

12-20-2009

The influence of conflicting role obligations on nontraditional student baccalaureate degree attainment

Rosaria Guastella
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

Guastella, Rosaria, "The influence of conflicting role obligations on nontraditional student baccalaureate degree attainment" (2009). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 1019.
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/1019>

This Dissertation is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Dissertation in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Dissertation has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

The influence of conflicting role obligations
on nontraditional student baccalaureate degree attainment

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Administration
Higher Education

By

Rosaria A. Guastella

B.A. Newcomb College, Tulane University, 1988
M.Ed. University of New Orleans, 1999

December, 2009

Copyright 2009, Rosaria Guastella

Dedication

It has always been my belief that no one accomplishes anything worthwhile without the support and influence of others. Without my faith in God and the love of my family, I doubt I would have gotten this far. To my paternal grandparents, Francesco (Frank) and Maria Cipriano Guastella, I offer my eternal gratitude for having the courage to start a new life in this great country. Your love and hard work paved the way for the rest of us. From you, I learned how to be strong, and I shall always remember the sacrifice you made to provide such a wonderful life for your family. To my maternal grandparents, Jacob and Stella Turcotte Schwander, I am most appreciative for your love of life and family. I shall always carry your spirit with me. To my brother, Francesco (Frank) Guastella, and my sister, Maria G. Held (Mrs. Alan), you are my best friends and a constant reminder of the true meaning of family. I am always comforted to know that someone else in this world shares my history, and I hope that you are blessed with a lifetime of wonderful memories. To my dear niece and Godchild, Amanda Held, you embody the best of all of us. You have given me more joy than I could ever have imagined, and I pray that you will have a long life full of love, happiness, and endless opportunities. To my wonderful parents, Rosario J. (Russell) and Linda S. Guastella, words cannot express how much I love and respect you. I am honored to be your daughter. From you, I have been given the invaluable gift of unconditional love. Although I doubted myself many times, you never did. Mother, you will always be the one who understands and consoles me and never judges me even when I make mistakes; you just continue to love me. Daddy, you will always be the smartest and strongest gentleman I will ever know, the one who can fix anything and will do anything to help others, especially our family. I am proud to share this accomplishment with each of you.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of my major professor and doctoral committee chair, Dr. Marietta Del Favero and my committee members, Dr. April Bedford, Dr. Lorelei Cropley, and Dr. Andre Perry to this dissertation process. You challenged me to always do my best, and I have acquired a deep appreciation for the vital role of faculty in the success of their students. I am forever grateful to my friend and colleague, Martha Blanchard, for her words of encouragement, understanding, and invaluable assistance throughout my doctoral journey. I shall always cherish your wonderful gift of friendship. I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Richard Marksbury, Dean of Tulane University's School of Continuing Studies for his constant support and for teaching me how to be a wise and compassionate leader in all aspects of life. Finally, I offer my sincere appreciation to each of the participants in my study and to all nontraditional students who work so hard and sacrifice so much but who never give up on their dreams. They are an inspiration to us all.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	ix
Abstract	x
Chapter 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Framework	2
Nontraditional Students in Higher Education	3
Barriers to Academic Success for Nontraditional Students	5
The Study Context	6
Theoretical Implications	12
Role Theory	12
Adult Development Theory	13
Adult Learning Theory	14
Student Persistence Theory.....	14
Statement of the Problem.....	15
Significance.....	16
Research Questions.....	20
Overview of the Manuscript	21
Chapter 2.....	23
Review of the Literature	23
Introduction.....	23
Historical Perspective of Adult Education in the United States	24
Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.....	24
Twentieth Century and Beyond	27
Description of the Study Context.....	29
Institutional Prestige	32
Summary	34
Nontraditional Students	35
Characteristics.....	36
Barriers.....	38
Reasons to Enroll	40
Summary	43
Role Theory	46
Behaviors	46
Social Position	48
Multiple Roles.....	49
Role Conflict.....	51
Coping Strategies	53
Benefits of Multiple Roles	54
Summary	58
Adult Development Theory	60
Life Stage Perspective.....	61
Life Events Perspective.....	62

Individual Timing Perspective	63
Motivation	63
Developmental Needs	65
Summary	66
Adult Learning Theory	68
Characteristics of Nontraditional Students as Learners	69
Situational Life Experiences	72
Adult Learning in Practice	74
Summary	77
Student Persistence Theory	78
Risk Factors	79
Interaction with Others	81
Summary	83
Conclusion	84
Conceptual Framework	87
Chapter 3	90
Methodology	90
Introduction	90
Autobiography of the Researcher	90
Research Questions	92
Research Design	92
Qualitative Methods	92
Phenomenology	95
Pilot Study	96
Interview Protocol for Pilot Study	98
Results of Pilot Study	98
Research Participants	99
Selection Process	99
Data Collection	102
Interview Protocol	102
Data Analysis	104
Generalizability and Validity	107
Limitations	108
Conclusion	109
Chapter 4	110
Findings	110
Introduction	110
Themes	113
Strategies Used by Nontraditional Students to Negotiate their Various Roles	120
Time Management	121
Stress Management	122
Effective Class Scheduling	124
Effective Study Techniques as a Result of Learning Styles and Experiences ..	126
Motivation for Nontraditional Students to Pursue a Baccalaureate Degree at this	
Time in their Lives	129
Affordability	130

Career Advancement.....	131
Lifelong Goal	132
Role Model.....	133
Role Change Due to Life Event/Life Stage	135
Obstacles and Challenges Related to Nontraditional Students' Various Roles	139
Job Responsibilities	140
Family Commitments.....	141
Community/Volunteer Activities.....	145
Support Systems.....	147
Family	148
Employers	150
Faculty and Staff	151
Fellow Students.....	152
Institutional Prestige	154
Conclusion	158
Chapter 5.....	160
Discussion and Conclusions	160
Introduction.....	160
Strategies Nontraditional Students Used to Negotiate their Various Roles.....	162
Time and Stress Management.....	167
Effective Class Scheduling and Study Techniques.....	172
Motivation for Nontraditional Students to Pursue a	
Baccalaureate Degree at this Time in their Lives	180
Affordability and Career Advancement.....	182
Lifelong Goal and Role Model	184
Role Change Due to Life Event/Life Stage	187
Obstacles and Challenges Related to Nontraditional Students' Various Roles	189
Job Responsibilities	190
Family Commitments and Community/Volunteer Activities	192
Support Systems Available to Nontraditional Students.....	194
Family and Employer.....	196
Faculty, Staff, and Fellow Students	198
Conclusions.....	200
Institutional Prestige	206
Implications for Policy and Practice	209
Recommendations for Further Research.....	220
References.....	223
Appendices.....	231
Appendix A: Solicitation Letter to Study Participants	232
Appendix B: Questionnaire to Study Participants	233
Appendix C: IRB Approval	234
Vita.....	235

List of Figures

Conceptual Framework	89
----------------------------	----

List of Tables

Continuing Studies Unit Comparison Characteristics	10
Participant Characteristics	111

Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the phenomenon of the conflicting roles, such as parent, spouse, employee, caregiver, and community member/volunteer, associated with the lives of nontraditional college students and to reveal how these conflicting role obligations influence these students' persistence toward the attainment of an undergraduate degree. This study provides a brief history of adult education in the United States as well as the study context, a continuing studies division of a privately endowed research institution located in the southern United States. The participants in this study were nontraditional students who were also recent graduates of this continuing studies unit.

This study drew upon the literature of nontraditional students in higher education, as well as literature on role theory, adult development theory, adult learning theory, and student persistence theory. This study used a phenomenological qualitative approach as a means of discovering the lived experiences of nontraditional students as these experiences relate to the conflicting roles of nontraditional students and their decision to persist toward the attainment of a bachelor's degree.

Several important findings were discovered. In order to negotiate their conflicting roles, these students used several strategies as a means of helping them to balance their roles. This study also found several motivational factors that prompted nontraditional students to pursue a bachelor's degree at this time in their lives. The obstacles and challenges that these students confronted were also revealed, and in order to overcome these obstacles and challenges these students relied on several support systems. The reputation and prestige of this university was also found to be an important factor in the students' decision to attend college at this stage in their lives.

Additionally, the various forms of assistance that this continuing studies unit provided encouraged students to persist.

Keywords: Nontraditional student, continuing education student, continuing studies division, continuing studies unit, adult development theory, adult learning theory, role theory, student persistence theory, needs, barriers, qualitative analysis, phenomenology

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Nontraditional students, typically defined as those students over the age of 24, are a significant population within higher education today; however, their many responsibilities outside of the classroom may often cause them to delay their academic goals or terminate them completely. As of 2008, approximately seven million students 25 years and older were enrolled in institutions of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008a). In 2010, this number is expected to reach 7.3 million nontraditional students enrolled in higher education (Aslanian, 2004). As the nontraditional student population and average age of the college student continues to increase, identifying the circumstances that determine their success is important to higher education institutions and nontraditional students themselves.

The demanding and often conflicting roles of student, spouse, parent, caregiver, employee, and community member are realities that many nontraditional students must confront if they are to achieve success in their educational goals. For the purpose of this study, I defined success as the attainment of a baccalaureate degree for the nontraditional students who received their degrees from a continuing studies division within a privately endowed research institution located in the southern United States. The continuing studies unit of this institution admits students with a high school diploma or GED, which is unlike the other undergraduate divisions of this university which employ a highly selective admissions process. Undergraduate students attending this continuing studies division may choose to pursue an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree. They may also take classes leading to a certificate in applied computing systems and technology, business studies, casino resort studies, homeland security studies,

journalism, media arts, or paralegal studies. Although this study does not focus on graduate students, this continuing studies unit does offer one master's degree program that students may complete on a part-time basis. This continuing studies unit offers credit classes only; non-credit classes are not available.

The students who attend this continuing studies unit range in age from 17 to 70-plus; the average age of students is 28. These continuing education students attend college part-time, with most enrolling in two classes each semester. Of the 6449 undergraduates enrolled in the entire university in the fall semester of 2007, 1294 students attended this part-time, continuing studies division. Of these 1294 students, 810 students were 25 years old and older. This study focused on how these continuing education students were able to persist toward attainment of a baccalaureate degree while also juggling their many responsibilities and multiple roles, including student, employee, spouse, parent, caregiver, and community member/volunteer.

The research participants selected for this study were nontraditional students over the age of 30 who completed a first baccalaureate degree from this continuing studies program within the last year. In addition to being over the age of 30, the research participants selected also had other characteristics of nontraditional students, including full-time jobs, family responsibilities, and community responsibilities. I selected students over the age of 30 because these students may be more likely to have multiple roles than younger students.

Framework.

In addition to providing a history of adult education in the United States as well as providing characteristics of nontraditional students, this study provides a detailed description of the setting, a continuing studies unit of a privately endowed research institution located in the southern United States, as well as the continuing education students who attend this unit. This

study was framed by role theory, including topics of multiple roles, conflict, and support; adult development theory, including life stages, motivation, and needs, and adult learning theory and practices and how these concepts may impact nontraditional students' success toward attainment of a bachelor's degree. This study also includes a discussion of student persistence theory as it relates to nontraditional students in order to provide information on why students attending this continuing studies division chose to persist in their studies until they received their baccalaureate degree.

Nontraditional students in higher education.

As a result of the GI Bill, which provided access to higher education to returning WWII veterans, as well as the civil rights and women's movements, higher education has experienced a growth in the nontraditional student population. From 1971 to 1991, nontraditional student enrollment increased from 28% to 43% of total undergraduate students, numbering over four million students (Kasworm, 2003). During the 1990s, this population increased but represented a smaller percentage of the total undergraduate population. In 2000, over six million nontraditional undergraduate and graduate students were enrolled, which represents more than the total college enrollment in 1968 (Kasworm, 2003). As of 2008, approximately 7 million students twenty-five years and older were enrolled in institutions of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008a). As revealed earlier, this number is expected to exceed 7 million by 2010 (Aslanian, 2004).

