100 hours job shadowing in the Radiology Department at a local hospital, but then decided to pursue a degree



as a medical lab technician instead after job shadowing for only three hours in that department. The scholarship he received was broad enough to apply to any health-related degree. However, Jimmy faced a very unique challenge after he began attending Midwest. In his words:

I met a girl at [Midwest], we fell in love, and we got married. Kind of the American dream, I guess you would say. But, marriage did leave me with a little financial challenge. During my stay there at [Midwest] in the program, we also had our first child. After joining the program at [Midwest], I moved out, got married, and had a kid. So, it was challenging financially. Had I not had that scholarship it would have been really, really hard to finish the program. I knew going in I had a goal to finish the program no matter what. But at that time I was single and still living with mom and dad. And you know 'life comes at you' and changed your way of life. It definitely was a struggling time, and not only financially, but academically. It takes your time away a little bit. But we made it through.

Without the scholarship it would have been more difficult, if not impossible for Jimmy to earn the degree and begin a career. It is informative to note that he has a career at the hospital which funded his scholarship. He went on to say:

I think knowing that that organization put out their hat for me and say, hey we like you, you apply for this scholarship, and we'll award you this scholarship. Knowing that they got their lending hand out there and said hey, we believe in you, kind of helped me, pushed me to go through and finish just kind of like nothing could get in my way.

Nick changed his mind and his degree plans while taking remedial courses. His original intention was to earn an associate's degree in Industrial Maintenance, but it changed to Nursing after he gave it serious thought. He observed that the medical field was expanding while the

manufacturing industry was declining, and his intuition paid off given where the economy went in 2008. The Midwestern states saw a cataclysmic decline in manufacturing coupled with an equally dramatic rise in the health-care industry. But being a male in a Nursing program who had originally planned to work in manufacturing had its challenges. Nick lamented:

Well, I mean there were a few classes. I mean I had a couple of classes like OB [obstetrics]. My OB rotation, the particular teacher there was kind of tough, and of course I wasn't enthusiastic about concentration in Gynecology anyways. Uh... you know, so that was a little bit. My actual clinical curriculum was great, but the in-class was pretty harsh.

Most reasonable persons would agree that when you take a young man previously destined to work with metals and machine tools and place him in obstetrics and gynecology it could be a little unsettling. But like everyone else in this study, Nick persevered. Thanks to the scholarship he received, he graduated with the rest of his class. Nick had this to say about the scholarship, "It was a little bit of a load off from a financial aspect... I didn't have as much financial burden."

Cindy graduated from the program she originally began, but it took longer than she initially expected. She said, "I had a very rough pregnancy, and had to drop a couple of classes right there in the middle." Someone once said that life is what happens when one makes plans to the contrary. But like everyone else in this study, Cindy overcame all the obstacles in her way. She found a way to cope with the difficult pregnancy and said:

Since the birth of my daughter, the online courses were the only way that I was able to keep going. During that 12-month period while I was pregnant and shortly after she was born, I was able to work around her schedule with online classes. After she was

asleep, I was studying or online taking a test. I did have a lot of support from my mom.

There were a couple of times when I had a midnight deadline, and I had to go to her house to get some help so I could accomplish that.

Cindy stated how she knew all along that she wanted a career in retail sales and the business degree she received from Midwest helped her move up the management ladder. When asked whether or not the scholarship had an impact on her ability to persist and graduate, she said:

Yes, definitely. It was towards my last year, it was the fire I needed to get things back on track and start doing the fall [crunch?] hours. Yes, kind of a way that I pushed myself to the end.

Cindy, like all of the other participants in this study overcame many obstacles to earn her degree and attributed the scholarship as a key element in her success.

Shirley envisioned taking three years to earn a two-year degree and to become a radiologist. As one of the older-traditional aged students, she stated she wasn't very good in math and expected to need a year of remedial and prerequisite courses. She said, "I knew I wanted to work in Health Care, and I didn't want to be a nurse, and did some job-shadowing around, and figured out that's what I wanted." Shirley also faced many challenges to persisting in her degree. But she buckled down and said to herself:

Keep pushing through and never give up. When you know what your goals are, and you understand what it will take to accomplish them, you push through all of the hurdles.

Receiving a scholarship that paid 100% of the tuition and fees did not hurt either.

When asked about how receiving the scholarship impacted her ability to persist, she exclaimed:

Yes, it definitely helped me. I would not have been able to go to school without it – probably. It definitely helped me there, and you know it was very helpful; it helped my motivation – Yes!

Shirley's positivism after receiving the scholarship carried her over every hurdle she encountered. When asked if there were times when she felt like giving up, she said, "No, I always knew I would complete it. I was very determined."

Trina completed the degree she began her first time through Midwest then returned for a second associate's degree. Her first degree in Office Administration helped her secure a career in the office of a health care firm, and her second degree in Human Services seems to be reinforcing her value to the firm. Like other community college students, she overcame many obstacles to earn her degree. She made the following comments when asked about the challenges she faced:

It was a lot of time constraints. I worked full time, I have two young children, and so managing all of that, and still being able to go to class – that was definitely a challenge and honestly, that was my biggest challenge, trying to fit it all in.

Trying to fit it all in seems to be a recurring theme among the community college students in this study. It can be difficult to balance family and school life, and that is one of the reasons so many community college students do not persist to earn a degree. But receiving a scholarship can help as Trina said, "At the point where I received the first one [scholarship] I was eager to get another one, and another one." Once she saw how helpful the kindness of strangers was to persisting in college, she sought to earn more of them. Trina seemed to embody the perseverant nature of successful college students. When asked if there were every times when she felt like giving up, she stated:

Honestly no. I mean, once I set out to do something, I mean, I am very persistent, and I strive to do my best at whatever it is, and get it done. So, I might have had feelings, you know, stressful days or something, but there was never a time when I thought, Oh I can't do this, and that kind of thing.

Then, Trina returned to earn yet another degree from Midwest which is also related to her career. It seems she endeavors to be the best she can be in all aspects of her life.

Betsy was the oldest participant in this study and was 56 years old when she graduated from college. She followed her original plans of earning a degree in Human Services and attributes her academic success to her department chair and the faculty, but not to the scholarship she received. She was not even aware she had received a scholarship until the researcher first contacted her. She had always assumed she was receiving grants that would pay for everything, and she was partially correct in her assumption. She felt called into this new career field after working in sales all of her life. Some incidents within her extended family opened her eyes to some of the problems facing our society today. She had the following to say when asked about her original goals and plans for a college degree:

I felt very led by God if you will. That I was going to be involved with sexually abused women, and have had a great deal of experience mentoring, discipling, and working with these people as well a 15-year old grandson who was abused by his biological father – coming to live with us by my final semester. And so, when I went in to school, I said I don't want any games played with me. I want to end up as a counselor – get me started. And that was the bottom line I had emphasizing to whoever was working with me. I don't care what I have to take or what it gets there, but I will be a counselor, you need to get me in the right direction.

Since Betsy did not know she had received a scholarship, she attributed her ability to persist to her family. She said, “My parents were the wind beneath my wings, and I had the support of the major people in my life.” But Betsy also felt perturbed by the younger students in her classes who were constantly whining about their grades when they did not want to have to study. As an older student, she knew the value of working for something and she also had a lot of respect for the single mothers who were struggling to keep it all together. She said:

I do have a very legitimate respect, especially for single moms, and those who work full time and try to juggle a job and college, because I know how hard it came for me and what I had to put into it. And I appreciate the fact that I do not have to have 40-hour week job. So I totally understand somebody’s plight when they have to juggle kids and a job.

As the eldest student in her class, Betsy brought a lot of wisdom, and she left hoping some of her work ethic rubbed off on the younger students. She brought a can-do attitude to college and said, “There was never a doubt in my mind. I never even gave it an intention of quitting.” This was good because she was not aware until afterwards she had been awarded a scholarship.

Jane was determined to graduate within two years, and even changed her majors so she could achieve her goal. She began pursuing an associate’s degree in education, but when she realized it would take longer due to even more remedial courses, she changed to the Business Administration degree. She discussed the process that went into her thinking about changing majors and said the following:

Originally, I wanted to get a degree in education, because I always wanted to teach.

And to be honest with you, after I got started in it, I kind of went into it with an attitude that I was going to be able to do this. I think that was why I worked so hard, getting the

grades I did, and I wanted to prove to myself and everybody else that I could do it.

And, it wasn't until the end of the first semester that I realized, hey I can do this, you know, I can get my grades. Then I decided, you know what, I just, I'll get a business degree. The more business stuff that I took, the more I really enjoyed those. And I went ahead and got my associate's degree in that, but I always knew that truly, that my heart was in teaching. That is what I always wanted to do. So after I received that, I transferred the credits that I could to [Faith-Based University], and got my [bachelor's] degree in education. So that was my first goal and it kind of changed through the first couple of years there, and I got my associate's in business, but then I went on and did what I really wanted to do.

Jane eventually followed her dream of becoming a teacher. It just took an unexpected path through the School of Business first at Midwest, then on to a four-year university to earn the teaching degree. But she attributed her success in part to the scholarship she received at Midwest, even though its announcement to her was a little unorthodox. She explained what happened this way:

Actually, they just came to my classroom, and said "we need to see you after class" and I said okay [sense of apprehension]. They informed me I had won that scholarship, there wasn't any big to do or anything like that. I can remember at the time, looking up who this person was, but I can't tell you much about them now. But I know when I hear their name; I know that I got their scholarship.

Jane shared with the researcher how scared she felt for the remainder of the class period, wondering why they wanted to see her after class, believing there was some problem with her financial aid, because she recognized the visitor as an officer from the financial aid department.

She was very relieved when they told her she had won and said, “I never thought I was smart. And because I worked hard, I earned that scholarship, and it just made me feel better about myself.”