In addition to being defined as students over the age of 24, nontraditional students may also include any student who experiences at least one of the following: being a parent, working, attending college part-time, being a high school dropout, or delaying college for at least one year (Hensley & Kinser, 2001). Further, five out of six college students are nontraditional students

who attend college part-time, commute to campus, and juggle the demands of academic commitments with family and work responsibilities (Levine & Cureton, 1998). According to Aslanian (2008), nontraditional students comprise over 40% of the total undergraduate enrollment of 15.6 million students, and 58% of these students attend college part-time.

Although this existing literature highlights the quantitative data related to nontraditional students in higher education in general, this study used a qualitative phenomenological approach in order to discover how nontraditional students were able to negotiate their many roles and obligations, in addition to those of student, in order to attain a baccalaureate degree. Of particular importance to this study is the context of this specific institution. The study participants enrolled at this elite institution are committed to the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree; they are not enrolled in, nor does this unit offer, non-credit classes. This university is referred to locally as “Harvard of the South” and its reputation as an elite university is widely accepted. It is also widely accepted that potential students consider elite colleges and universities in the United States as highly effective institutions of higher education. These institutions boast low student-faculty ratios, and employers continue to hire their graduates (Morphew, 2008). According to Morphew, they also attract well-educated parents and students who believe that an education provided by an elite university will provide a better quality of life. Karen (1990) suggests that students aspire to graduate from elite institutions because they provide better opportunities for careers and better opportunities for graduate studies. This attraction to elite universities is highlighted by the selectivity of these institutions: In 2007 Princeton rejected more than 90% of its applicants, and Stanford rejected 89.7% (Morphew).

Barriers to academic success for nontraditional students.

Once adults embark on a higher education, their success can be undermined by their many roles and responsibilities outside of the classroom (Fairchild, 2003). Most adults attend college part-time since they have so many other demands on their time. In addition to being students, nontraditional students are parents, spouses, caregivers, and employees. They are also more likely than younger students to be involved in community service and activities (Graham & Donaldson, 1996b).

Nontraditional students are highly motivated and dedicated students who attend class regularly (Fairchild, 2003). In addition to their focus on education, these students also experience the demands of most adults: careers and jobs, families, children, and community responsibilities. As the average life span continues to increase in the United States, adults who choose to attend school are also the caregivers of their aging parents and grandparents. These students strive to be successful in each of these areas, but obviously this is not an easy task.

Initially, the higher education experience can be a struggle for personal, academic, financial, and emotional survival (Bowl, 2001). Nontraditional students are fearful that their sacrifices, especially the sacrifices that their young children must endure, may be too overwhelming. They are also fearful of the academic demands of college and that they will be unable to measure up to the demands. The students in Bowl's study also had financial concerns associated with going to college since students are responsible for tuition, fees, books, and tutoring services, just to name a few.

Bowl (2001) also found that nontraditional students' family lives and responsibilities may be a focal point of their college experience and not just a minor factor. Associated with their multiple roles and responsibilities is the challenge of time management. Bowl found that in order

to juggle their many demands, nontraditional students were forced to skimp on some of their academic assignments, and sometimes poor time management led to their inability to complete their studies. According to Bowl, women, specifically, may experience barriers to success that are directly related to their gender and roles as mothers, caregivers, and even workers in occupational roles with disadvantaged career structures. Padula (1994) also found that family commitments coupled with the demands of academia created challenges and barriers to academic success for female nontraditional students. Additionally, Bowl's study found that female nontraditional students were troubled by inadequate funding, lack of childcare, and the unresponsiveness of higher education institutions to these concerns. These students also felt alienated by the institution as well as other students who did not share their concerns. They felt that they did not have adequate support and that they had to discover things on their own. Not only were their families unable to help because of their lack of knowledge of higher education, but they felt that the institutions failed to provide adequate support as well. Some nontraditional students also cite institutional barriers to their success that include inflexible class schedules, inconvenient locations, and strict course sequences (Long, 1983). Some students in Bowl's study also cited their lack of technological knowledge and experience as a barrier to their success.

The study context.

The context used for this study was a continuing studies, part-time, primarily evening division, of a privately endowed research institution located in the southern United States. For this study setting, the students attending the continuing studies division within an elite university pursue associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees, and certificates, as well as take credit classes for their own personal enrichment. In 2007-2008, this division included approximately 1300 students who commute from the local region. This part-time division includes three campus

locations plus online delivery of class instruction. In 2007, 58% of the students attending the continuing studies unit were female, and 59% were over the age of 25. The average age of students attending this division was 28. Information concerning number of children and work history of the students was not available. However, this information was researched in this study during the interviews of the participants. This information is important because this study considered nontraditional students' multiple roles such as these and how these students attending this continuing studies unit were able to negotiate these roles and barriers in order to persist toward a baccalaureate degree.

The continuing studies division also has an open admission policy where students are admitted as long as they have a high school diploma or GED. This admission criteria is very different from the highly selective admission criteria used by the other eight schools at the university. Although the students attending the continuing studies unit may enroll in any undergraduate course throughout this private university (as long as they have met any pre-requisites), only those courses offered by the continuing studies division are offered at a substantial discount, which is about one-fifth of the cost of a three-credit course at the university's other undergraduate divisions. Moreover, the tuition at this continuing studies unit is substantially higher than public colleges and universities in the geographic area, but the tuition, although higher, is competitive with other private institutions in the area.

Further, although several elite institutions throughout the United States include divisions and offer programs similar to the ones in this study, some notable differences exist. A selective university in the Midwest offers bachelor degrees and post baccalaureate certificates and non-credit professional development courses to nontraditional students who wish to attend college on a part-time basis. Like the students in this study, the students at this continuing studies unit in the

Midwest usually work full-time and attend classes in the evening. The study context enrolls approximately 400 more students than this continuing division in the Midwest. Students at both universities have the convenience of multiple campus locations; however, the study context has three campuses, including one in a neighboring state, and the continuing studies division in the Midwest has two campus locations. Students at both continuing studies divisions are admitted with a high school diploma or GED. However, the students seeking admission to the continuing studies division of this elite university in the Midwest must pay a \$50 application fee unlike the \$25 application fee required at the study context, and these students at the Midwest university must submit a personal statement with their application. A personal statement is not required for admission at the study context. The tuition rate at this continuing studies division is approximately \$500 more per course than the tuition rate at the study context. Unlike the study context which is a degree granting division of a larger university and offers its own undergraduate and graduate degree programs, the Midwest continuing studies division provides students access to undergraduate degrees granted by other divisions of the university. Further, the study context also offers associate degrees, unlike the Midwest continuing studies division which only provides access to bachelor and master degrees.

Another selective university in the Northeast offers both associate and bachelor degrees as well as non-credit courses to nontraditional students on a part-time basis. Although most of the students admitted to this program must only provide proof of high school graduation, those students who graduated from high school within the last five years must also provide test scores. The study context does not require test scores for admission. The study context also does not require an interview with potential students, but this continuing studies division in the Northeast does require that students meet with an academic advisor as part of the admission process. The

application fee for the Northeast continuing studies unit is \$70, compared to \$25 for the study context. Also, part-time students at the Northeast continuing studies division may pursue a degree through the larger university's other schools, but this continuing studies unit is not degree-granting. Part-time students at the study context may enroll in a maximum of 13 credit hours each semester, which qualifies them for full-time status for financial aid and insurance guidelines. However, the part-time students at this Northeast university may only take a maximum of 11 credit hours each semester, which may limit their access to such benefits. Further, the tuition rate for part-time students at this Northeast university is substantially higher than the tuition rate for part-time students at the study context. The tuition rate for part-time students at the study context is approximately one-fifth of the tuition rate for full-time students; however, the tuition rate for part-time students at the Northeast university is two-thirds of the tuition rate for full-time students attending the university. Also, this Northeast university enrolls approximately one half of the part-time student population at the study context.

Another selective university in the West offers extension classes to nontraditional students via several delivery methods and at several campus locations. Although some of these classes are offered for credit as well as non-credit, this continuing studies unit does not offer degrees. More than the other two continuing studies divisions discussed earlier and certainly more than the study context, the students attending this continuing studies unit in the West do not have very much association with students or services of the larger university. In contrast to students attending the study context, these students enroll more for personal or professional enrichment than for degree attainment. Students who wish to enroll in these extension classes for both credit and non-credit must have a high school diploma; however, those students who wish to apply credit classes taken through the continuing studies unit toward a degree at the larger

university must meet the admission requirements of the degree program that they wish to enter. Like the study context, students at this continuing studies unit who are also employees of the university may qualify for a tuition discount. Tuition for extension classes varies according to the program or class, but the tuition for credit classes at this continuing studies division in the West is greater than the tuition at the study context. Further, for those students who wish to apply credits toward the larger university, the application fee is \$100 compared to \$25 for the study context. Table 1 provides information about these continuing studies divisions.

Table 1

Continuing Studies Unit Comparison Characteristics

	Study Context	Midwest	Northeast	West
Enrollment	1300	900	700	NA
Credit	Y	Y	Y	Y
Non Credit	N	Y	Y	Y
Degree Granting	Y	N	N	N
Application Fee	\$25	\$50	\$70	\$100
Open Admission	Y	N	N	N
Multiple campuses	Y	Y	N	Y
Tuition Discounts	Y	N	N	Y
Tuition	Greater than study context			

Note. Y = Yes; N = No; NA = Not available

By revealing the characteristics of this continuing studies program at the study context and their students who persist toward graduation in spite of their conflicting roles, it is possible

that other institutions may be able to adopt similar programs and policies that may positively influence the persistence of their own nontraditional students. Although other elite institutions throughout the United States also offer some continuing studies programs for nontraditional students as these descriptions suggest, significant differences exist. Unlike the other continuing studies divisions described in the previous paragraphs, the study context is a degree-granting unit within the larger university and does not simply provide nontraditional students access to programs in other divisions in the university. Although the study context provides this access as well, it also creates and maintains its own unique programs. The study context offers open admission to all students whereby a high school diploma or GED is required for admission. The other continuing studies units discussed earlier may also require admission tests and additional admission standards for certain students and/or for certain programs. The application fee and tuition rate at the study context is also less than those at the other continuing studies units. Although the tuition for full-time students attending the larger university of the study context is higher than the tuition rate for similar students at the other institutions, the application fee and tuition for part-time students at the study context are comparatively less than these fees at the other continuing studies units. Also, the study context offers various tuition discount programs for part-time students that the other continuing studies units do not offer. Finally, the study context focuses on credit courses that part-time students can use toward degree attainment. The other continuing studies units offer both credit and non-credit courses for nontraditional students, but there seems to be less of a focus on degree attainment.

The literature suggests that nontraditional students have many conflicting obligations that interfere with their role of student and that may prevent them from achieving their academic goals (Graham & Donaldson, 1996a; Hensley & Kinser, 2001; Horn, Peter, and Rooney, 2002;

Kerka, 1998; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Tinto, 1987). However, the nontraditional students attending this continuing studies unit had a retention rate of 70% in 2007. Further, of the 53 students who received a bachelor's degree from the continuing studies unit of this private university in fall semester 2007, 43 or 81% were over the age of 24. These numbers suggest that the nontraditional student population enrolled in continuing studies programs at the study context may have different experiences from other nontraditional students that allow them to persist toward attainment of a baccalaureate degree. This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to discover how nontraditional students were able to receive a bachelor's degree in spite of their multiple roles and obligations outside of the classroom.

Theoretical Implications

This qualitative study of how nontraditional students managed to negotiate their multiple roles in order to achieve a bachelor's degree was framed by several theories. I discuss role theory and the conflicts that may arise as the result of multiple roles. I discuss adult development theory, including life stages, motivation, and needs, as well as adult learning theory and how the concepts associated with these theories may inform the reader about nontraditional students and their ability to be successful in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree. This study also includes a discussion of student persistence theory, most especially as it relates to nontraditional students, as a means of providing information about why these continuing education students chose to persist in their studies until they received their baccalaureate degree.

Role theory.

The basic idea of role theory, which has its roots in the social sciences of anthropology, sociology, and psychology focuses on the various activities and roles that human beings assume as we interact with others in society (Biddle, 1979). Role theory helps to explain why and how

people respond to certain situations based upon the various roles that help to define them. Role theory provides a connection between the various roles and functions with which people identify and how they interpret and respond to situations that they encounter (Fowlkes, 1987). For example, those nontraditional students who maintain and identify with multiple roles, including spouse, parent, employee, and caregiver, may also share a similar view about the value of receiving a baccalaureate degree. In addition to the usefulness of role theory in integrating the social sciences of anthropology, sociology, and psychology, I purport that role theory may also contribute to the field of education as well especially as it pertains to nontraditional students enrolled in continuing studies programs and their many role obligations. Role theory may contribute to the field of higher education by informing us about the behaviors associated with nontraditional students as they pursue their goal of a baccalaureate degree while also navigating their many roles.

Adult development theory.

Adult development theory uses adults' experiences as a foundation for their actions and further posits that adults generally have a complex cognitive component that is rich with knowledge and experience, and this level of cognition allows them to connect new information with their previous experiences (Donaldson, 1999). Donaldson also suggests that adults also use their previous successes and failures as a way to monitor their learning approaches, study habits, resources, and motivation, and once adults begin their college careers, interactions between their everyday environment and their classroom experiences influence their cognition. Based on these assertions of adult development, I investigated how this theory of adult development relates to the experiences and the decision-making processes of these nontraditional students. Specifically, I reveal what role adult development and the characteristics associated with adult development

have on these nontraditional students' ability to manage their conflicting roles in order to achieve a bachelor's degree in this continuing studies program. By understanding the experiences of this specific nontraditional student population, the reader is able to identify and comprehend the relationship between the students' actions and adult development theory.

Adult learning theory.

Malcolm Knowles' (1970) use of the term andragogy as a method of engaging students in the learning process and experience forms a basis for this adult learning theory in the twentieth century and beyond. Knowles' description of adult learning theory provides a framework for discovering and explaining the motivational factors that encourage adults to participate in higher education in spite of their many personal responsibilities and role obligations. Further, Kasworm and Blowers (1994) found that the adult life context influenced learning as well as gave adults a way to express their learning, and these learning activities may be influenced by the interaction of the students' various roles of parent, spouse, employee, and student. Nontraditional students' life experiences not only define who they are in their many roles, but may also provide a foundation for their learning experiences at this continuing studies unit.

Student persistence theory.

Because nontraditional students typically have more responsibilities outside of the classroom than their younger counterparts, one may reason that these students' ability to focus on their studies is limited, and therefore, their performance is negatively affected. Tinto's (1987) theory of departure acknowledges that for many students, including continuing education students, college is one of many responsibilities that they must balance in their lives. Using this theoretical concept as a lens with which to view this study of nontraditional students enrolled in this particular continuing education setting and their experiences related to their attainment of a

bachelor's degree, I reveal how these students were able to successfully balance their conflicting demands when the student departure and persistence research indicates that this achievement is difficult at best.

I argue that due to nontraditional students' determination, maturity, and motivation to realize their educational goals, nontraditional students' focus on their education may be even greater than that of some of younger students. Adults use their prior experiences to evaluate their social and psychological progress as they reflect on their college experiences. These social and psychological dimensions are the social conditions, values, and psychological motivations that influence adult students' decisions to remain in college (Donaldson, 1999).

Moreover, I investigated the idea that the personal responsibilities and many roles and obligations outside of the classroom that the nontraditional students who attend this continuing studies division experience may act as a motivator rather than a deterrent in completing their degree requirements. According to Cross (1981), nontraditional students' persistence and success in college is related to their commitment to their role as student, and this level of commitment is especially important given their many other competing roles and obligations.

Statement of the Problem

As reported by Kasworm (2003), for the past 30 years nontraditional students, typically defined as those students over the age of 24, have represented between one third to one half of the undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States. These students are a significant population within higher education today; however, their success can be undermined by their many roles and responsibilities outside of the classroom (Fairchild, 2003).

According to Bean and Metzner (1996) and some adult development theories, unlike traditional age students (those between the ages of 18 and 24), nontraditional students may be more affected by their environment, including their multiple roles, various responsibilities, and the daily tasks of working and caring for a family than by factors associated with social integration. When entering higher education, many female nontraditional students experience anxiety and doubt in their academic abilities (Home, 1993). They doubt their study and writing skills as well as their knowledge of technology and their ability to juggle their many demands (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Carney-Crompton and Tan also found that the age of children under the care of a female nontraditional student may affect her success as a student: the younger the children the more likely a nontraditional female student will suspend her studies.

This study revealed the influence of conflicting role obligations, such as parent, spouse, employee, caregiver, and community member/volunteer, on the ability of nontraditional students to attain a baccalaureate degree at this continuing studies division. Specifically, this study revealed how nontraditional students were able to navigate their many roles, as well as the obstacles and challenges related to these conflicting roles, in order to achieve a bachelor's degree. This study was investigated through the primary lens of role theory in addition to adult development theory, adult learning theory, and student persistence theory.

Significance.

Although research is available on the factors related to the persistence of traditional age college students, there is much less research available that focuses on how nontraditional students navigate the conditions created by their conflicting role obligations. Little research other than a drop-out rate has focused solely on nontraditional students. Further, no model is available to guide attrition research on nontraditional students in higher education institutions, and few, if

any, qualitative studies have investigated the factors that may influence nontraditional students' success in higher education.

Further, there is little research on educational degree attainment for nontraditional students. Among nontraditional students who enrolled in 1989-1990 with the intention of receiving a baccalaureate degree, only 31% had earned one by 1994, compared to 54% of their younger counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002a). For those nontraditional students who enrolled in 1995-1996 with the intention of receiving a baccalaureate degree, the percentage did not change significantly; only 30.5% had earned a bachelor's degree by 2001. This number, however, increased to 58% for younger students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). When considering their somewhat typical part-time status as well as other characteristics of nontraditional students including multiple roles and responsibilities, this figure may not tell the whole story. Since many nontraditional students are enrolled in institutions of higher education on a part-time basis, degree attainment may take longer than four to six years which is a usual criteria for determining degree completion for traditional age students. Consequently, degree attainment based on years of study may be a difficult item to measure for nontraditional students. This study focused on nontraditional student success as defined by the attainment of a bachelor's degree and how multiple roles and obligations may affect this phenomenon of degree attainment. This study did not define degree attainment according to a four to six year time frame since that criteria may not be very accurate for nontraditional students who drop in and out of college. Instead, this study focused on persistence (sometimes many years) toward baccalaureate degree attainment of nontraditional students in spite of their conflicting role obligations. Added to this focus is the specific environment of this continuing studies unit within a privately endowed research institution. This university is a top-50 institution

in the nation, and since the students enrolled in this continuing studies program have a fairly impressive retention rate of 70% despite their various role obligations, the practices of this division (unlike the practices of some of the other continuing studies units at elite universities discussed earlier), such as providing a truly open admissions process for all students, providing access to courses throughout the entire university, offering a significantly reduced tuition rate and several tuition discount programs, and possessing its own degree programs and degree-granting capability, may influence nontraditional students' ability to persist toward degree attainment. In turn, some of these practices may be duplicated at other institutions, selective or not, in order to benefit the retention and persistence of other nontraditional students who are also struggling with multiple roles and obligations.

For traditional age students, there is evidence of the benefits of the interactions between the students and between the students and faculty; however, due to their conflicting role obligations, nontraditional students often experience difficulty in becoming involved in campus activities (Donaldson, 1999). Nontraditional students often choose to enroll in college as a result of work or life transitions, which are different reasons than traditional students. Further, many adults experience low self confidence in their academic abilities, poor study skills, and fears associated to returning to college. However, in spite of these concerns as well as their lack of active participation in campus life, nontraditional students attending this continuing studies unit still managed to achieve success similar to that of traditional age students.

In spite of conflicting role obligations or perhaps because of various role obligations, as this study revealed, many nontraditional students are successful in reaching their academic goals. Many adults choose to pursue higher education because they view it as a wise investment of their time, money, and effort (Fairchild, 2003). Many adults also look to higher education as a means

to acquire needed skills for the job market (Ely, 1997). The economic impact of nontraditional student enrollment in college is especially relevant given the current downturn in the United States economy as well as the poor economic outlook worldwide. In the fall of 2008, the nation's economy was severely impacted by the struggles of Wall Street and the stock market that many attribute to the collapse of the housing market. As a result, many retirement portfolios were also negatively affected by the worldwide financial crisis. Additionally, unemployment in the United States also rose, and the duration of the economic downturn has not been easy to calculate. Consequently, many Americans may turn to higher education during this economic crisis in order to acquire new skills for a changing economy. It is very likely that these new students will be nontraditional students with many roles, obligations, and fears as they embark on new challenges in a difficult economic environment.

The purpose of this study was to investigate qualitatively how nontraditional students managed to negotiate the demands of multiple roles in order to attain a bachelor's degree. The average age of students attending this continuing studies division is 28, and these students attend college part-time because most are full-time employees with various other roles. This continuing studies program was selected for the context of this study since most of the students attending this division are nontraditional students with multiple roles. Moreover, this continuing studies unit uses several practices, such as a truly open admission policy, discounted tuition (compared to full-time tuition), tuition discount programs, access to degree programs at other schools within the university, and the ability to grant degrees, that other continuing studies divisions do not offer to nontraditional students at all or to the extent that the study context offers them. The findings of this study revealed that the practices of the continuing studies division in this study may contribute to the success of nontraditional students.

This study also investigated what motivated nontraditional students to embark on a bachelor's degree at this stage in their lives given their multiple roles. This study attempted to reveal the obstacles and challenges related to multiple roles that nontraditional students confronted and overcame in order to persist toward completion of a baccalaureate degree and what, if any, support systems they had that may be related to their multiple roles. For example, does a spouse provide support as well as a conflicting role? Moreover, this study revealed how nontraditional students enrolled in a continuing studies unit within a private university were able to attain a bachelor's degree while also negotiating the demands of their multiple roles, including the roles of student, employee, parent, spouse, caregiver, and community member.

Research questions.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do nontraditional students enrolled within a unique university context of a continuing studies division manage to negotiate the demands of multiple roles in order to attain a baccalaureate degree?
2. What motivates nontraditional students to embark on a bachelor's degree at this stage in their lives?
3. What obstacles and challenges related to their multiple roles must nontraditional students overcome in order to persist toward completion of a bachelor's degree?
4. What support systems do nontraditional students have as a result of their multiple roles? For example, does a spouse provide support as well as a conflicting role for the nontraditional student?

Overview of the Manuscript

This chapter provides a definition and description of the nontraditional student population in higher education in the United States today. Chapter one also provides an overview of the statement of the problem concerning nontraditional students and the challenges involved in balancing their role obligations with their lives as college students. The reader is also introduced to the literature that will frame this study as well as the significance and importance of this issue within higher education today.

In chapter two, the literature review provides a historical perspective of adult education in the United States from the eighteenth century to the present. This analysis also includes the historical background and description of the continuing studies unit as well as characteristics of nontraditional students. Role theory, adult development theory, and adult learning theory also frame this study. The review of the literature also includes student persistence theory in higher education especially as it relates to nontraditional students.