Joanie thought it would take two years to earn an associate’s degree, and she later discovered she was partially correct. It took a little longer, because as she said, “I didn’t know how much remedial work I would need.” But her plans did not change very much; she still pursued and earned an associate’s degree in Office Administration. She offered this advice to future students, “I think people need to... whenever they go to school, I think they need to be focused and prepared for a lot of hard work because it takes a lot.” When asked about the challenges she faced both as an older-aged, and as a disabled student, Joanie had the following to say:

That’s a good one! As far as homework went, I would use the tutoring. [In regards to] challenges; you see I could take that question in more than one way, because I have kind of a disability. I have a disability, I was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I had panic attacks, and anxiety attacks. And there would be times that would come up where if I would have an anxiety attack, I get to the point where I can’t walk, and I can’t talk, and I stutter a lot. And I think a lot of the stress that people feel while they’re in school can be eased just through a lot of self-teaching techniques like I “can do this,” and to be focused enough to where are not going to quit. You do not want to quit, and it’s also.... It helped me, because I had someone that was there, that was able to... and it was [faculty member] was my stronghold I’d say because she was able to... If she saw me go into a panic attack, she would kind of take me to the side, and she’d just say ‘It’s okay, [my name] just calm down’ you know and she would talk me through a panic



attack or she would get me someone to come and get me and take me home. It was almost like I had to have a safe haven to go to. Through that relationship with this advisor and professor, she made me feel important as a person to where I could overcome some of these anxiety attacks, I was having. She treated me like an equal even though I had a disability. There was not favoritism, she just treated me like a person, and respected me as a person, and helped me through the rough times I would have. And because of my disability I did have to miss school, and missed classes during certain times, which I think this could have helped. Could have been part of why it took me the extra six months to get through my college – but at the same time it was such a huge obstacle that I had to overcome to able to go to school that I needed the extra support and as some of the students got to know me as a person, and realized that I had a disability that I had to deal with along with going to school and doing homework and taking care of my home here... Even some of the students became a stronghold for me and they would stand beside me and help me through anything, and any attacks I would have as well. And if I can go ahead, and say that even though I had that obstacle when I graduated in 2007, I had overcome my disability to the extent to where I could actually get in front of the entire graduating class and I was the Commencement Speaker for 2007.

Joanie overcame a lot of obstacles, and attributes involvement with a student organization as the mechanism that helped her overcome her fears and disability about public speaking. She said:

So I mean I overcame a lot and it's hard to explain everything in such a short amount of time. But there was a time when I first started school that there was no way I could get

up in front of anyone or talk to anyone. You know in front of a group. So I went to the point, the next step of being the President of the IAAP Maple Chapter that initiated at [Midwest]. I started out as Vice president, then went to President, and then followed through and ended up being the commencement speaker. So I felt completely, totally honored, to have that privilege. That it gave me a lot of self confidence, and it gave me a lot of self-esteem to where I felt like I could go out into the job force and actually tackle the job and be good at what I do. So I mean, just the whole experience of the school, the extra-curricular activities like Student Government and IAAP, it was such an ego boost. Not ego. Yea, kind of an ego boost, and it give my self-confidence raised 100%. It was really, I felt like going to [Midwest] saved my life!”

Furthermore, it was the same organization, IAAP, who awarded Joanie the scholarship, which she said, propelled her to finish her last year of studies. She said, “So that scholarship was just like I took a step forward... That scholarship pushed me out forward to where I could continue to finish.” The compassion of the faculty, staff, and administrators at Midwest played a crucial role in not only Joanie’s ability to persist and graduate, but as she said, they saved her life.

Stacy never changed her degree aspirations either. She began and finished the associate’s degree in the Office Administration program, and transferred to a four-year university to pursue a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. Stacy was searching for a new career and discovered that a degree from Midwest could help her find an office job so she would not have to stand on her feet all day. She had some medical issues, but rather than taking disability from a manufacturing firm, she determined to change careers which accommodated her needs. But like a lot of older-aged college students, she faced many challenges. She commented about one particularly difficult time, “About halfway through my husband became

very ill and almost died. That was challenge getting through that term.” When asked whether or not the scholarship had an impact on her motivation or ability to persist in her studies, Stacy exclaimed, “Oh, yes!” But she never felt like giving up, she always found a way to clear any hurdles in her path. She had the following to say in regards to giving up:

No, I never really felt that way. There were times when it was like, you know, I just am not getting it. But I was persistent enough to get help. And you know, I did have to have tutoring for one of my classes. Once I did that, once I got through that, I was okay. Tutors are helpful! Adapting and overcoming any obstacles are the hallmarks of successful college students.

When Tammy was asked about how long she thought it would take to earn the associate’s degree in Early Childhood Education, she said:

I figured it would take me two about two years – that was my plan. And basically it did. I graduated in 2007, but I completed it in December 2006. It took a little over two years, but I completed it basically on the time plan I had to complete it. It worked out for me – time wise.

Even though Tammy was initially depressed when she was told she would have to take remedial courses, she overcame those feelings and addressed the next set of challenges. She made the following comments about overcoming challenges:

The challenges were... finding enough time to do the work that was required. It took a lot of effort on my part, but it also took a lot of effort on my family’s part. Because I still had a daughter at home who was still going to school. So the biggest challenge was just trying to manage the time and be able to meet the requirements of the courses. And I did, it was a lot of work and it was a good experience, but it was a very big challenge.

Tammy also commented on the financial challenges she faced when trying to go to school and raise a family. She said, “Another thing was the financial part of it. I did end up taking out student loans to help me pay for my education, but I also had to buy my gas to get there and back.” Even though she received a scholarship, she needed even more money to cover all of her college expenses as a full-time student. She was very grateful for the scholarship. Tammy claimed it was her in-born nature to persevere. She had the following to say when asked if she ever felt like dropping out:

No I didn't have that kind of moment when I felt like I couldn't achieve it. I just felt like I would always be able to eventually complete it. I did become concerned about maybe not completing it within the two year time frame that I wanted to. But, I did, and basically I just had a lot of in-born desire to complete this degree and do it. I was just very highly motivated to do it. I ended up doing what I set out to do. I guess I'm not someone who starts something and quits. I always try to finish what I started, that's something that's important to me, and I am able to manage it.

Like a lot of the participants, Tammy found ways to care for her family while simultaneously earning a college degree. She adapted and overcame.

José's situation was very unique. He was not only the sole Hispanic participant, he was an older-aged male student pursuing a Nursing degree. He laughed when asked how long he thought it would take to earn the degree. He said, “Well actually I think I took a little too long. I wanted to do that in two years.” Like most participants the necessity of taking remedial classes tacked on almost one more year to his degree. But he overcame that obstacle and more and stuck with his goal. He said:

Once I set my mind on a nursing degree, that was the primary goal, and I never wavered from that. I had previously been in a completely different career, and I was changing my career field, completely. I started as an Aid; I got my LPN first, and then went on with my RN. The process of what I wanted to reach that RN goal, for the job opportunities that would provide.

José was also challenged by trying to balance family with studies. He said, “Going to school with a family and still maintaining a job as well was taxing.” He said his family was very supportive and gave him time to study, and the scholarship had a big impact on their financial situation and allowed him to work less and study more. He made the following comments on the scholarship:

Yea, it definitely had an impact on my ability to continue. Actually it was excitement, relief. I was excited to finally finish, and to be done with that aspect of my education, start my career, and then look forward to continue my education later on.

José overcame many obstacles to earn his degree including changing careers in mid-life, as well as the remedial and familial obstacles many of these participants faced. But he persevered and is working as an RN instead of being another unemployed former factory worker during the current economic recession.

**Participants’ continuing studies.** It is informative to know whether or not the participants’ experiences at Midwest affected them positively or negatively in regards to continuing their education beyond the associate’s degree. Seven of the 15 participants have pursued another college degree since graduating from Midwest. Some have continued on to earn bachelor’s degrees while others have returned to Midwest for another associate’s degree.

The other eight participants have either not considered, have tried but stopped-out, or would like to continue their education but cannot currently afford it. Their comments follow.

At the time of the interview, Laura was a senior at the land-grant university in her home state. She is studying Organizational Leadership, which she says was an easy transition from the Business Administration degree she earned at Midwest. She said:

I think that transferring from [Midwest] to [Land Grant] worked well for me. I don't think that I would have been half as successful had I just started right off the bat from high school at [Land Grant]. I think [Midwest] was an excellent school to prepare me for [Land Grant].

However, Laura's transfer was not as smooth it sounds. Land Grant required her to re-take several courses she believed should have matriculated. She said, "I worked really hard in those classes, and now I have to basically re-take the same classes at [Land Grant] and I am paying eight times more money." Her experience was not atypical. Even though a transfer agreement had been written between Midwest and Land Grant, some departments within Land Grant are still reluctant to accept some credits.

Teresa had investigated continuing her studies at a four-year university, but because her husband was recently laid off, she was working as many hours as possible to keep their family afloat. Also, she had calculated the opportunity cost of earning a bachelor's degree in Nursing. She discovered it would cost her \$17,000 for the bachelor's degree, but the pay increase afterwards would be only 25 cents per hour. The payback period for the higher degree would be 32 years if she remained a floor nurse and was not soon promoted to a supervisor's position, which was a possibility.

By December 2010, several months after his interview, David graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Human Resources. He had the following to say about the transition from Midwest to a four-year, residential university in a major city:

I would like to say that, I believe that my experience at [Midwest] made transfer to [Four-Year University] better than if I went right after high school. Because when I was in high school, I was a very average student. I got mostly Bs and Cs, and I believe that my time at [Midwest] taught me how to study, and actually focus in on what they were trying to get across and make sure that I mastered the material, and not only for the tests, but beyond them, down the road. In high school, you do it for the test, and you forget it and move on. I believe it [attending Midwest] taught me how to learn, how to study, and how to retain the information more - it definitely sharpened my study skills.

David's experience proves the value of community colleges for some high school graduates who are not yet ready for the leap to a residential, four-year university.