Chapter three describes the research methodology used to conduct the study. I used the qualitative research method of phenomenology where nontraditional students' experiences were studied. I conducted individual, in-depth interviews with ten nontraditional students who were recent graduates of a baccalaureate degree program at a continuing studies division within a privately endowed, research university located in the southern United States.

Chapter four describes the findings of this qualitative study. After conducting the interviews and transcribing and coding the communication, I report on why and how nontraditional students attending this continuing studies unit were able to persist toward their goal of an undergraduate degree in spite of the barriers they experienced; namely, their conflicting role obligations.

Chapter five provides a discussion of the findings, draws conclusions, and makes recommendations. The discussion draws on the literature related to nontraditional students as well as role theory, adult development theory, adult learning theory, and student persistence theory as well as the historical background of both adult education in the United States and this specific continuing studies unit. The discussion reveals how these theories impact and inform nontraditional students' desire to persist in higher education and achieve their baccalaureate degree in spite of their many roles and responsibilities.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

In this research study, the literature review begins with a historical perspective of adult education in the United States followed by a brief history of the setting for this study, a continuing studies division of a privately endowed research institution. My goal is to provide the reader with a historical context of both adult education in general as well as the specific nontraditional student population attending this continuing studies division. I will then address the topic of nontraditional students and their contribution and relevance to higher education and this study.

Following the review of the literature of nontraditional students, I review the literature pertaining to role theory. Although role theory has its roots in such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, and psychology, I purport that role theory may also be useful in the field of education and this study in order to shed light on nontraditional students and their ability to cope with their many conflicting roles and demands on their time.

Following the review of role theory literature, I review adult development theory literature in order to inform the reader about the needs and developmental stages of adults. Included in this review of adult development theory is a section about the concept of motivation and needs and their relationship to adult development.

Following this review of the literature of adult development theory, I include a review of the literature pertaining to adult learning theories, including best practices for adult learning. This information will help to inform the reader about what type of learning environment and learning processes are beneficial to adult learners given their stage of development and life

experiences. This information will also provide insight into the connections, if any, between adult learning practices of those attending this continuing studies unit and their ability to navigate their many obligations outside of the classroom.

Finally, I include a section on student persistence theory as it relates to nontraditional students in higher education. Since current literature asserts that nontraditional students may drop out of college or stop out for at least a limited time due to their many responsibilities outside of the classroom, this information may help to uncover under what circumstances nontraditional students are able to succeed in spite of these obstacles.

Historical Perspective of Adult Education in the United States

In order to understand and appreciate the role of the increasing population of nontraditional students in higher education today, it is important to understand the history of adults in higher education. Additionally, for the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the history and setting of this continuing studies division. Once the reader has an understanding of this historical context, the literature will further inform and frame this study of the continuing education students attending a part-time, continuing studies unit within a major university.

Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Following American independence in the eighteenth century, the goal of an enlightened citizenry was stressed more than ever; however, access to educational opportunities was still determined by race, gender, class, and religion (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). Voluntary associations were popular, but these associations promoted individual improvement rather than social reform. Then, in the nineteenth century literacy was increasing due to popular reading materials available in libraries. Protestant lectures were also popular, but they were not open to

slaves. Agricultural societies, as well as mechanics, apprentices, and mercantile libraries, also flourished and promoted scientific innovations.

At the college level, adult education began in the early nineteenth century when older students enrolled in American universities as degree candidates (Harrington, 1977). Even at this time, men—and later women—sometimes interrupted their education in order to earn money before continuing with their education. Then, adults returned to school after they were financially able to do so. This economic decision to attend college was evident in the nineteenth century just as it is evident today. By the middle 1800s, industrialization and immigration led to the creation of additional adult education programs, including professional traveling lectures.

Vocational and English language programs were also popular as were lyceums, informal programs that promoted values and avoided controversial topics (at least until the coming of the Civil War.) Lyceums sought to provide education to the general public by promoting public schools and relied upon college teachers as lecturers (Harrington, 1977). Although education was available to women in the 1800s, it was limited to occupations such as teaching, midwifery, or nursing. Women were more involved in social movements, such as the abolition of slavery, than in formal education (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994).

Until the Civil War, higher education in the United States, was focused on low-enrollment and limited curriculum of liberal arts colleges (Harrington, 1977). As an industrialized economy emerged in the United States throughout the nineteenth century, many more informal learning opportunities surfaced. After the Civil War, the impact of science and the industrial boom led to a shift from a liberal philosophy of education, which can be traced to colonial times and the liberal arts curriculum at Harvard University, to one of a more progressive and pragmatic education (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Following the Civil War, older men and

women enrolled in typical degree programs along with younger students. However, most of these older students enrolled in summer sessions, evening colleges, correspondence, and extension courses in order to accommodate the part-time students, many of whom were similar to the nontraditional learners of today (Harrington). (This characteristic of adult education in the United States is evident in the description of this continuing studies unit which follows this section of the literature review.) In the 1890s, university extension programs for adults developed and combined both vocational and cultural education. Information was disseminated to the general public through books, magazines, newspapers, libraries, museums, and world fairs. Liberal culture and scientific knowledge became fine-tuned as evident in the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service which provided scientific education in agriculture and replaced the lectures of the farmers' institutes. The industrial welfare movement was corporations' response to providing education and training to untrained immigrants and migrants from rural areas (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994).

As the United States grew and prospered, many groups looked to education as a means of improving their status. The idea that role systems of family and work involve contradictory commitments is related to the popular ideas associated with biological categories of men and women in the United States during the industrial revolution (Fowlkes, 1987). This historical example of role conflict and its relationship to adult education is a cornerstone of this study, and still may be a significant factor associated with adult students almost 200 years later. The cultural norms of the nineteenth century segregated the world of work for women and men by assigning women to homemaking activities while men participated in the competitive world of work. Women were considered morally superior to men but intellectually inferior to men. Due to their biology, women were considered to be better suited for a family role than a role outside of the

family. Initially, women were educated to perform utilitarian tasks to prepare them for the work as wives and mothers. Then, by the end of the nineteenth century, the first graduates from the Seven Sister colleges provided proof that women were intellectually equal to men (Fowlkes, 1987).

Various segments of society in the United States looked to education as a means of advancement. Women organized to develop their independence and provide their worth to society; farmers and industrial workers organized to combat corporate domination. Education of African Americans advanced through the Freedmen's Bureau and then through African Americans' own efforts. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was formed to teach farming and homemaking to Native Americans (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994).

Twentieth century and beyond.

Eventually, community centers and public and private educational agencies were committed to the cultural advancement of the immigrant workers. In 1915, the National University Extension Association was created as summer sessions, evening colleges, and extension divisions were becoming increasingly popular in the United States (Harrington, 1977). Adult education was also important to the war effort as the army educated and trained soldiers for World War I (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994).

Following World War I, there was a resurgence of interest in the liberal arts philosophy, and the American Association for Adult Education, supported by the Carnegie Corporation, promoted adult education as an important tool for life-long learning in the changing world of the 1920s and 1930s. The Carnegie Corporation also saw adult education as a method of fostering communication among experts in diverse fields (Kett, 1994). In 1924, at the urging of the Carnegie Corporation, the American Association for Adult Education was established and

performed as a consultant to the corporation (Kett). With the advent of radio and film, information was even more readily available to the masses. Adult education grew from a means of personal enrichment and advancement to a means of addressing and solving the religious, social, and economic issues of the day. For example, the League of Women Voters was formed to address the new rights of women in the political process. Religious groups also organized to create learning programs for various groups (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994.)

As a result of the Depression and President Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s, the federal government adopted an active role in adult education. Structured programs in literacy, homemaking, and vocational education were made available to those citizens who previously had not taken advantage of educational programs. World War II required industrial production and military training which demanded new levels of educational support. Additionally, the military provided continuing education opportunities as a result of the GI Bill which provided access to higher education to returning WWII veterans as well as implementing procedures for accrediting military training. The GI Bill also showed that older students were capable of earning a college degree if they were given adequate support (Harrington, 1977).

Following World War II, special degrees for adults (SDA) became popular in the United States (Harrington, 1977). The special degree movement was supported by the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults as well as the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation's Fund for Adult Education. By the end of the 1960s, the special degree for adults was successful in over 200 institutions across the country. The university in this study was one of these institutions. However, some thought that the special curriculum would be considered something less than regular university standards. Others thought the curriculum was too concentrated in the liberal arts to provide the career preparation that many students want

(Harrington). Interestingly, almost 50 years later, this continuing studies division still must cope with just these issues.

In the middle twentieth century, television became the most popular media format for informal learning. In the 1950s, the Ford Foundation created the Fund for Adult Education which provided money for experiments in liberal adult education. In the 1960s, the Great Society programs and the emergence of a global economy led to an unprecedented quest for knowledge. Education became an integral component of all segments of society. In the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement and the women's rights movement used education to further their respective goals. Even the Catholic Second Vatican Council focused on the education of adults. In the 1970s, many colleges introduced interdisciplinary masters of liberal studies degrees which were very popular with adult students. However, liberal education has lessened somewhat in popularity in the United States due to the movement toward vocational education and the behaviorist philosophy which emphasizes objectives and outcomes. Throughout the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty first century, adult education continues to be a focal point in politics, economics, religion, and social reform (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994).

Description of the study context.

The university in this study is a highly selective, privately endowed research institution located in the southern United States. The university, including the continuing studies unit, which is the part-time, primarily evening division of the university, is regionally accredited by SACS, the Southern Commission on Colleges and Schools. This university dates back to 1834 and is one of the top-50 universities in the nation. Over 50% of the full-time undergraduate students (not those enrolled in continuing studies programs) enrolled in this university are from geographic areas outside of the southern United States, and the tuition and fees for full-time

undergraduate students is \$36,610.00 for the 2007-2008 school year (not including summer). This cost of attendance is competitive with some of the ivy league institutions located in the northeast United States. By comparison, the tuition rate for students attending the part-time, continuing studies division for the 2007-2008 school year is about \$7,000.

The continuing studies unit, the part-time division of this research university, dates back to the 1890s when it began offering adult extension courses. In 1942, this division began offering credit courses for students wishing to attend college on a part-time basis. Unlike the highly selective admission policy for full-time students attending this university, the part-time division has an open admission policy where students are admitted with a high school diploma or GED. This division also offers classes during the day, in the evenings, on Saturday mornings, and online. This continuing studies division also operates three campuses, two campuses are located within 15 miles of each other. The other is located in a neighboring state, about 90 miles away. Although this division offers one graduate degree program in the liberal arts, most students are undergraduates. Most students are enrolled in baccalaureate degree programs; however, others are also enrolled in associate degree programs and certificate programs. Still others are not degree seeking and are simply taking credit courses for their personal or professional enrichment. The continuing studies unit offers degrees in applied computing and technology, business studies, casino resort studies, homeland security studies, journalism, media arts, paralegal studies, and liberal arts. At the time of this study, over 1300 students are enrolled in undergraduate part-time degree programs across all three campuses and online. This continuing studies unit offers credit courses only; non-credit courses are not available.

The tuition rate for the classes offered to part-time students through continuing studies is also substantially less (approximately five times less) than the full-time tuition rate for full-time

students attending the university; for the 2007-2008 academic year, tuition was \$263 per credit hour. This continuing studies unit also has several tuition discount programs in which its students may participate. These programs focus on financial incentives and include a 50% tuition discount for senior citizens (those over the age of 60) and teachers employed in the area. There is also a 50% tuition discount for those students who work for certain agencies, including city employees and some federal organizations. Active-duty military personnel and their spouses are also eligible for a 50% tuition discount. In addition to these tuition discount programs, the university also offers a tuition waiver for up to two classes each semester for those students who are also employees of the university. Another incentive for students enrolled in continuing studies programs is that they may apply for tuition reimbursement for their seventh class once they complete six classes. Federal financial aid is also available for qualified students.