Jake had graduated with a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice the month immediately prior to his interview. However, he was not starting a career in law enforcement just yet, because he was beginning graduate studies the fall term following the interview. He said by first earning the associate's degree from Midwest before transferring to the residential, four-year university in a major city, he was better prepared for advanced studies and campus life. When asked if he had any further comments about his continuing education, he said, "Nothing that I can think of." A man of few words, he was the least spoken of all the participants.

Jimmy had attempted a bachelor's degree program at a four-year university in an adjoining state, but had to stop out. He said:

I actually started a program at [Neighboring State Four-Year University], and once again life came, and we had another child. So at this point; and my wife was laid off from her job. We decided that I would work since I already had a degree, so she went back to college. I took a break, and she is finishing up her nursing degree at [In-State Four-Year University], just kind of hanging out until she gets done. And I've decided that to go back to a four-year degree in the laboratory, they call it a Medical Technologist now.

Jimmy's wife liked all aspects of attending [In-State Four-Year University]. Therefore, he planned to attend the same university as soon as she finished instead of returning to [Neighboring State Four-Year University]. His experiences at [Neighboring State Four-Year University] were not very fulfilling.

Nick had no plans to continue his studies at a four-year university in the near future. He said, "I am kind of happy being a grunt. I like doing this kind of work. I don't really want to pursue management or anything like that." He went on to say that "he is a simple man and enjoys a simple life, and there is nothing wrong with that."

Even though she had considered continuing her education, Cindy said she was very comfortable where she is in her career. Also, because her husband works nights, she felt it would be difficult for them at this stage of their family. But she also said it was something that was not out of the picture, but not in her immediate future.

"Because of my field, a four-year degree is no better than a two-year degree," said Shirley. She had been studying for different certifications so she could work in different modalities, and that is one way she had been continuing her education and learning. But a



bachelor's degree would be necessary only in the distant future if she wanted to someday manage the Medical Imaging Department.

Trina said she had given some thought to a bachelor's degree. But since she was currently enrolled in a second associate's degree from Midwest, that was enough for now. She also said she would need to gather a lot more information about the cost and benefits of earning a bachelor's degree relative to her career.

Betsy was continuing her studies in Psychology and Counseling at a faith-based university in another state. She had taken some extra classes at Midwest that will transfer to the bachelor's degree program, which she will complete online instead of travelling to the other state. She said college at Midwest was something new to her, that growing up on the family farm, higher education was not pushed upon her. But since she experienced earning one degree, and the opportunity it had afforded her to work with abused women, she was very motivated to earn a higher degree and to become a licensed counselor.

"I transferred the credits [from Midwest] that I could to the [Faith-Based University] and got my bachelor's degree in education," proclaimed Jane. She always wanted to be a teacher, but earning a degree in business at Midwest was an easier first step than beginning in a bachelor's degree program. She had the following to report about the transition from Midwest Community College to Faith-Based University:

It was pretty smooth. Some of my business classes wouldn't transfer. I think the only one that I took that I needed for education was, as far as business courses was... a statistics course. [but all of the general education courses transferred]

By the time of the interview, Jane had already graduated from Faith-based University and was working as a high school teacher fulfilling her lifelong dreams.

Joanie landed a full-time job immediately after earning an associate's degree from Midwest and stated she had not considered continuing her education. She made the following comments about her life following Midwest:

I actually got hired full time at a job which I worked at for about a year and a half. And my wage had doubled from what it was before I went to [Midwest]. I do see with the software changing a lot I may have to pick up some classes, you know, new software that is coming out. But as far as going for a four-year degree, no I haven't thought about it. And my age is a lot to do with that too, because, I am 56.

Although it is true, Joanie is closer to retiring than earning another college degree, she did not rule out continuing education. At 56 years of age, she sees the value in continuing education now more than ever.

"Yes, I have already earned a bachelor's of science degree in Business Administration from [regional campus of State University]," was Stacy's reply to the continuing education question. By the time of interview, she had already transferred her Midwest credits to the regional campus of a State University, and in short manner, had earned a bachelor's degree. When asked how smooth the transition from Midwest to State University was, she said:

Actually it went pretty well. I did their program through [local regional campus] with [Professor]. Getting responses to e-mails was kind of difficult sometimes. But he let me know ahead of time what extra classes I needed to take, that I could take at [Midwest] that was cheaper, which was a big help. So, you know, that was pretty smooth for me.

Stacy was able to take advantage of the lower tuition at Midwest for some bridge courses she would need at State University. It was very student-friendly of Professor to share the list of courses with her.

Tammy graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education one week before the interview. She exclaimed, "I am happy!" Although she had not yet landed a teaching job in an elementary school, she was very positive about the opportunities which lay before her. She had the following comments about the transition from Midwest to the local, regional campus of a State University in her city:

The transfer, I went through the "Crossroads program" that was there at [Midwest]. And that was part of the agreement that [Midwest] and [State University] had with each other. And the "Crossroads program" was really a good program for me to go through to make that transition. The people that [State University] the lady that worked there, the coordinator, was very good about helping me work the schedule for the classes I had taken, and how they would fit into the schedule at [State University]. So it worked out really not difficult – is really the best way to say it. It was very easy to do. Maybe easy it not the word, it was a very simplified process. It was very smooth; I didn't really have any problems. The biggest problem I had was once I did start at [State University] there were some classes that were in question, as to whether or not they would transfer, they did transfer, but they weren't really sure what courses they covered. And I think that was the initial stages of what they needed to get worked out with their agreement they had. But that really wasn't a problem. My advisor there was very good about working on that with me and I really didn't have a lot of difficulty with it.

It sounds like her matriculation from Midwest to the regional campus of State University might have fallen apart if not for a dedicated advisor at State University. Even though both institutions had a signed matriculation agreement, there were still some holes in the process the advisor had to patch.

“I haven’t at the moment,” was José’s reply to the continuing education question. Although he had been taking advantage of some in-house training at the hospital where he works, he said he is not in a hurry to earn a bachelor’s degree. However it had crossed his mind, and he said he would eventually earn a Master’s degree too so that he can return to teach at Midwest.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the results of the study were presented. The findings mapped across six themes. These themes included: (a) level of commitment during remedial courses, (b) motivation to persist through remedial courses, (c) level of commitment after receiving scholarships, (d) belief in their ability to be successful, (e) overcoming obstacles to goal attainment facilitated by the scholarship, and (f) continuing studies. Table 3 below presents a summary of the key findings from the interview questions that enabled tabulation of perspective.

Table 3

### *Summary Findings*

#	Question	Response	Number
1	How did you feel when you discovered through assessment testing that you would be required to take remedial courses?	Not surprised/Expected	7
		Neutral/Ambivalent	4
		Surprised	2
		Disappointed/Depressed	2

Table 3 (continued)

#	Question	Response	Number
2	How many remedial courses did you take?	Varied widely, no consistent trend.	1 – 4
3	What motivated you to persist, to be successful in your remedial courses?	Goal driven Faculty Determination/Perseverance Excitement/Desire for a better life Financial	7 2 2 2 1
4	Were you aware at the time that you had received a named scholarship? Or did you just believe it was part of the college's comprehensive financial aid package?	Yes No Later	11 3 1
	Follow-up question, how were you notified?	Formal ceremony Could not remember Letter via U.S. mail E-mail Not notified	4 4 3 3 3
5	Did receiving a named scholarship affect how you thought about yourself and your abilities?	Positively affected Moderately affected No affect	10 3 2
6	What were your original goals for obtaining your degree and how, if at all, did that change over time?	Remain unchanged Changed	15
7	What challenges did you experience along the way toward completing your degree and how did you overcome those challenges?	Family Work Academic Time constraints Disability Travel mileage to campus General differences	9 6 4 4 1 1 1
8	Did receiving a local, named scholarship have an impact on your motivation and ability to persist?	Definite positive influence Moderate influence No influence	10 3 2
9	Have you continued your studies at a four-year institution?	No Yes	8 7

In Chapter 5, a discussion of the meaning of the findings in light of previous research is presented. Implications for policy and practice are then discussed. The chapter closes with a presentation of the study limitations as well as opportunities for future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Discussion**

The guiding purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore how receiving a named scholarship affected persistence for remedial students at a Midwest community college. Utilizing the population of remedial students over the three-year period 2004 – 2007, the number and percentage who persisted to graduate in three years who received, and did not receive, named scholarships was investigated to answer research question one. Research question two investigated the number and percentage of remedial students who received a local, named scholarship and persisted to graduation in three years. Finally, and the qualitative component of the study, research question three explored how a sample of 15 remedial students with local, named scholarships felt about receiving the scholarship and its effect on their self-efficacy. The results of these collective investigations were presented in Chapter 4.

In this chapter, the findings are discussed in light of previous literature. From there, the implications are presented, particularly as it regards for community colleges which are similar in size, mission, and scope to Midwest where this study was conducted. The study's limitations, within its bounding context, is then presented followed by a discussion of opportunities for future research.

## Study Findings in Light of Previous Research Literature

Different methods of analyzing and predicting student retention and persistence have been developed by researchers over the past 50 years. Since the population for this study involved students from a two-year community college that was chartered in 1963, and since the name “community college” only came into vogue in the 1970s (Cohen & Brawer, 2003), research prior to the current era may not be a good fit. Furthermore, there is no lack of research on the broader topic of retention and persistence. For example, Braxton’s (2004) book on student departure cited 45 other researchers currently studying this subject. However, little of this work has focused specifically on remedial community college students. Therefore, while several pieces of recent research can enlighten this study, no single book or paper provides the focused insight into the research this study has sought to extend.

**Tinto’s model of college student retention.** Tinto’s (1975) framework for college student retention is divided into five elements that were found to have an impact on whether or not students persist to earn a college degree. The model, originally presented in Chapter 2, is reproduced in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Tinto’s model of institutional departure.