This continuing studies unit allows students to receive college credit for military service (up to 12 semester credits) and for law enforcement training (12 semester credits). This division also allows students to receive up to 15 semester credits for CLEP, the College-Level Examination Program. However, in order for students to receive CLEP credit, they must score in the 75th percentile.

In 2007, 58% of students enrolled in continuing studies programs were female; 59% were over the age of 25 and the average age was 28. Of 1143 students who chose to respond to a question about their ethnicity included in the application for admission, 57% of the students attending the part-time division were Caucasian; 27% were African American; 6% were Hispanic, and 3% were Asian. Although figures are not available concerning the graduation rate for part-time students enrolled in continuing studies programs, the retention rate for students attending from fall 2007 to spring 2008 was almost 70%. Due to the frequent lapses in

nontraditional student attendance at the context study, accurate graduation rates are difficult to calculate. Unlike full-time students attending the university, the students attending the part-time division are from the local community. In fact, 72% are residents of the local community. They are commuter students, and many are employees of the university. Most students take an average of two classes each semester, and the part-time division operates on a trimester system where students are admitted in fall, spring, and summer. Many students attend classes in the evenings; however, some daytime classes are available where part-time students are enrolled in classes along with full-time students attending the university.

Institutional Prestige

As described in the previous section, the study context is a degree-granting division of the only top-50 institution of higher education in the Gulf South United States. The university was established in 1834 and has a long history and reputation of academic excellence. In addition to offering undergraduate degree programs, the university has a medical school as well as a law school and boasts many distinguished alumni. The participants in a study by Baker and Brown (2007) found prestigious institutions to be awe-inspiring rather than intimidating; they also found that the age of the universities evoked feelings of history, academic excellence, and tradition, and these historic universities impressed nontraditional students and made them more desirable than some other “younger” institutions. Elite institutions had earned credibility over the years; they no longer had to prove themselves to the community, and the nontraditional students in Baker and Brown’s study recalled others who had gone to prestigious universities, and they aspired to do so as well. Nontraditional students were also drawn to these elite universities because of the reputation of their various academic departments and specific programs.

Although the part-time division which is the setting for this study has an open admission policy where students may be admitted with a high school diploma or GED, the full-time division has a highly selective admission process. Those who are admitted to the full-time division are typically in the top 10% of their high school graduating class. Consequently, the students attending the continuing studies division have the opportunity to share college classes with the brightest minds in the country and the world. Many nontraditional students consider this ability to attend one of the most prestigious universities in the country with some of the most intelligent students from around the world a chance-in-a-lifetime opportunity that they would not encounter elsewhere in this region of the country.

High expectations are also associated with institutional prestige, and the nontraditional students attending this continuing studies division expect a quality education. Faculty are expected to be experts in research, teaching, and service, and students are expected to set goals and achieve those goals (Scott & Trobe, 1995). Because most of the full-time students who are admitted to this university also graduate from this university, part-time continuing studies students often adopt these same expectations of degree attainment since the academic culture of this university promotes and expects student success. However, high expectations are not the only factors that lead to student persistence. Motivation and experience, in this case the motivation and experience of nontraditional students, as well as a supportive educational climate are also instrumental for high expectations to produce results (Scott & Trobe). Each of these elements can be found in this prestigious higher education institution, which was the setting for this study.

Selective institutions also boast low student-faculty ratios which enable interaction between faculty and students, advanced technology, and state-of-the art facilities (Morphew,

2008). As a result of these attractive attributes, nontraditional students are drawn to prestigious institutions. Unlike lower-tiered institutions which are underfinanced in comparison to elite institutions, selective institutions are often able to spend more money per student, and they attract nontraditional students who look to higher education as providing access to a better quality of life (Morphew). Moreover, a student's willingness to pay for their college education coupled with their ability to pay affects their college choice (Hu & Hossler, 2000). In the case of the study context which offers several tuition discount programs and financial incentives for nontraditional students, these students are able to meet the financial obligations associated with this elite institution.

According to the study by Baker and Brown (2007) concerning institutional choice, nontraditional students did not equate elitism and prestige with exclusion and snobbery. This finding was surprising since many traditional or elite institutions are typically accused of alienating nontraditional students (Baker and Brown). These students desired to attend what they perceived to be the best institutions. Further, they were not intimidated by the traditional age students. Instead, they believed that their own unique experiences, academic and others, qualified them to attend just as much as other students. They were driven to succeed, and they had confidence that they would succeed (Baker and Brown). Each of these factors associated with institutional prestige may also influence nontraditional students' persistence at these institutions.

Summary

As revealed in this historical perspective of adult education in the United States, over the years, even centuries, adults have desired access to higher education in order to learn new skills, to advance in their chosen profession, or simply to expand their knowledge. In order to meet the needs of these nontraditional students, various organizations, including the Ford and Carnegie

foundations as well as the federal government have initiated programs to help adults achieve their educational goals.

These organizations have also realized that in order for their mission of educating nontraditional students to be productive, they also need to consider the multiple roles and obligations that these students have as well as their learning and developmental needs and even challenges. In order to address these concerns and to hopefully alleviate some of the barriers to success that can result in nontraditional student departure from higher education before receiving a baccalaureate degree, this continuing studies unit has initiated a variety of programs, such as flexible class schedules and tuition discounts. The following section on nontraditional students reveals the characteristics, barriers to success, as well as the reasons that these students choose to participate in higher education.

Nontraditional Students

In addition to this historical context, the reader must have an understanding of nontraditional students, including their role in higher education today, their needs, and their characteristics. Nontraditional students are typically defined as those over the age of 24 who choose to enroll in college for diverse reasons including social, economic, and cultural reasons (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). This information is especially helpful for higher education administrators as they strive to meet the needs of their students and provide applicable services. Although most nontraditional students tend to be enrolled in non-university settings (Schuetze & Slowey), this study focused on nontraditional students who were graduates of a part-time, continuing studies division of private research institution, and unlike some highly selective universities that offer very limited access to nontraditional students, this unit offers open

admission (high school diploma or general equivalency is required for admission) to nontraditional students who wish to pursue part-time studies.

Characteristics.

According to Kasworm (1993), there are four categories of nontraditional students:

(a) students who enter or re-enter higher education with a previous break in their formal education experience; (b) students who represent a specific chronological age, typically those over the age of 24; (c) students who enter higher education on the basis of their life experiences; and (d) students who previously completed a higher education program and now re-enter for a professional credential or to pursue a second area of interest.

Although the term nontraditional student has many definitions, age and part-time status are common defining characteristics (Bean & Metzner, 1996). Students over 24 years of age, often referred to as nontraditional students, are likely to have needs and interests that younger students do not share often because they are attending college after having other life experiences, including careers and families. Nontraditional students may have less interest in traditional campus programs, services, and activities than younger students; however, they may find support in academic programs that build upon their experiences and coursework taken at other institutions (El-Khawas, 1996). According to Cross (1979), adults favor variety in learning methods, and many indicate that they prefer something other than lectures. Instead, they prefer action-oriented methods of teaching and learning. They are pragmatic learners in that they want to immediately apply learning to their everyday lives rather than focus on the theoretical component of learning.

The needs of nontraditional students often intersect with the needs of part time students since 72% of nontraditional students are also attending college part time (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2002b). In 2005, of the 17 million students enrolled in college, over six million attended college part-time (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008b). In 1992, 55% or 7 million students were over 21 years old and 41% or 5.1 million students were over 24 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002b). As of 2004, 6.9 million students age 25 years and older are enrolled in institutions of higher education (Aslanian, 2004). In 2010, approximately 7.3 million students over 25 years of age are expected to be enrolled in higher education. According to the report of the National Center for Education Statistics, a nontraditional student has one or more of the following characteristics: (a) delays enrollment into postsecondary education, (b) attends a postsecondary institution part-time for at least part of the academic year, (c) works full-time while enrolled, (d) is financially independent, (e) has dependents other than a spouse, (f) is a single parent, (g) does not have a high school diploma. Horn (1996) considered students to be “minimally nontraditional” if they have only one nontraditional characteristic, “moderately nontraditional” if they have two or three of these characteristics, and “highly nontraditional” if they have four or more. In 1999 to 2000, 73% of all undergraduates nationwide had one or more of these characteristics. During the same time period, 27% of all undergraduates were traditional. At both public 2-year and private for-profit institutions, 89% of the students were at least minimally nontraditional. Conversely, 50% of students enrolled at private not-for-profit 4-year institutions were at least minimally nontraditional (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002b). Between 1992-1993 and 1999-2000, the percentages of students who delayed enrollment, worked full-time, had dependents, and were single parents all increased while the percentage of undergraduates attending part-time decreased (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002b). These numbers suggest that students attending all types of higher education institutions are becoming increasingly

nontraditional. Associated with this growing trend, and even before the most recent increase in nontraditional students, is the fact that college students, both traditional and nontraditional, have at least some nontraditional characteristics as defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002b) and Horn. As a result, it makes sense for higher education institutions to consider this trend toward nontraditional characteristics when planning programs and services for their students.

Barriers.

Once adults embark on a higher education, their success can be undermined by their many roles and responsibilities outside of the classroom (Fairchild, 2003). According to Tinto (1987), college is one of many responsibilities that nontraditional students must balance in their lives. In addition to being students, nontraditional students are parents, spouses, caregivers, and employees. They are also more likely than younger students to be involved in community service and activities (Graham & Donaldson, 1996b).

Nontraditional students often enroll in college as a result of a life-changing event or as a result of an evaluation of their life goals (Justice & Dornan, 2001). Also, many adult students lack confidence in their academic abilities as a result of their prior experiences in college (Donaldson, 1999). Weil (1986) found that entry into college can be a shock for some nontraditional students which is accompanied by a sense of personal powerlessness. Although some students receive initial support from their families, their family members are often unfamiliar with the higher education system, and these nontraditional students feel that they are on their own (Weil). Some students are unfamiliar with the demands of college work, and they fail to realize that time spent in the classroom is only a part of the academic experience. They also must make time for assignments outside of the classroom setting. They are fearful of the

academic demands of college, and they are fearful that they will be unable to measure up to the demands (Bowl, 2001). Women, specifically, may experience barriers to success that are directly related to their gender and roles as mothers, caregivers, and even workers in occupational roles with disadvantaged career structures (Bowl). Padula (1994) also found that family commitments coupled with the demands of academia created challenges and barriers to academic success for female nontraditional students.

Cross (1979) found that older students view higher education as an activity that is more socially acceptable for younger students, and that being older is a barrier to education. According to Benshoff and Lewis (1992), returning students may experience limited social acceptance and lack of support from family members when their role as student detracts from their other roles and obligation. As a result, these barriers increase a nontraditional student's decision to drop out of college. Further, nontraditional students lack the social interaction with faculty and other students due to their part-time status and their commuter status (Bean & Metzner, 1996).

According to Cross (1979), the obstacles to adult learning can be categorized into situational, dispositional, and institutional factors. Situational barriers refer to a student's situation in life at any given time, such as lack of time due to family and work responsibilities. Tinto's (1987) model of student departure addresses situational factors by explaining that students' external responsibilities may interfere with their academic responsibilities, and because of this conflict, nontraditional students may choose to drop out. Cost of attendance can also be considered a situational barrier for nontraditional students. For lower income students, they have the time but not the money; for higher income students, they have the money but not the time. Dispositional barriers refer to attitudes about learning and the student's perceptions about themselves as learners, such as lack of confidence in their academic abilities. Institutional

barriers refer to those barriers caused by the institution. Some nontraditional students cite inflexible class schedules, inconvenient locations, and strict course sequences as institutional barriers to their success in college (Long, 1983). Institutional barriers can be categorized into five major areas: (a) scheduling problems, such as offering classes at times that conflict with nontraditional students' work and/or family obligations; (b) problems with location or transportation, such as offering classes at locations that are far from the student's home or workplace; (c) lack of interesting or relevant courses, including those that students do not think will assist them with getting a better job; (d) problems related to attendance, time requirements, or course requirements, for example, strict class requirements that do not allow for excused absences due to nontraditional students' obligations outside of the classroom; and (e) lack of information about programs and procedures, for example, institutions that do not clearly outline information about course requirements, program objectives, or financial aid procedures (Cross).