**Tinto's pre-entry attributes.** The first element, pre-entry attributes, has some bearing on this study because all of the participants were not academically prepared for college-level coursework. They were lacking in the area Tinto (1993) labeled, 'skills and abilities' (p. 114). Every participant needed remedial reading, writing, and/or mathematics. Each participant commented on how they felt about being required to take remedial courses in Chapter 4.

Other aspects of the participant's pre-entry attributes including their family background and their prior schooling may have had some impact on the likelihood they would persist to graduation. However, data about each participant's family background and prior schooling was not collected for two reasons: (1) Because this is a qualitative study whose nexus revolved around how scholarships affected student's ability to persist and graduate within the 150% time frame; and (2) "...researchers generally agree that what happens following entry is, in most cases, more important to the process of student departure than what had previously occurred" (Tinto, 1993, p. 45). Information collected about their pre-entry attributes follows.

Only one of the 15 participants in this study was non-White/non-Caucasian: José, a 40-year old Hispanic male. But he was in the majority in regards to family, because he was married and only 5 of the 15 participants were single. He also had a lot of familial support, because his wife was already a nurse when he decided to change careers and attended nursing school on a scholarship offered by his wife's employer – the hospital where she worked. José's pre-entry attribute of being the only Hispanic made him unique in one sense, but because he was also married, he had that in common with one-half of the participants.

Betsy was the oldest participant and was 56 when she graduated. She was one of the six older-aged participants and was 35 years older than the traditional-aged group of participants. However, she was also married and White/Caucasian and that placed her in the majority group

in regards to other pre-entry attributes. The five other older-aged participants, with the exception of José, were all married females: Jane, Joanie, Stacy, and Tammy. The youngest participants in the older-aged group, Jane and José, at 40 years of age, were still 19 years older than the traditional-aged participants.

There were three older-traditional aged participants, and all of them were White/Caucasian females. Two were single, Cindy and Trina, and Shirley was married. They ranged in age from 23 to 28, which made them two to seven years older than the traditional-aged students and 31 to 33 years younger than the oldest participant.

One-half of the traditional-aged students were married: Teresa, Jimmy, and Nick; one-half were single: Laura, David, and Jake; two of them were female. All of them were White/Caucasian and were 21 years old when they graduated.

Tinto's (1993) pre-entry attributes were one of several factors in his model of student departure. Tinto wrote, "Patterns of entry are necessarily related, in time, to eventual patterns of departure" (p. 8). However, for these determined students who persisted to graduate within the 150% timeframe, their pre-entry attributes served to reinforce their persistence.

**Pre-college goals and commitments.** Tinto (1993) reported that students follow many different paths into college, which can affect their level of commitment to a particular institution. Tinto included intentions, goals and institutional commitments, and external obligations in this category. Some of each participant's pre-college goals and commitments were recorded, but not all, because the goal of this study is to discover how scholarships, received once they have enrolled, affected their ability to persist.

Another researcher on persistence, Carroll (1989), reported that students who delay entry into college are significantly less likely to persist and earn a degree. In this study, the six

traditional-aged students enrolled immediately following high school and the six older-aged students waited 20 to 35 years before they began. What was less evident was how long the three older-traditional-aged students waited before attending college and whether or not Midwest was any participant's first choice.

Laura enrolled at Midwest immediately following high school and it was her first choice based upon the lowest-cost tuition of any institution in the state and its close proximity to her home. She was fully committed to earning a degree at Midwest.

Teresa enrolled at Midwest as her second college choice immediately following high school. Her first choice was a faith-based university 60 miles away where she had received a full scholarship. But her fiancé convinced her to attend one of Midwest's campuses closer to their hometown, and fortunately, all of her scholarships transferred, so it still worked out for her. Even though she did not get to attend her "dream university," she had a successful career in Nursing thanks to Midwest. Once she began taking classes at Midwest, she was fully committed to earning her nursing degree.

David dreamed of attending a four-year university in a large city, but by his senior year in high school, he realized he was not adequately prepared for college-level coursework. So he chose Midwest immediately following high school where he became fully committed, because the faculty and staff worked with him and taught him how to learn, how to study, and how to retain information. After he earned the associate's degree from Midwest, he matriculated to the large four-year university in the large city, and had been a very successful student seeking double majors.

Jake was vague about whether or not Midwest was his first college choice, but he was committed to beginning immediately following high school. However, he knew he wanted a

career in law enforcement and he chose Midwest because of its close proximity to his home and the low tuition. He was committed to earning a degree and while at Midwest, he discovered he could earn two degrees in less than three years. He graduated with an associate's degrees in Criminal Justice and Business Administration from Midwest and then matriculated to a large four-year university in a large city and earned a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and was enrolled in a master's degree program. A career in law enforcement was his goal and Midwest was his first step up the academic ladder of higher education.

Jimmy was fully committed to earning a degree at Midwest. With the low tuition, his scholarship would go further and he wanted to begin a program immediately following high school.

Nick was committed to begin college immediately following high school and chose Midwest because it was close to home and offered the degree he wanted. However, he changed degree plans before the first term and was committed to doing whatever it took to earn a Nursing degree, even though he had long imagined himself working in an industrial setting.

Cindy waited five years after graduating from high school to begin a degree program at Midwest. She spent time working in retail while deciding on her future. She chose an associate's degree in Business Administration with the hope of being promoted to management in the same retail store where she had worked for some time. She chose Midwest because she could still work full time and take a full-time course load around her work schedule. She was an excellent student and maintained 4.0 GPA, because she was fully committed to earning a degree that could help her move up the management ladder.

Shirley joined the [State] National Guard immediately following high school and waited two years before enrolling at Midwest. She did not choose Midwest, it was chosen for her. She

wanted to enroll at the large state university near her home city, but was not academically prepared and was forced to take remedial courses at Midwest for later admission to the university. After the remedial courses, she transferred to the large university, but immediately was not comfortable with the large class sizes and lack of contact with the faculty. So the next semester, she transferred back to Midwest and finished their degree program within two more years. The small class size, low tuition which was 100% paid by scholarships, and regular faculty contact, were the factors which reinforced her commitment to earning a degree from Midwest.

It took Trina seven years after high school to decide to attend college and to decide on a particular degree and career field. She initially enrolled in the Human Services program at Midwest, but quickly changed to Office Administration. She was fully committed to that degree and earned a 4.0 GPA in the program. Furthermore, she returned to Midwest within one year of earning the Office Administration degree and at the time of the study, was taking classes part-time towards the degree in Human Services.

Betsy waited 35 years to go to college. She was motivated to learn more about counseling abused children and women after their grandson, who was abused by his biological father, came to live with them. She felt called by God and said, "I have a mission." She was fully committed to earning an associate's degree in Human Services at Midwest, and was continuing her education online with a faith-based university. She credited her ability to persist to the kind and caring faculty and tutors at Midwest who helped her through the most challenging subjects, including algebra.

It took Jane 19 years to become a college student. She was fully committed to persisting at Midwest because it was fulfilling her life-long dream of becoming a teacher. She

spent those 19 years raising a family, working on the farm, driving a school bus, and volunteering in her community. She then spent two years at Midwest, another two years at a faith-based women's university, and is now a teacher in the high school where she used to deliver children on her bus route.

Joanie waited 31 years between graduating from high school and enrolling in college. Having been diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) years earlier, her level of commitment to Midwest or any college was going to be predicated by their level of commitment to meeting her special needs. She found support in the professor and chair of the Office Administration program at the regional campus of Midwest closest to her home. Midwest was, after 31 years, her first choice based upon its proximity and low tuition. She became fully committed to Midwest when they made her feel important as a person, as an equal, even though she had a documented disability.

It took Stacy 28 years to finally enroll in a degree program at Midwest. She lived with her family five miles from the regional campus she attended, so this college was always in the back of her mind. She attributed its close proximity and low tuition for what drew her to this particular college when she decided she needed a career change. The associate's degree at Midwest Community College was the first step in a new direction. However, she became fully committed to Midwest when she realized all of the teachers and the tutors there seemed to care about their students passing their courses.

Tammy took 30 years after high school to begin taking classes at Midwest. Changes in state laws regarding substitute teachers and teacher's aides necessitated Tammy's decision to earn a college degree. She had worked in the school system for years, but in order to continue she needed at least an associate's degree. She chose Midwest for its low tuition and because

she knew she would need refresher courses which were available there. She said she had an inborn desire to complete this degree, and was fully committed to Midwest, especially after she received a scholarship there.

José had spent 19 years in the manual-labor workforce when he realized he needed to settle down into one career. He had taken classes intermittently at Midwest, so when he decided to follow his wife's footsteps and become a nurse, Midwest was his first choice. He knew it was one of the best nursing programs within driving distance and they were highly selective. So when they accepted him, he was fully committed to earning his degree and said he "felt blessed that I was able to get into the program."

The time it took these students to choose to attend college at Midwest is one of several pre-college goals and commitments as described by Tinto (1993). Another is their level of commitment after they began. For these persistent, dedicated students who persevered to earn their degrees regardless of how long they waited after high school, once they began, they were fully committed to changing their lives.

**Institutional experiences.** Students pre-conceived, positive expectations of the college experience must bear out after they enroll otherwise they will disengage from their studies (Halpin, 1990). Conversely, it is up to the institution to prove false any of the students' negative expectations as quickly as possible in order to enrich their college experience. Students' interactions with faculty, staff, and other students will have a significant impact on their desire to continue their studies at that institution (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1993). Thus, students' overall institutional experiences both inside and outside of the classroom will play a role in either their persistence or their departure.

Tinto (1993) sub-divided institutional experiences into four categories: peer group interactions, academic performance, faculty and staff interactions, and extracurricular activities. During the interviews, participants were asked open-ended questions intended to cause them to think more deeply about their experiences while attending Midwest. The expectation is that participant's responses would lead to other comments, other recollections. The only drawback to open-ended questions is exact responses which fit neatly into Tinto's categories can be difficult to glean.

Most of the traditional-aged students cited positive interactions with faculty and staff as one factor in their choice to persist and graduate from Midwest. Laura said, "I had a lot of extremely good professors in the business program. I knew that they wanted me to succeed." David cited the free tutoring at Midwest helped him through his most challenging subject. David said, "I had numerous amounts of tutoring." Jimmy had a very unique experience interacting with the people he met at Midwest. He fell in love with another student and before they both graduated from Midwest, they were married and had their first child. Nick had a negative experience in Anatomy and Physiology I during his first semester. Nick said, "I worked my butt off and had an A going into the final exam, but ended up with a B. That was pretty harsh and everyone dropped a letter grade [because of the final exam]." The other traditional-aged students cited personal commitment to reaching a goal more than interaction with faculty and staff as factors in their persistence.

One of the older-traditional aged students cited positive interactions with faculty as a key factor in their persistence at Midwest. Cindy cited one professor in particular who "bent over backwards to make sure that every single person in the class understood everything." The



two other older-traditional aged students cited external support and personal determination instead of interactions with faculty and staff.

Several of the older-aged students cited positive interactions with faculty, staff, and students as factors in their choice to persist and graduate from Midwest. Betsy said, “My department chair and my professors were very good at explaining things.” Betsy also named one tutor and one professor in particular who helped her get through some of the more difficult subjects, but as for classmates, she said, “I made two good friends and that was it. I was not there to socialize and whine, I am from the old school, I was on a mission.” Joanie claimed, “[Midwest] saved my life.” Interactions with faculty and the department chair helped make it possible for her to persist and graduate. Joanie said,

If she [faculty] saw me go into a panic attack, she would kind of take me to the side and she’d just say, ‘it is okay [Joanie] just calm down’ and she would either walk me through a panic attack or get someone to come and take me home.

Because of the caring support she received from Midwest, Joanie was “100% determined to finish.” Tammy said, “I had instructors who were very good at helping me reach my goals. They were good about helping me after class... and they really encouraged me.” The remaining older-aged participants cited support from their family as a key factor in their ability to persist and graduate instead of interaction within the college.

Students’ experiences once they enter a particular institution have a significant effect on their ability to persist (Tinto, 1993). Their experiences as they interact with the staff, faculty, and other students, play a role in how they feel about that particular institution and whether or not they stay. These students had enough positive experiences that they chose to stay and to earn their degrees within the 150% time frame. Regardless of the rollercoaster ride of once

being told they were not prepared for college-level courses and were required to take remedial courses, then being awarded scholarships, these truly perseverant students found their footholds and made it through.

**Integration.** How well students integrate into a particular institution both academically and socially can have an impact on their ability to persist (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, it has been widely accepted that education is an interactive experience where the student is as much a part of the learning process as the school. Tinto (1993) wrote, “Inherent in the model of institutional departure is the important notion that colleges are systematic enterprises comprised of a variety of linking interactive, reciprocal parts, formal and informal, academic and social” (p. 118). These two factors simultaneously interact and can have some bearing on whether or not the student, especially the remedial student, may persist to earn their degree. Also, integration in one system may constrain or limit integration in the other system. Therefore, it is important to understand how these participants integrated into the college. The six traditional-aged participants had different integration experiences as their following comments reveal.

Laura worked full time while attending Midwest, so she had little time for social activities on campus. She took one remedial math course and did not state whether or not she needed tutoring outside the classroom. She said, “I had to take that one – basic algebra, because I knew I was not good at math.” Integration does not appear to have been a factor for her. Laura still lived at home and enrolled at Midwest immediately following high school; therefore, she was still geographically close to her high school friends and her family.

Teresa worked the weekend shift as a nursing assistant while taking classes at Midwest. As a full-time student in the Nursing program and recently married, she did not have much time to socialize at school – her family and her studies occupied her evenings. Also, because she

was already working as a nursing assistant when she enrolled at Midwest immediately following high school, she was already assimilated into the health care environment.

David experienced difficulty integrating into business courses, and needed a lot of tutoring in math and accounting. He had received the Thorntown Businessmen's Scholarship, so it was important to him to be fully immersed into the world of business subjects. He found the support he needed at Midwest, and the tutors helped him find his way through the business courses. Since he enrolled at Midwest immediately following high school, still lived with his parents, and stayed in touch with his high school friends, integrating into the social fabric of the community college was not very important to him.

Jake was a man of few words and shared very little about his personal life and his experiences at Midwest. He enrolled at Midwest immediately after high school, and he stated he worked all the way through college, but that was about it. He did not share any other information about his social life.

Jimmy knew he was going to earn a degree in a health care field from Midwest before he graduated from high school. He said, "I took it step by step" when asked about his experiences as a student at Midwest. He had an interesting story to tell in regards to integrating socially to college – he met a girl and fell in love. They were soon married, and had their first child before he graduated. Academically, he integrated quickly, because he had spent more than 100 hours job shadowing in a hospital during his senior year in high school. By the time he got to Midwest, he had already spent more time quasi-working in a hospital than any of his classmates and was fully integrated into the medical environment.

Nick faced some unique challenges integrating into the Nursing program at Midwest, because he had spent most of his high school years preparing for a career in Industrial

Technology. The transition was awkward for him both academically and socially. He was not prepared for clinical rounds in obstetrics and gynecology. But somehow he found the intestinal fortitude to persevere and maintained his composure as best as possible. His family was very supportive, and his wife was very understanding.

The three older-traditional aged participants also had unique experiences integrating into the culture of Midwest. They had been out of high school for two to seven years, so they were not as far removed from education as the older-aged participants.

Cindy found an ally who helped her integrate into the academic fabric of Midwest – her math professor. He spent extra time with her, patiently working with her until she was comfortable working on her own. She had been out of high school for five years and found it difficult to “fit in” during the first semester. But after the first term she said, “It was just kind of nice to know that I could keep up with all of the people that were fresh out of high school.” The extra assistance afforded her by a compassionate professor made it possible for her to “fit in” and “keep up.”

Shirley, the youngest of the three, wanted a career in a health care field other than nursing. She enlisted in the [State] National Guard in order to qualify for their scholarships and to delay entry into college so she could find a field which interested her. She waited two years after high school before enrolling at Midwest, after she had spent some time job-shadowing in various health care areas. Along the way, she discovered she enjoyed Radiology Technology and had a lot of common interests with workers in the field. She pursued that degree and graduated within two years, and it can be said that she was integrated into the subject area before she started taking courses in it.

Trina waited seven years to attempt college. She experienced some difficulty integrating into college life as a mother of two who was older than most of her classmates. She changed majors after the first semester, because she was not getting the support she needed. Had she not changed, she may have dropped out. She had a lot of time constraints trying to raise two young children and attend college, so integrating into the social fabric was not important to her, but it was academically. After she changed degrees; however, everything fell into place and she earned the associate's degree within two years. At the time of her interview for this study, she had returned to Midwest, now she knows how to navigate their system, and is pursuing the degree she gave up on after the first semester.

Cindy found an ally who helped her integrate into the academic fabric of Midwest – her math professor. He spent extra time with her, patiently working with her until she was comfortable working on her own, because she had explained how she had been out of high school for five years and found it difficult to “fit in” during the first semester.

Shirley, the youngest of the three, wanted a career in a health care field other than nursing. She discovered she enjoyed Radiology Technology and had a lot of common interests with workers in the field. She pursued that degree and graduated within two years, and it can be said she was integrated into the subject area before she started taking courses in it.

Trina waited seven years to attempt college and experienced some difficulty integrating into college life as a mother of two who was older than most of her classmates. She faced a lot of time constraints trying to raise two young children and attend college, so integrating into the social fabric was not important to her, but it was academically.

There were six older-aged participants who had been out of high school for 19 to 35 years. They faced integration challenges unique to their age and distance from their teenage,

high school experiences. Betsy was the oldest and had grandchildren the same age as some of her classmates. For her, social integration was not important. She said, “I was not there to socialize.” She also had difficulty learning how to study and would have faltered academically if not for several tutors and faculty members who spent extra time with her. She was “on a mission” and was not afraid to ask for assistance from anyone.

Jane had been out of high school for 19 years when she decided to attend Midwest. She found internal motivation to persist and did not seek out friends to socialize with at school. She had four children, a husband, and a farm to contend with – all she wanted from Midwest was a degree. She found herself, academically, in business courses. She said, “The more business stuff that I took, the more I really enjoyed those.” Jane just enjoyed learning.

Joanie waited 31 years after high school before deciding to pursue a college degree. She had a disability and needed the social integration Midwest offered in its student clubs in order to feel like she belonged. Her advisor and program chair offered her a lot of extra assistance both inside and outside of the classroom and that helped her integrate academically. Student clubs helped her integrate socially, and she eventually overcame most of her disability to be a student speaker at her Commencement. Social and Academic integration were paramount for Joanie’s success.

Stacy was 28 years removed from high school when she enrolled at Midwest. Getting back into the groove of studying and completing homework took a little time for her. She needed remedial courses in both reading and math and took two semesters to be ready for program-level courses. But she persisted, and she used the free tutoring services offered at Midwest to integrate academically. She said, “I was persistent enough to get help. Once I did

that, I was okay.” Since she had a family of her own, she was not looking to make new friends or socialize at college; she just wanted a degree and a new career.

Tammy struggled with math at Midwest, but she had been out of high school for 30 years, so it was not surprising. She asked for extra assistance and received it. She said, “I had instructors who were very good at helping me to reach my goals.” Her husband and daughter were supportive, but also took a lot of her time, so she did not seek out opportunities to socialize with classmates at college because it was not important to her.

José returned to college after 19 years seeking a new career so he could be a better provider for his family. He took remedial math courses and which helped him integrate into the college academically, preparing him for higher-level courses. He was not looking for new friends at Midwest, and once he began the full-time Nursing program, he did not have time for them anyway.