However, Cross (1979) suggests that situational barriers, such as nontraditional students' multiple roles and the responsibilities and time constraints that are a result of these roles, offer the greatest obstacles for nontraditional students, which was the topic of this study. Cross further posits that time constraints, family responsibilities (especially for women), and job responsibilities (especially for men) are some of the greatest obstacles for nontraditional students.

Reasons to enroll.

Historically, younger students decide to enroll in college in order to seek credentials that will help them in a future career. Students 25-45 years of age typically enroll in order to gain professional training for career advancement, and those 50 and older usually view college as a leisure activity (Cross, 1979). Unlike nontraditional students, traditional age students typically

come from a family background that includes previous experiences in higher education, and this background helps to inform traditional students of the expectations of college (Laing, Chao, & Robinson, 2005). However, according to Cook and Leckey (1999), nontraditional students have an inaccurate idea of how much study time or time outside of the classroom is involved in the college experience. Further, not unlike some traditional age students, nontraditional students rely on their educational experiences in high school to guide them in college, and this can lead to false expectations.

Generally speaking, those adults who embark on a baccalaureate degree believe that higher education will, in the long run, prove beneficial to themselves and their families so they are willing to sacrifice their time in the short run. According to Bean and Metzner (1996), economic factors, including the desire for better pay and better jobs, have contributed to the increased enrollment of nontraditional students in higher education baccalaureate degree programs. In addition to career growth potential, many adults enter college due to a significant life event, such as a divorce, death of a spouse or loved one, or transition or a re-evaluation of their goals (Justice& Dornan, 2001).

Socioeconomic status is also a factor that is related to nontraditional students' participation in higher education. Lower income adults are likely to pursue education that will lead to new job skills whereas higher income adults are more interested in job advancement in their current careers. Low educational attainment, low job status, and low income are related to a decrease in educational participation. Further, women with a high school education are less likely than similarly educated men to participate in adult education; however, women with some college are more likely to participate than their male counterparts (Cross, 1979).

Two trends in the national economy have led to an increased number of nontraditional students attending institutions of higher education: an increase in women entering the work force after devoting several years to child rearing and the educational needs of American workers (El-Khawas, 1996). Additionally, the current worldwide financial and economic crisis may likely affect nontraditional student college enrollment for the next few years. As unemployment and underemployment in the United States continue to rise, concerned citizens may choose to return to school in order to update their credentials or seek new areas of employment. Even though attending college means adding another role for these students, they may be willing to make the sacrifice because the benefit of finding employment and improving their financial status is worth the cost involved.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2002b) provides the following data: Among traditional students, 67% worked while also attending school; 30% did not work. However, only 3% of traditional students considered themselves primarily employees; the rest considered themselves primarily students. Conversely, 67% of highly nontraditional students and 37% of moderately nontraditional students considered themselves primarily employees. Overall, both traditional and nontraditional undergraduates (55%) thought that working helped them with their coursework; however, highly nontraditional students were slightly more likely than other undergraduates to believe that working helped them with their coursework. This information suggests that nontraditional students may be better able to navigate the barriers associated with completing their degree requirements than younger, more traditional students. By interviewing nontraditional students who attended this continuing studies division and who had multiple roles but were still able to successfully complete their baccalaureate degree, I hoped to gain insight into this phenomenon of how these students were able to navigate these barriers.

However, the National Center for Education Statistics (2002b) report also found that working can interfere with school as well. Undergraduates who considered themselves primarily students, but also worked, found that working limited the number of classes they could take, their choice of classes, and their access to student services. Nontraditional students who worked were more likely than traditional students to report these limitations, and the more nontraditional students were, the more likely they were to report these limitations. About one-half to three-quarters of highly nontraditional students reported these problems associated with working while also going to school (National Center for Educational Statistics). Further, 73% of nontraditional students reported that personal enrichment or acquiring skills for career advancement or completing a degree or certificate were important factors in their decision to attend college. Only 37% revealed that they were attending college in order to obtain additional education required for their job (National Center for Educational Statistics). Given these statistics, especially those that indicate the conflict between adults' roles as student and employee as well as their desire to earn a baccalaureate degree, it becomes evident that higher education institutions must accommodate the needs of these nontraditional students. In order to address these concerns of nontraditional students, higher education institutions may look to programs and classes that suit the needs of these students as well as on nontraditional class delivery methods, including online. Institutions may also look to offering classes at locations near to where these students live and work.

Summary

Following the historical perspective of adult education in the United States in general and this continuing studies unit in particular, this review of nontraditional students in higher education provides insight into the characteristics of these students as well as the barriers to their

success and the reasons they choose to enroll in college and pursue a degree in the first place. Over the years, nontraditional students have shared many similar characteristics, including their age, reasons for enrolling in college, and challenges that they experience as a result of their many roles and responsibilities.

Nontraditional students, as defined by Kasworm (2003), are those students over the age of 24 who enter higher education with a previous break in their formal education experience. They also enter higher education based on their life experiences, and they often want to pursue a professional credential or a second area of interest (Kasworm). Nontraditional student characteristics also include attending college part-time, working full time, financial independence, single parent, dependents other than a spouse, and no high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002b). According to Horn (1996), students are considered minimally nontraditional if they have only one nontraditional characteristic, moderately nontraditional if they have two or three of these characteristics, and highly nontraditional if they have four or more.

Nontraditional students also confront several barriers when they return to school. These barriers include their multiple roles of spouse, parent, employee, caregiver, and community volunteer as well as their unfamiliarity with the academic demands of college. They also consider college to be a social activity, and their age is a barrier to this socialization (Cross, 1979). According to Cross, nontraditional students also experience situational barriers (e.g., multiple roles and lack of time); dispositional barriers (e.g., lack of confidence in their learning abilities), and institutional barriers (e.g., scheduling conflicts).

Nontraditional students also enroll in college for several reasons. Many enroll in order to acquire a professional credential or just to acquire new knowledge (Cross, 1979). Economic

factors such as the desire for better jobs and better pay also motivate nontraditional students to enroll in higher education (Bean & Metzner, 1996). They also enroll due to a life-changing event such as divorce or death of a loved one (Justice & Dornan, 2001).

The historical perspective of higher education in the United States and this continuing studies unit allow the reader to gain a greater understanding of the elements of this study. Nontraditional students have actively sought educational opportunities for many years, and some institutions, especially this continuing studies unit, have worked to meet the needs of these students. However, since nontraditional students are very diverse in that they have many characteristics and conflicting roles, various reasons for enrolling, and several challenges to meet, the task of meeting their needs and providing them with the necessary support to achieve their educational goals is not an easy task. It is important to understand who these students are, why they are willing to sacrifice their time for an education, and what difficulties they encounter as a result of their academic experience and their multiple roles. By doing so, institutions can adopt programs that meet the goals and expectations of these students.

The following section on role theory offers an explanation of why adults choose to assume the role of student in addition to their other roles that may include spouse, parent, caregiver, and community member/volunteer. At some point in their development, and for reasons described later in this review about adult development theory, adults may decide that education, specifically the attainment of a baccalaureate degree meets a need and this need is important enough to take on the additional role and responsibilities associated with being a student. As a result role conflict may occur and students must manage the stress and strain associated with these multiple roles in order to persist toward degree completion. The following

literature pertaining to role theory and role conflict helps to provide a framework for this phenomenon.

Role Theory

In the context of this study, role theory, which has its roots in the social sciences, may help to explain why adults choose to attend college and then persist to graduation even though they must juggle many roles and obligations in order to do so. Once this phenomenon is explained, then this study may be able to shed light on the influence of multiple roles on nontraditional students' success at the continuing education unit in this study.

Behaviors.

According to Biddle (1979) role theory is a focus on context, people, and their behaviors. It is a science that studies human behaviors that are characteristic of people within contexts as well as the processes that produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors. "Role theory distinguishes individual behaviors, social activities, and the phenomenal processes that presumably lie behind them" (Biddle, p. 5). Role theory has thus far been a vehicle for integrating the three social science disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology. I purport that role theory may also contribute to the field of education as well especially as it pertains to nontraditional students, especially those attending this particular continuing studies unit, and their many role obligations. Role theory may contribute to education by informing us about the behaviors associated with nontraditional students.

According to Biddle (1979), role theory includes several underlying propositions: (a) role theorists purport that some behaviors are characteristic of people within contexts (roles); (b) roles are usually associated with groups of people who share a common identity (social positions); (c) people are usually aware of roles, and often these roles are dictated by their

awareness (expectations); (d) roles persist because of their consequences (functions) and because they are a part of larger social systems; (e) people must be taught roles (socialization) and find these roles satisfying or not. Kemery (2006) found that clergy report the most satisfaction when role conflict is low and role ambiguity is high. This finding suggests that role ambiguity, which is the absence of daily structure, is meaningful to clergy who spend a great deal of their time responding to the emergency needs of their congregation. Therefore, this role ambiguity is a coping mechanism for dealing with role conflict. An employee's status in the workplace provides another example for each of these propositions. Employees are expected to behave a certain way in the workplace. Employees are expected to be punctual, professional, and knowledgeable. When employees deviate from these usual behaviors, they are often viewed as being deficient in their responsibilities.

An assumption of role theory is that people are somewhat alike in their behaviors and that these behaviors are somewhat predictable once one knows the person's identity and the context in which the person finds himself or herself (Fowlkes, 1987). The concepts of status and role allow us to understand the links between the individual, the social order, and its culture. Individuals act and interact according to the cultural norms of what is appropriate and what is expected of them. As a result of statuses and roles, people develop an identity. Then, as people's lives and values change these changes bring new roles or updated definitions of previous roles (Fowlkes).

However, people differ in the roles they are willing to assume and in the grounds on which they would make predictions about these roles (Biddle, 1979). This concept is important in this study of nontraditional students and their decision to persist toward their goal of a baccalaureate degree in that it may help to explain why some adults succeed and others do not

succeed. Do they think the additional role of student will provide them with the outcome they desire in spite of the challenges? This question may be related to Cross (1979) and McMillan and Forsyth's (1991) idea that adults are motivated as students if they are confident in their academic abilities and their ability to succeed in earning a baccalaureate degree.

Social position.

According to role theory, roles are associated with social positions (Biddle, 1979). From the sociology perspective, people are a product of their social world. They maintain a culture, and they represent the values of their community, social class, family, occupation, and social groups. People respond to their challenges with behaviors that are linked to other behaviors that help them to accomplish a task (Biddle, 1979). This idea is similar to Evans' (1996) life events stage of development, to be discussed later, as nontraditional students view a baccalaureate degree as a solution to other challenging events in their lives such as divorce, death of a spouse, or empty nest.

Social position is an identity that resembles a group of people. For example, the terms parent, teacher, athlete, student, and criminal each refer to a recognizable set of people. Each relates to a social position and each behaves in characteristic ways. People who share roles usually share a common identity as well. Furthermore, those who share identities also share the expectations of the behaviors associated with those identities (Biddle, 1979). For example, students are expected to attend class and submit assignments.

In addition to the association with social positions, role expectations are also associated with context. For example, people behave differently when they are at church, at a concert, or at a cocktail party. Their behavior depends upon the environment or the context. Further, people are motivated to continue in their roles because they desire and approve of what they are

accomplishing (Biddle, 1979). For example, many nontraditional students continue to go to class in spite of the difficulties associated with their many conflicting obligations because they have a goal of receiving their degree, which is worth accomplishing.

The concept of role is related to the social position and adjustment of the person. For example, role behaviors are learned in the family according to a person's identity of mother, father, sibling, etc. Then, behaviors are assumed according to one's gender, ethnic group, and social class. These behaviors are learned through role playing and role taking. Eventually, the person develops a self-concept that is comprised of role expectations as the person assumes various identities and enters various contexts (Biddle, 1979). This idea is similar to the concept of self-actualization and Maslow's hierarchy of needs which will be discussed later.

Although this idea of social position and personal adjustment is formulated first in children, adults also are faced with issues related to their roles. For example, entrance into social positions is not always guided by choice, but by birth or cultural norms. In the case of nontraditional students, they must first be members of one group before they can gain entrance to another. For example, before going to graduate school or receiving a certain job or promotion, students must first earn a baccalaureate degree.

Multiple roles.

According to Swanson, Broadbridge, and Karatzias (2006), roles are expectations of behavior that are attributed to certain positions or activities; as individuals engage in multiple roles throughout their lives, it is often a challenge for them to successfully navigate these roles. As the modern demands of these complex roles increase, multiple roles are often associated with increased stress and strain (Home, 1998).

Unlike most traditional age students, nontraditional students often have multiple roles that demand their attention (Home, 1993). When people experience multiple roles, they may successfully navigate these roles when they are able to gain benefits from each additional role. However, roles that cause contradiction may result in conflict or stress (Thoits, 1983). Further, as roles are interrelated, less conflict results (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). Role conflicts (which include family responsibilities) and emotional social support systems may affect nontraditional students' academic experience (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). According to Backels and Meashey (1997), multiple roles can be associated with higher stress levels, anxiety, and depression for nontraditional female students. This stress is also associated with Evans' (1996) individual timing approach to adult development, which is described later in this literature review, where adults experience stress when they are faced with time constraints associated with fulfilling their multiple roles. However, Johnson and Robson (1999) found that multiple roles also provide multiple opportunities for success and a sense of well-being. In a study where the convergence of student and athlete roles were studied for elite male college student-athletes in a college football program, Killeya-Jones (2005) found that less discrepancy between student and athlete roles was significantly associated with positive well-being and higher levels of both life satisfaction and academic satisfaction. So, when roles are integrated, the person is more likely to have a positive experience; conversely, when the roles are divergent, less satisfaction results. Competition between roles for available resources may result in the forfeiture of one of the roles (Killeya-Jones). Furthermore, according to Carney-Crompton and Tan, the difference between the success and failure of those students who juggle multiple roles may lie in the amount of emotional and instrumental (financial, household) support that students receive. Support may provide a mechanism for lessening the stress associated with multiple roles. According to

Edwards (1993) combining the demands of college and family is especially problematic for nontraditional students since both roles demand loyalty, time commitments, and flexibility. Further, women are expected to perform both roles equally well, and as a result, these students frequently report overload, role conflicts, and a lack of support.

Role conflict.

Role theory also includes elements of role conflict. Role conflict, as defined by Katz and Kahn (1978) is “the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult” (p. 204). According to Thoits (1987), individuals are motivated to conform to role expectations so that incompatible expectations become burdensome and create personal dilemmas. Another view is that people conform to role expectations in order to gain rewards and avoid punishment. In this case, the need for conformity is a result of outside pressures rather than internal desires.

According to Biddle (1979), difficulties arise when the roles that a person takes on require additional time or ability. As a result, role conflict occurs when the person must deal with conflicting role obligations and he or she must do various things that cannot all be done. Sometimes in this case, role overload results when too much is demanded of the person. The experience of role conflict and role strain may cause psychological distress and physical exhaustion. Pomaki, Supeli, and Verhoeven (2007) found that health behaviors, such as sleeping and exercising, could alleviate some of the stress associated with role conflict by affecting the physiological and psychological responses to strain. Role strain can result from having a large number of roles to play as well as from having statuses that are unfamiliar to most people or to which others do not approve (Epstein, 1987). Role strain results when individuals become overwhelmed with their many demands. Sieber (1974) explained that role strain involves role

overload which occurs as a result of lack of time and role conflict which refers to conflicting expectations. Further, there are internal and external role expectations which may result in conflict. In the case of nontraditional students, they have a role to fulfill as student, but this role competes with their desire to care for their families and their other responsibilities. The life events perspective, life stage perspective, and individual timing perspective, which are described in the next section, along with situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers, all converge on the nontraditional student (Cross, 1979; Evans, 1996).

As stated, multiple roles are considered potential sources of stress, which can lead to an increased risk for psychological or physical disorders (Thoits, 1987). In order to reduce the likelihood of the stress associated with multiple roles, individuals use several strategies, including time management strategies. Bruening and Dixon (2007) studied mothers who were also coaches and focused on coping strategies that these women used to achieve success at work at home. They found that the work-family conflict influenced outcomes with work and family and coping strategies included stress management, time management, self-awareness, support systems, and flexible hours. Pomaki et al. (2007) also found that healthy behaviors, such as eating well and not smoking, were coping strategies for multiple roles. Trueman and Hartley (1996) found that as a result of nontraditional students' previous experiences, they make better use of time management strategies than traditional age college students. However, in some cases, adults may abandon one or more roles, which in the case of nontraditional students usually results in their dropping out of school. They may also assign priority to roles. Those nontraditional students who are strictly committed to their goal of a baccalaureate degree are willing to sacrifice some of their other roles in the short-run in order to realize their dream. Their education becomes their top priority. This concept fits in with the adult development theory,

especially the individual timing perspective discussed later in this chapter, where individuals expect things to happen at certain times in their lives.

Coping strategies.

In the case of nontraditional students, family or other type of support may be beneficial in order to counter the concept of role conflict and role overload. When discovering at what point the costs of multiple roles outweigh the benefits, it is important to realize that roles are reciprocal (Thoits, 1987). Roles involve relationships between people in that they are exchanges of behavior. For example, an individual's role as student involves a relationship with the teacher and the individual's role as teacher involves a relationship with the student. In order for role relationships to succeed, one must be able to anticipate and respond to the other's expectations (Thoits). The teacher expects the student to behave in a certain way in order to meet the objectives of the course, and the student expects the teacher to share his or her expertise. This idea of reciprocity is especially important when considering the role of family support for the nontraditional student. In many cases, these students rely on significant others in their lives to provide support in order for them to meet their academic goals. For example, the spouse of a nontraditional student may need to assume a more active role in child-rearing. So, not only does the student's role as parent change since the student may no longer do all of the things with the children that they did before going to school, but the spouse's role as parent changes as well. Just as in the teacher-student relationships, nontraditional students have expectations for their spouses or significant others and vice-versa. If the spouse is unable or unwilling to meet these expectations, then conflict may result among the student's roles as student, parent, and spouse.

According to Epstein (1987), emotional support of significant others is important to the success of multiple life roles. When family members are supportive of the nontraditional

student's decision to embark on a baccalaureate degree, both are cognizant of the expectations of the other. The family and the student must be on the same page, so to speak, in order for the relationship to be successful. Since education helps to expose people to varying expectations for the same social roles, this phenomenon can undermine the legitimacy of traditional family roles. The more education someone has, the more social networks are available and the less constraining traditional norms become. So, some family and friends of nontraditional students may feel threatened by the student's decision to return to school or to begin a college career for the first time. Horowitz (1982) found that men and women who are financially secure may be able to negotiate more satisfying distributions of rights and obligations with their spouses and children and may thereby be able to reduce the stress associated with multiple roles. On the other hand, men and women whose earnings are minimal may be unable to negotiate obligations, and will then be unable to cope with demands of multiple roles.

Benefits of multiple roles.

In addition to the stressful situations that result from multiple roles, multiple roles may also have beneficial effects. Sieber (1974) specified four types of benefits of role accumulation: role privileges, status security, resources for status advancement and role performance, and the enrichment of personality and gratification. Thoits (1987) discussed how multiple roles can provide people with social identities which can then enhance their feelings of meaning and purpose and reduce the feelings of despair. This concept is also related to the social position aspect of role theory previously discussed. Additional roles provide individuals more opportunities for interaction with others as well as success in other areas of their lives. This socialization and interaction with others may also provide support for individuals when they are

faced with life's challenges, including the challenges associated with being a nontraditional student.

For both men and women, multiple roles, as long as they are not excessive, can help to promote physical and psychological well-being. Verbrugge (1987) found that adult roles include obligations as well as pleasures, and each role can have varying degrees of happiness. In general, the more roles one has, the better one's health. Verbrugge found a link between high role involvement and good health. Verbrugge found this link to be the result of social selection and social causation. People with long term health problems are unable to have multiple roles due to restriction of their activities. This is the social selection phenomenon. People can only choose to select additional roles if they first believe that they have the ability to do so. For example, nontraditional students may consider returning to school if they believe that are able to commit the time and resources to this activity. They consciously select this social position of student because they believe that there is a chance that they will succeed. According to social causation, roles give people the opportunity to express their skills and to gain access to social supports, resources, and stimulation (Thoits, 1983). Social causation gives people a reason to act and to assume an additional role. For example, after acquiring a lifetime of experiences, including work and family experiences, nontraditional students may feel that they have something to contribute as well as something to gain by pursuing a bachelor's degree. They have a history of relationships and learning experiences, and by going to school they are able to share these experiences with others in a social context. This may help to explain why conflicting role obligations provide incentives to nontraditional students rather than barriers. As stated earlier, multiple roles lead to increased socialization which may, in turn, lead to support and assistance from others. Consequently, this socialization as a result of multiple roles may provide a

mechanism for achieving success in various areas of an individual's life, not just in their role of student. So, as long as the educational experience is positive and not considered too burdensome, then nontraditional students may be more likely to persist.

In a study by Rozario, Morrow-Howell, and Hinterlong (2004), older caregivers with multiple productive roles reported significantly better health than those without multiple roles. This suggests that social roles have a positive effect on health. Although these multiple roles may lead to some role overload and role conflict, they also provide caregivers with privileges, status, resources, and gratification (Sieber, 1974).

Further, according to a study by Verbrugge, men and women who had less than 25 or 70 or more hours per week of constrained time had poorer health than those in the middle. Also, people with lowest and highest responsibility for dependents had worse health than people with moderate responsibility. Therefore, balance of personal responsibilities and obligations with academic responsibilities may contribute to the success of nontraditional students in higher education in general and toward degree attainment in particular.

Verbrugge (1987) also found that the more people disliked their lives, their jobs, or their main roles, the worse was their health. Further, she found that women who were employed and also had outside responsibilities did not report poor health unless they disliked both their jobs and their other roles. People who often felt rushed or those who never felt rushed were in worse health than those who reported moderate experiences. Likewise, those who felt overinvolved or underinvolved reported poorer health than those who had moderate involvement in activities. Verbrugge found that role burdens or negative feelings about roles had a negative effect on health much more than role responsibilities. So, what mattered was how people felt about their responsibilities more than the responsibilities themselves. Also, low quality roles rather than the

high quantity were risks for poor health. For nontraditional students, it may be that their success is related to how they prioritize their education. If education is a high priority or high quality, then their risk of failure is less than if their educational pursuits are lower on their priority list. Also, how individuals experience their role as student is important. This includes how they conceptualize their learning abilities as suggested by Cross (1979) and perhaps even how the institution is able to meet their needs by reducing those institutional barriers discussed earlier. An adult's experience as a student seems to matter which is something I will investigate in this study.