The older-aged students with families had more to balance than the traditional-aged students. Balancing work, family, and school can be a difficult feat, but all of these students made it through. Tinto’s (1993) model of student departure cites integration as one key factor in students’ ability to persist. The students in this study from varying age groups each found what they needed to be successful.

**Within college goals/commitments.** Within college goals and commitments is the final piece of Tinto’s (1993) model of student departure. Tinto (1993) wrote:

Low goal commitment, for example, may result in total withdrawal from all forms of higher educational participation. Conversely, sufficiently high commitment to the goal of college completion may lead a person to ‘stick it out’ until degree completion or to transfer to another institution. (p. 130)

Therefore, student's level of commitment to attaining a degree can outweigh other factors, and may lead them to *stick it out* for the singular sake of completing a program regardless of their level of integration or other factors.

Institutional policies can also affect the level of commitment a student feels for a particular college. After a student begins an academic program, their goals must align with the goals of that particular institution if they are to persist. If the college values headcount more than persistence, then adding new students takes priority over helping current students navigate the academy. If the college places more value on graduation rates, then they will take steps to improve on that goal. One final factor for Tinto's "within college goals and commitments," (1993, p. 114) is the role that students' finances play in their level of commitment to a particular institution. The goals and level of commitment, based upon receiving a scholarship, for each participant will be presented next in demographic order beginning with the traditional-aged students.

Laura's primary goal was to earn a degree in a business field from Midwest. Receiving a scholarship to attend Midwest was exciting for her. She said, "I was pretty excited because I didn't have the money to pay for it myself. So I was pretty stoked about that." She attended an awards ceremony for the scholarship which was sponsored through her father's employer, Nucor Steel. Receiving the scholarship strengthened her commitment to Midwest. She said, "It made me work harder because I knew I only had the money for a certain amount of time. I couldn't be messing around."

Teresa was tired of working as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and wanted to become a nurse herself. She was committed to the nursing program at Midwest because the scholarships she received would go further there than at the private, faith-based university



where she initially planned to attend. In her words, the scholarship, “really set me up.”

Without the scholarship applied to the cost of attending the community college, Teresa would have had to work more hours while she was a student and would have had to borrow money in order to cover the expenses.

David said attending the awards ceremony was a “big deal.” He said that the scholarship reinforced what he wanted to do, to earn a business degree from Midwest. He was fully committed to Midwest after receiving the scholarship and in his own words, he said, “It gave me more reason to not let those fine folks down that gave me that scholarship and gave me that opportunity.”

Jake’s goal was to have a career in law enforcement and the associate’s degree in Criminal Justice from Midwest was a natural first step for him. He was committed to Midwest, so much so he earned a second degree from them before matriculating to a large four-year university. He said, “I had scholarship money leftover, so I continued on and earned a second degree in Business Administration [at Midwest].”

Jimmy wanted a career in a health care field and the scholarship he was awarded made it possible for him to earn an associate’s degree at Midwest without incurring any debt. He felt such a strong connection to his benefactor that he went to work for the hospital whose foundation administered his scholarship. He was fully committed to both the donor and Midwest and he said, “It’s a good place to work, and I think the main reason I am there is because of those scholarships. They paid tuition and helped out with books.”

Nick wanted to be a nurse and the scholarships he was awarded during a ceremony made it possible for him to attend Midwest. He said:

I went into it thinking I was going to have to get student loans and work, and do whatever I had to in order to get through college. It was just a little bit of a load off, to think that I didn't have as much financial burden.

Nick was committed to earning a degree at Midwest because of the scholarships he received.

The stories from the three older-traditional aged students are not very different from their slightly younger counterparts. Cindy said the scholarship she received while attending Midwest made a difference in her ability to persist. She said, "It was a great help. It came at a good time." She knew what degree she wanted from Midwest and was fully committed to the school when she said, "I knew exactly what I was going for, it related to my everyday life, what I was doing, so that was a big help." She chose Midwest because it offered an affordable degree in business which could help her move up the management ladder at her job. But the scholarship cemented that choice, even though at first she thought it was a mistake. She said, "It just happened. I received a check in the mail one day, and I had to call to figure out why. It was a scholarship and it was a great help."

Shirley took a different approach, but was as committed to earning a degree at Midwest as everyone else in this study. She first joined the [State] National Guard so she could receive a scholarship to attend Midwest's Radiology Technologist program. Once she began the program at Midwest, she was fully committed to earning high marks so she would not be in danger of forfeiting the scholarship. She said, "I definitely would not have been able to go to school without it."

Trina, like Cindy, had to contact the college, because she was surprised she actually received a scholarship. Having been required to take remedial courses, she did not expect to receive assistance from any benefactors. But afterwards, it strengthened her commitment to

Midwest and the donors. She said, “It just made me want to keep going and I strived for really good grades and I wanted to keep that 4.0 GPA all the way to the end.”

The stories from the six older-aged participants varied more than those from the two younger groups. Betsy did not realize she had been awarded a scholarship until she received the letter from the researcher about this study. She said, “I was told that I was fully student loans. I had no idea - that was not explained to me whatsoever.” Had she been invited to a formal ceremony and presented with her scholarship, she would have recognized a donor made her scholarship possible.

Jane said she “felt proud of herself” when she received the scholarship. She wanted to in her words, “prove that I deserved it.” Her level of commitment to Midwest was cemented by the scholarship. Her life-long goal of becoming a school teacher was realized through a divergent path at Midwest. She earned a business degree there instead of one in education; because as she said, “the more business stuff that I took, the more I really enjoyed those.” Jane took a path at Midwest based upon personal enjoyment and that along with the scholarship locked-in her commitment to the community college. Enjoying your studies should be one basis for choosing a particular program out of the myriad of degrees available.

Joanie was in her words, “surprised and honored” when she received her scholarship. She was committed to the community college because as she said, “I felt like going to [Midwest] saved my life.” The scholarship made her more determined than ever to earn her degree and she said, “I overcame a lot... and I was determined to finish.”

Stacy found so much to like about Midwest, she took a position there after her first year. Her scholarship donor was from the college and when they awarded it to her she said, “It felt

like it was an acknowledgement that I was a good student.” The scholarship strengthened her commitment to Midwest, and as an employee of the college, she was fully committed.

Tammy said she was committed to Midwest because they offered the degree she needed. She said, “I wanted to get a degree that would enable me to stay employed in the school.” The scholarship offered through Midwest helped too and she said, “It helped motivate me to get my degree.” With two levels of motivation, needing a degree to retain her job, and receiving a scholarship along the way, Tammy was fully committed to her program at Midwest.

José was committed to Midwest for two reasons: (1) He had been taking classes there off and on for several years, and (2) it is where the hospital had set up the scholarship he received. Both are excellent reasons for persisting in a degree program at a particular college. Furthermore, he said, “I think Midwest has a terrific program and I know it is highly sought after. And from what I understand it has been difficult for others to get in there, it’s highly competitive.” He said he, “felt blessed to have been accepted there” and was fully committed to completing the program.

Through the lens of Tinto’s (1993) model of student departure, it can be observed how the students in this study navigated the academy and graduated with its highest degree within the 150% time frame. But as he said, “In the interactive, reciprocal world of institutional life, student retention is at least as much a function of institutional behavior as it is of student behavior” (p. 202). Therefore, it is not only the actions and behaviors of the students which affect their persistence; it is also a result of institutional policies and practices.

**Bandura’s effects of self-efficacy on student retention.** As Braxton (2004) reported, “Bandura’s model of self-efficacy has received growing attention in higher education research” (p. 52). Bandura (1977) is the foremost scholar on how students’ self-efficacy affects their

educational experiences. Self-efficacy, as defined in Chapter 2, explains what students believe they are capable of accomplishing on academic tasks. Bandura defined it as, “Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Thus when a student’s self-efficacy is high, they will be more likely to perform well on a given academic task. Conversely, when a student’s self-efficacy is low, they will be more likely to perform poorly on a given academic task. Furthermore, performance on a series of academic tasks will have a significant impact on students’ likelihood to persist through an entire academic degree program and to graduate.

The use of self-efficacy in college environments has been applied by a few researchers including Lent, Brown and Larkin (1987). Lent et al. noted college student’s academic self-efficacy was a predictor for both academic performance and persistence. They concluded that for underprepared students, like the remedial students in this study, a high level of self-efficacy was critically important to their success and persistence. Therefore, this study asked the question whether or not receiving a scholarship impacted a student’s motivation and ability to persist – their self-efficacy.

It is important to note that 5 of the 14 interview questions were centered on scholarships. Three of the scholarship-focused questions were worded specifically to uncover how receiving local, named scholarships affected the participant’s self-efficacy. Question No. 5 read, “Tell me how you felt after receiving the scholarship?” Question No. 6 read, “Did receiving a named scholarship affect how you thought about your studies and getting your degree?” Question No. 7 read, “Did receiving a named scholarship affect how you thought about yourself and your abilities?” Participants’ responses to these three questions follow.

Ten of the participants said receiving their scholarship positively increased their self-efficacy as evidenced in their responses. Two of the participants said it moderately increased their self-efficacy, a perspective that was also reflected in their remarks; two said their scholarship did not increase their self-efficacy; and one participant fell into an unknown category, because they were not aware they had received a scholarship.

Laura said receiving the Nucor Steel scholarship from her father's employer made her "work harder," which in turn helped increase her self-efficacy. She said, "Yes, absolutely, I mean it, the scholarship was the whole reason I was able to go in the first place... So it definitely was a huge motivator."

Teresa had a similar experience with the Nursing scholarship she received through the college's foundation. She said, "It really did help me. It made me more confident."

Jake said receiving a scholarship from his home county's foundation, "made me work a little harder." That in turn had some effect on how he thought about his abilities, his self-efficacy. The scholarship served as a motivator for him to work harder, which in turn improved his grades.

"Oh definitely!" was Jimmy's response to the question about how receiving the St. Vincent Hospital scholarship affected his motivation and his ability to persist and graduate. He said, "[It] pushed me to go through and finish just kind of like nothing could get in my way." He also said it felt like someone believed in him and that in turn improved how he felt about his abilities, his self-efficacy.

"Yes definitely," proclaimed Cindy when asked whether or not receiving a scholarship through her home county's foundation had an impact on what she thought about her abilities.

She said, “Kind of a way that pushed me to the end.” Getting to the end, the graduation is the ultimate goal.

Trina said, “Yes,” receiving a named scholarship through the college’s foundation had an impact on what she thought about her abilities. “It just made me realize that I could do it,” she said. “I never thought I was smart - and because I worked hard, I earned that scholarship,” said Jane. It also had a positive effect on her self-efficacy and she said, “It just pushed me to prove that I was worthy.”

Joanie’s response to the question about whether or not receiving a scholarship from the local chapter of the IAAP scholarship impacted her ability to persist was, “absolutely!” She was determined more than ever after receiving the scholarship and said, “It encouraged me. That scholarship pushed me out forward to where I could continue to finish.” As this study’s only participant with a documented disability, Joanie also said, “I overcame a lot and it’s hard to explain everything in such a short amount of time... but receiving that scholarship was such an ego boost... and it raised my self-confidence 100%.”

“Oh yes!” was Stacy’s response to the question about how receiving a named scholarship through the college’s foundation impacted what she thought about her abilities. She also said, “It gave me a little more confidence that I could do more than I [originally] thought I could.” She also said, “It gave me more confidence going into the classroom thinking I can do this!” Stacy was emphatic about the positive affect the scholarship had on how she felt about her abilities. She went on to say, “Especially for someone like me who’s been out of school for so long, because you don’t have the confidence [in your abilities].”

Tammy said receiving a scholarship through her home county's foundation increased her motivation. She said, "It was just some kind of motivator." She said she "had a lot of inborn desire to complete this degree. I was just very motivated to do it."

David's response fits in the "sort of" category. His self-efficacy must have already been fairly high, because his response as to whether or not receiving the Thorntown Businessman's scholarship affected his abilities was, "not really. Just because I deserve it and there was a small pool of students they had to choose from. But I'm being too hard on myself." But he also said, "It reinforced what I thought I wanted to do." Even though he stated it had little effect on his abilities, it served as a positive reinforcement tool, which had a positive effect on his self-efficacy, whether he admitted it or not.

José said the scholarship he received from Wayne Hospital where his wife worked as a nurse, "definitely had an impact on my ability to continue." But he also stated he would have found a way without it, so he also fits into the "sort of" category. But he was more confident about his abilities after receiving it, because he said, "I was very pleased and very thankful that they were taking an interest in my future career."

Nick stated, "There were many times that I thought I better work my butt off, you know, to do as best as I could." But receiving the Nursing scholarship and a grant from the college's foundation did not have a significant impact on what he thought about his abilities. He said, "It was a little bit of a load off from a financial aspect. But for me, the work, I felt the same about why I came to college – I had the same mind frame."

"No" was Shirley's reply, because she expected the scholarship. She joined the [State] National Guard so she would be guaranteed the scholarship. Therefore, it cannot be attributed to any affect on how she felt about her abilities.



Betsy fits into the “unknown” category, because she was never notified by Midwest she had received a named scholarship through the college’s foundation office. Therefore, its effect on how she thought about her abilities cannot be measured.

Ten of the participants clearly stated their scholarships positively affected their self-efficacy; two said it “sort of” affected them; and two said it had no effect. One participant could not be counted either way, because she was unaware she had received a scholarship. It appears the simple process of clearly informing these recipients they had been awarded scholarships was a positive stimulus to their self-efficacy, a key factor of persistence found in the literature (Bandura, 1977; McMillan & Hearn, 2008).

Self-efficacy is very important because as Bandura (1977) discovered, a person’s level of motivation and their actions that follow are influenced more by what they believe than what is objectively true. What one believes he or she is capable of accomplishing is of paramount importance to their likelihood of success. In this study, success is measured by persisting to earn an associate’s degree within the 150% time frame after you were notified you were not prepared for college-level coursework and would be required to take remedial reading, writing, and/or math courses.

### **Implications**

This study adds to the body of work on college student persistence following the works of Braxton (2004), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), St. John and Wilkerson (2006), and Tinto (1975, 1993, 2007). Persistence and improving graduation rates are currently at the forefront of research in higher education. The Lumina Foundation for Education’s Goal 2025 of having 60% of the United States’ citizens holding high-quality college degrees within the next 14 years is presently the most talked-about target in the persistence arena (J. Merisotis, personal

communications, November 19, 2010). Lumina's goal is based upon the premise that the United States is falling behind a growing number of nations in this regard.

Lumina reports only 39% of Americans hold college degrees. Therefore, their goal of 60% represents a very sizable 50% increase in a relatively short time (Lumina Foundation, 2010). A 50% increase is lofty goal, indeed. Many colleges would most likely celebrate a 10% improvement as quite significant since the United States has been hovering around the 39% rate for the past 40 years. It is generally agreed there are significant economic and social benefits with a more educated citizenry. So while other industrialized nations in the world have had recent, sizable increases in the level of degree attainment among their citizens, degree attainment in the United States has remained stagnant for the past four decades. If the United States is to return to worldwide economic superiority, then more of its citizens need to earn college degrees in very short order. That implication makes Lumina's Goal 2025 worth working towards and hopefully this study suggests what colleges like Midwest might do to move closer to this lofty goal by increasing their students' self-efficacy through local, named scholarships. Because this study used a qualitative design, though, it at least suggests what might be investigated through a larger sample of students and institutions.

Improving persistence and graduation rates at open-access colleges like Midwest may be facilitated through well-executed remediation programs. Programs similar to Midwest's which require all incoming students to be tested in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, followed by placement into appropriate courses may be beneficial. By not merely placing students into program-level courses without knowing whether or not the students are ready for them, a well-deployed remediation program similar to the one implemented by

Midwest and represented in Table 1 in Chapter 3, may reduce drop-out rates in program-level courses.

Brown's (2008) and subsequent reports on the remediation programs at Midwest could be studied by any researcher or administrator seeking to develop or re-engineer a remedial education program at their institution. Cohen and Brawer (2003) stated, "All public two-year colleges offer remedial courses" (p. 263). Therefore, Brown's and other researcher's reports may be beneficial to all community colleges.

As Saxon and Boylan (2001) reported, no institution in recent history has reported losing money on remedial courses. Therefore, the argument against offering remedial courses on the basis of expenses falls flat. There is however a perceived stigma that institutions who offer remedial courses, do so because their students need them; and that makes them appear less selective, less elite. The elitism stigma may be true. But as Brown (2008) and Patthey-Chavez et al.'s (2005) studies discovered, when a student needs remedial reading, writing, or mathematics; placing them in those remedial courses increases the likelihood of their persistence.

The crux of this study further expands on the research surrounding persistence into the area of local, named scholarships. Findings in this study revealed students who receive a scholarship with a name attached to it, may feel a special connection to the donor which increases their commitment to persist and to earn a degree. By extension, then, local, named scholarships may improve a student's self-efficacy, increasing their confidence, and that in turn motivates them to persist. Development offices would be wise to consider building the pool of named scholarships since having them, and linking with a formalized ceremony of some kind, may enhance the likelihood of a student completing their degree.

Self-efficacy has been shown to play a critical role in persistence, because it affects how students perceive themselves in academic situations. When first-time students take academic proficiency tests and are subsequently advised they need remedial courses, this may lead to a drop in their self-efficacy. In this study, more than one-quarter of the participants were surprised and even disappointed or depressed when they were told they would need remedial courses while slightly less than one-half of them expected it. The blow to a student's self-efficacy may be difficult to overcome and could result in them giving up on earning a college degree. That could have been the case for 90% of the remedial students in this study's original cohort who did not persist to earn their degree within the 150% time frame. But as this study also uncovered, by awarding remedial students local, named scholarships, any negative effect may have the potential to be counteracted, because it reveals to the student that someone believes in their potential for success.

The findings of this study also make it clear that scholarships awarded at Midwest and colleges like them can have a greater impact on their students if they announce them during a formal awards ceremony. At the minimum, they would be more effective if they notified the recipients either in person or via mail they had been awarded a scholarship. Experiences like Betsy's, who did not realize she had received a named-scholarship until she was contacted by the researcher, should be very infrequent. But her experience is a useful example of how procedures for announcing scholarships can be improved.

**Limitations**

This study was limited by several factors. The first factor was it was conducted at a two-year community college. Therefore, it may not be as applicable to four-year universities,

especially if they do not offer remedial courses. But it could be valuable to community colleges which offer remedial coursework or are planning to develop a program similar to Midwest's.

This study was also limited in its scope because only 15 of the 4,678 possible participants were interviewed. However, it would not be feasible to interview every student in the 2004 cohort at Midwest, and it would not provide much meaning, because it would encompass students who did not match all of the study's criteria. Furthermore, the primary objective of phenomenological studies like this one are to study a small number of participants to uncover patterns and meaningful relationships and that is precisely what it accomplished (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).

Another factor to consider in qualitative research is how the researcher becomes part of the study (Creswell, 2003). But this was not necessarily a problem, especially when semi-structured, open-ended questions were presented to the participants during the interviews as they were for this study. By not constraining the researcher and the participants to rigid, closed-ended questions or surveys, the participant was free to recall other relevant experiences and the researcher was free to ask follow-up questions. This process leads to deeper understanding of the participants lived experiences and enriches the study instead of diminishing it (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008).

### **Opportunities for Future Research**

There are several opportunities for future research including interviewing the 2,988 remedial students in the population of this study who did not persist to graduate within the 150% time frame. By interviewing them, the researcher could discover the factors which led to either their delayed graduation or their departure from Midwest.

Another opportunity would be to interview a similar set of 15 of the 672 graduates from the cohort who did not require remedial coursework and compare what motivated them to persist to what motivated the remedial students. It would also be informative to interview the other 55 students who matched all of the criteria for this study. However, the researcher was not able to locate them or they did not respond to requests for interviews.

It appears the best opportunity for future research would be to study how student's self-efficacy is affected by all of the scholarships awarded at [Midwest] Community College instead of just those awarded to remedial students. Since Midwest has 14 regions in its home state, and since the smallest region has 12 different scholarships; that could encompass over 250 different scholarships awarded to over 4,000 students in a single cohort.

Expanding such a study to the Midwest region or the nation would also be enabled via a survey design. Utilizing one of the well developed self-efficacy scales, students could be administered the survey at three points during their academic career. The first survey point could be at the time of application to the college and prior to any remedial testing. The second survey could be completed after the student's have received their grades following their first term. By comparing the first and second surveys, the researcher could uncover how the participants' self-efficacy changed after their first term, after they took some college courses and/or remedial courses.

The third survey could be completed during the students' final semester, before they graduate. The results from the final survey could be compared to the first and second survey to map fluctuations in their self-efficacy. The results from these surveys could be analyzed and synthesized to uncover opportunities for new policies and procedures which could improve students' self-efficacy with the goal of improving persistence and graduation rates. Although,

this would be a longitudinal study which would take at least three years to complete for associate-degree seeking students, it would be very informative and could add significantly to the research on college student persistence.

### **Summary**

This was a unique study that sought to not only add to the research on community colleges, an area which has been lacking (Cohen & Brawer, 2003), but also to inform any institution where there is concern for persistence, remediation, and disbursement of donor funds. In the end, this study fulfilled its purpose by looking into places where few have looked before for answers and ideas which can result in improved persistence to graduation for American college students, thus fulfilling Merisotis' (2008) charge of doing a better job helping students achieve their educational goals.

Furthermore, this study also shed light on how Midwest Community College and others like it can improve their students' self-efficacy, which is a key factor in persistence. The rich insights gleaned from these participants' stories can be used by many departments in the academy. Development offices can learn from these participants' experiences surrounding how they were notified, or not notified, they had been awarded scholarships and the impact that has on the value of receiving a named scholarship. It also provides institutions useful insights on the value of raising money for named scholarships versus generic institutional aid. Academic programs can learn how their policies and practices negatively and positively affect students' self-efficacy. Finally, administrators can learn how the entire academy positively and negatively affects their students. With this information, more is possible as it regards how to improve student persistence to graduation.

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## APPENDIX A

### **Consent To Participate In Research**

#### **Feeling Special: A Study of Local, Named, Need-based Scholarships for Remediated Community College Students**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ronald M. Oler, who is a doctoral student from the Education Leadership and Foundations Department at Indiana State University. Mr. Oler is conducting this study for his doctoral dissertation. Dr. Joshua Powers is his faculty sponsor for this project.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a graduate of Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana and received a named scholarship while in attendance at the institution.

#### **• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore participant thoughts/feelings on what helped them to persist to graduation and the role that the scholarship may have played in that process.

#### **• PROCEDURES**

##### **Selection Criteria**

You were selected to participate in this study, because: (1) You began pursuing an associate degree at Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana in the fall 2004 term. (2) You persisted to graduate within three years. (3) You took one or more remedial courses. (4) You received a local, named scholarship. Information on students who met these criteria was provided by Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, and I selected possible study participants based on location demographics.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we will ask you to do the following:

1. You will be asked a series of semi-structured questions about your experiences and feelings while a student at Ivy Tech Community College. The interview should last approximately 45 minutes to one hour.
2. For accuracy of reporting, you will be given the opportunity to review your remarks before they are reported in the final study.

3. You will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used in the published study instead of your actual name. Only the researcher will know your true identity.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

We expect that any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and we believe that they are not likely to happen. If discomforts become a problem, you may discontinue your participation.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

It is not likely that you will benefit directly from participation in this study, because you have already graduated. But, the research should help us learn how to improve services for students in situations similar to yours.

- **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will not receive any payment or other compensation for participation in this study. There is also no cost to you for participation.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a code number to let Mr. Oler and Dr. Powers know who you are. We will not use your name in any of the information we get from this study or in any of the research reports. Three years after the study is finished, we will destroy the list that shows which code number goes with your name.

Information that can identify you individually will not be released to anyone outside the study. Mr. Oler will, however, use the information collected in his dissertation and other publications. We also may use any information that we get from this study in any way we think is best for publication or education. Any information we use for publication will not identify you individually.

The audio recordings that we make will not be listened to by anyone outside the study unless we have you sign a separate permission form allowing us to use them. The recording will be destroyed three years after the end of the study, as standard practice.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be included in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact

Mr. Ronald M. Oler  
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Graduate Student  
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## • RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at [irb@indstate.edu](mailto:irb@indstate.edu). You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Indiana State University Institutional Review Board APPROVED	
IRB Number:	50-000
Approval:	1/1/2004
Expiration Date:	12/31/2005

## APPENDIX B:

**Interview Protocol**

Time and Date of Interview:

Place:

Interviewee:

A: Introductory comments:

- ✓ Thank participant
- ✓ Explain the process including audio recording and taking field notes
- ✓ Confirm the previous letter concerning confidentiality and ask for any questions
- ✓ Collect participant's signature on Informed Consent

B: Purpose of study

This study will investigate the ways in which scholarships for remedial students affect persistence to graduation.

C: Questions:

#### Remedial Questions

1. How did you feel when you discovered through assessment testing that you would be required to take remedial courses?
2. How many remedial courses did you take?
3. What motivated you to persist, to be successful in your remedial courses?

#### Scholarship Questions

4. Were you aware at the time that you had received a named scholarship? Or did you just believe it was part of the college's comprehensive financial aid package?
5. Tell me how you felt after receiving the scholarship.(Q. 3)
6. Did receiving a named scholarship affect how you thought about your studies and getting your degree? (Q. 3)
7. Did receiving a named scholarship affect how you thought about yourself and your abilities? (Q. 3)

8. Did you at the time or do you now feel a personal connection with the donor named in the scholarship you received?

#### Persistence to Graduation Questions

9. What was your original plan for pursuing your degree in terms of how long you envisioned it taking?
10. What were your original goals for obtaining your degree and how, if at all, did that change over time?
11. What challenges did you experience along the way toward completing your degree and how did you overcome those challenges?
12. Did receiving a local, named scholarship have an impact on your motivation and ability to persist?
13. What were some of the feelings that went through your mind as you progressed through toward graduation and the challenges you confronted? Were there ever any moments when you felt you might not or could not achieve your goal?

#### Post Graduation Question

14. Have you continued your studies at a four-year institution?

D: Concluding Comments  
✓ Thank participant

## APPENDIX C:

**First Prospective Participant Invitation Letter**

Greetings Ivy Tech Community College Graduate,

As you are likely aware, college completion rates are among the hottest issues in higher education and the American society today. The causes of persistence to graduation are many and vary from student to student. Some factors are academic, some are financial, and still others are social in nature.

Another hot issue that you are undoubtedly aware of is the continually rising cost of earning a college degree. Fortunately, the escalating costs of earning a college degree are usually offset by the increased earnings potential of graduates. For every dollar invested in earning a college degree, the successful graduate will usually garner between 100 and 1,000 times that amount in increased, lifetime future earnings. Some call higher education an investment in human capital, while I call it an investment in yourself that usually pays off later rather than sooner. Patience and perseverance are key factors in graduates' future success just as they were while they were students.

Another factor in the persistence of college students is remediation and the needs of under-prepared students. Some say that requiring college students to re-learn reading, writing, and math skills they should have learned in high school is an in-efficient use of resources. But you know from first-hand experience, that most remedial courses are necessary to refresh students' skills and to prepare them for higher-level courses. Without remedial coursework, too many students would flounder in advanced courses, because they had forgotten most of the math, and some of the reading and writing techniques they learned in high school. Even though the human brain has limitless capacity, like a muscle, parts that go unused for a period time become weak and need to be re-trained.

We also know that college students face difficult financial choices, and that these can have a negative effect on their likelihood to persist and to earn a degree. As the researcher St. John discovered, "There is evidence that students' perception of their ability to pay for college have an influence on their academic and social experiences in college." And we know that our perceptions can lead to either success or failure.

Because you are among the elite few, students who overcame considerable odds and yet still persisted to graduate, you have been selected to participate in a study of Ivy Tech Community

College graduates. You were among the 70 students who declared their degree in the fall 2004 term, needed some remedial coursework, received a local scholarship, and persisted to graduate by the spring 2007 term. I know that sounds like a very low number, so consider this: 4,678 students began an associate degree program at Ivy Tech in the fall 2004 term; 3,325 needed remedial coursework (71%); 1,009 graduated within three years (21.5%), but only 337 of the remediated students graduated (7%), and only 70 of them also received a local, named scholarship (1.5%). You are part of that 70, and you are 1 of 15 graduates (0.3%) who will be interviewed for this study.

As a professor and administrator at Ivy Tech, it is my hope that this study will shed light on how remedial coursework and financial support affects persistence to graduation. In 2006, Ivy Tech made national news having received more charitable contributions than any other community college in America. However, less than 10% of those funds trickled down to students in the form of direct financial aid. Hopefully, your personal story can be the fuel that ignites a fire that causes our donors to give more to students than to buildings and labs. So that future students, like you, can have a better chance of earning a college degree and improving their odds of future professional success.

Please contact me by whichever method you prefer to discuss the best Friday or Saturday in the near future when we can meet at your home campus for a 30- to 45-minute, face-to-face interview. Thank you for your support of future students like yourself.

I can be reached at: [roler@indstate.edu](mailto:roler@indstate.edu), or (765) 969-9905.

Thank you for your support of future students like yourself,  
Ronald M. Oler