In the study of the effect of diverse roles on health, however, it is unclear whether poor health causes role limitations or if the lack of roles leads to poor health. Longitudinal studies may assist with this assessment. A possible implication here is that support from employers, family, and the educational institution may help nontraditional students achieve the middle road regarding their conflicting role obligations. According to O'Reilly and Caro (1994), involvement in productive roles, defined as those that produce goods or services, in later life is beneficial to both the individual and to society. According to Thoits (1992), multiple roles provide people with a connection to social groups as well as access to social support. This may certainly be the case for nontraditional students and again suggests the importance of reciprocity of roles and socialization as a result of these multiple roles.

According to the role enhancement perspective of Moen, Robison, & Dempster-McCain (1995), when individuals have multiple roles, they experience higher levels of well-being because of the development of the person's power, status, resources and emotional gratification. Glass and Fujimoto (1994) found that wives who worked outside of the home experienced less depressive symptoms than those who did not work outside of the home. Because multiple roles

offer multiple resources, those with multiple roles may experience positive outcomes associated with these multiple roles, again, the positive aspect of socialization and support as a result of multiple roles.

Further, how one experiences a role matter. The quality of the role is at least as important as the quantity of roles. Perhaps, the higher education institution has the most input on this component of multiple role obligations and their affect on nontraditional students in higher education. By providing a rewarding learning environment, the institution can provide a quality experience to the nontraditional student, and this experience will allow them to prioritize their education goals and persist in their attainment of the baccalaureate degree.

Summary

The previous section on role theory provides insight into why nontraditional students choose to progress toward degree attainment even though it means assuming additional roles and responsibilities. Role theory includes the concepts of behavior, social position, and role conflict, and stresses the importance of support from others in order for nontraditional students to succeed in their academic programs.

In many ways, role theory is a study of human behaviors. It posits that an individual's behavior is guided by his or her position in a particular context. Behavior is related to a person's identity. According to Biddle (1979), roles are dictated by a person's expectations and roles persist because they are a part of larger social systems. For example, when nontraditional students decide to advance in their career or learn a new skill, they are willing to assume the role of student because that role allows them to meet their expectations. Their behavior is then guided by their new student role. Biddle also found that people are taught roles through their social positions, and they continue these roles if they find them satisfying. Nontraditional students who

learn to value education as a result of their upbringing or experiences may be more likely to persist toward degree attainment than those who do not share these values. Furthermore, if nontraditional students' academic expectations are satisfied by the institution, then they may also be more likely to persist than those who are dissatisfied with the institution.

When individuals assume additional roles they often experience conflict and stress associated with their multiple roles. Role conflict occurs when a person is unable to devote sufficient time to their various roles. As a result, role overload occurs and may lead to both physical and psychological stress (Biddle, 1979). Since multiple roles can lead to stressful situations, nontraditional students may need to develop strategies to help them to alleviate these stressful situations. Time management may help as well as support from significant people in their lives. Developing relationships with other students who share their context and behavior and values may also help nontraditional students navigate the conflicts associated with their various roles.

Although multiple roles may cause stress for nontraditional students, they may also have beneficial effects. Since multiple roles are associated with social positions and shared behaviors with others, they may help to reduce feelings of despair (Thoits, 1987). This may help to explain why nontraditional students elect to return to school when they experience a life-changing event such as divorce or the death of a loved one. The role of student, as long as it is a positive experience, may help nontraditional students better handle stress in their lives.

In order to gain a better understanding of why adults choose to enroll in college at a particular time in their lives and why they are willing to take on the additional role of student in spite of its many challenges, it is important to consider the role of adult development theory in their decision-making process. As a result of their many experiences and various roles and

desires, adults may be motivated to pursue a baccalaureate degree, even more than traditional students. The following section on adult development theory helps to provide insight into what situations and events prompt adults to embark on a college education and then persist toward degree attainment.

Adult Development Theory

By reviewing the literature on adult development, the reader can acquire a better understanding of why nontraditional students behave as they do when they are confronted with conflicting obligations. Generally speaking, the older the student, the better is his or her psychological and academic well-being (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Connections can also be made between adult development and how adults cope with the demands of being a student in higher education. Included in this review, is information on motivation which is an integral part of adult behavior and decision-making. Those who decide to go to school later in life usually already have a higher level of motivation and commitment to their educational goals than some younger students (Krager, Wrenn, & Hirt, 1990).

In addition to identifying the unique needs and conflicting role obligations of nontraditional students, institutions of higher education can also rely on human psychological and social development theories related to these students in order to understand what helps these students to succeed. When nontraditional students are academically successful they are likely to experience an increase in self-esteem and role gratification (Padula, 1994). These development theories can help to guide policy in institutions of higher education. By understanding the needs and developmental stages of nontraditional students, institutions can adopt policies that can address these needs, such as online courses, extended hours, etc. As a result, institutions may help these students meet their academic goals.

Life stage perspective.

According to Evans (1996), adult development theories can be separated into three groups: life stage, life events, and individual timing perspectives. The life stage approach suggests that as individuals progress through their lives, they become more complex as developmental tasks in the later years build upon earlier tasks in a predictable pattern. As I will discuss later in this review, higher education institutions can provide nontraditional students with a positive academic experience (which may, in turn, positively affect their progression toward degree) by incorporating learning activities that rely on past experiences into their assignments. Further, developmental change happens according to an internal timetable and is influenced by environmental factors. Often, the goal of personal enrichment and self-improvement is more important for nontraditional students than external needs. Conversely, traditional age students are more motivated by such external factors as financial opportunities and parental expectations (Kasworm, 1990).

This life stage perspective refers to the learning or developmental skills that are acquired throughout one's life at various stages (for example, childhood, young adulthood, middle age, old age) and how this learning at earlier stages impacts behavior at later stages. According to the life stage perspective, behavior in later stages in life are influenced by what is learned during earlier developmental stages. For example, children may learn that when they share their toys with others, they have more fun. Then, when they enter a later stage of young adulthood, they build upon that knowledge and behavior of sharing and embrace the idea of volunteering which allows them to share their time and talent to benefit others. The life stage perspective is based on the experiences of heterosexual men and, although women progress through developmental stages at ages similar to men, they experience greater conflict in achieving the more complex

goals, which involve relationships and career (Roberts & Newton, 1987). For example, females may experience a personal tug-of-war when they try to provide equal attention to their careers and their families. Frustration may then follow when they realize that they may be unable to fulfill both of these responsibilities according to their plan. When their role as student enters into this complexity of their various role obligations, they may be inclined to limit these obligations. Many nontraditional students drop out as a result, but others continue to complete their degree. According to Chartrand (1992), nontraditional students' psychological distress associated with the demands of returning to school along with their many roles may be alleviated by having supportive friends and family. This study attempts to discover the influential factors that allow continuing studies students to persist toward their degree attainment in spite of their many conflicting roles.

Life events perspective.

The life events perspective stresses the significance of "timing, duration, spacing, and ordering of life events in the course of human development" (Evans, 1996, p. 171). Unlike the life stages perspective, the life events perspective does not see life events as necessarily occurring at certain ages. Life events perspectives stress the influence of environmental factors on developmental change rather than internal forces like the life stage perspective. Life events perspectives acknowledge the interconnectedness of life events and are well suited for explaining women's development over time. Tittle (1982) found that unlike men who make distinctions between career, marriage, and parenthood, women view these events as interrelated. According to the life events perspective, environmental factors affect a person's decision making. So, as a nontraditional student, especially a female student according to this perspective, deals with a divorce, empty nest, or change in career, she focuses on education to bring order and purpose to

her life. She sees higher education and the attainment of a degree as a suitable response and connection to the other events in her life.

Individual timing perspective.

The individual timing perspective stresses the variability of human development and the role of the environment in growth and change. This perspective believes that people are more alike as children than as adults since the timing of events in someone's life is important (Evans, 1996). People develop social clocks that indicate when certain events are supposed to occur in their lives. When events do not happen according to their proposed timing, adults experience stress. For example, many nontraditional students return to complete a degree that they started in their youth. They may express regret over never having completed what they started out to do. When this regret multiplies and stress results, returning to school may help them to "get back on track" with their lives. So, even though they still have many conflicting roles, they may be willing to undergo the sacrifice to attend college and complete their degree since doing so helps them to achieve their personal development according to their own timetable.

Motivation.

According to Lussier and Achua (2004), motivation is "anything that affects behavior in pursuing a certain outcome" (p. 74). Content motivation focuses on explaining as well as predicting human behavior based on people's needs. Process motivation focuses on how people choose behavior to satisfy their needs, and reinforcement theory states that behavior can be explained, predicted and controlled through the consequences for behavior (Lussier & Achua). Behavior is the result of a person being motivated to satisfy a certain need. Motivation is the inner desire that someone has to satisfy a need, and people act in order to meet a need so that they can be satisfied (Lussier & Achua, 2004). Nontraditional students are motivated to learn

when they can relate new knowledge to their life experiences and when they can use this new knowledge in their own lives (Knowles, 1970). Nontraditional students often lack confidence in their academic abilities and question if their efforts are sufficient (Klein & Schnackenberg, 2000). According to Nunn (1994), nontraditional students may compensate for this lack of confidence by working harder than their traditional age counterparts. Houle (1961) suggests that nontraditional students identify three motivational factors in their decision to pursue higher education: (a) goal orientations or to obtain something, (b) activity orientations or to do something, and (c) learning orientations or to know something. Lower income students may be motivated by external rewards such as a better job or an increase in salary; however, higher income students may be more motivated by internal rewards such as personal satisfaction and the desire to learn (Cross).

According to McMillan and Forsyth (1991), students' motivation is influenced by what they think is important and what they think they can accomplish. For example, nontraditional students may be motivated by their desire to provide a better life for themselves and for their families or their desire for advancement in their careers. In addition to being motivated by their needs, these students are also motivated by their expectations for success. These expectations may be based upon factors such as prior learning experiences, how feedback is given and received, and if they believe they have earned their success (King, 1996). McMillan and Forsyth suggest that students are motivated if their needs are met, if they value what they are learning, and if they believe that they will be able to succeed. By addressing and alleviating institutional barriers, higher education institutions can meet the needs of nontraditional students which may result in their motivation to succeed. Further, by connecting adults' learning to their own experiences, adults may have a greater appreciation for their learning which may also result in

their motivation. Adults' belief in their ability to succeed is evident in Cross's (1979) definition of the dispositional barriers that nontraditional students confront regarding their perceptions of themselves as learners.

Developmental needs.

This idea of needs and motivation was most notably introduced in the mid twentieth century when Abraham Maslow (1954) developed his hierarchy of needs theory. This theory is based on four assumptions: (a) only unmet needs motivate a person to action, (b) people's needs are arranged according to importance going from basic to complex needs, (c) people are only motivated to satisfy a higher order need when a lower level need has been satisfied, (d) people have five classifications of needs. From low to high level of need, these needs are physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self actualization. Following the satisfaction of the basic physiological and safety needs, and then the belongingness needs where people look to others for acceptance and affection, nontraditional students' level of development based on Maslow's hierarchy may best fit in with esteem needs and self actualization needs (Lussier & Achua, 2004). After social needs are met and while satisfying esteem needs, individuals focus on ego, status, self-respect, recognition for accomplishments, and a feeling of self-confidence and prestige (Lussier & Achua). Self-actualization needs represent the highest level of need, which is to develop one's full potential by seeking growth, achievement, and advancement. As explained earlier in this chapter, this definition of self-actualization is closely aligned with the motivators that prompt adults to pursue higher education in the first place and then to persist toward achievement of a baccalaureate degree. Evans (1996) also used this concept of self-actualization in the life stages approach to adult development.

Summary

The aim of this review of the theories of adult development is to help to address the question of why and how nontraditional students decide that degree attainment is an important goal. As Carney-Crompton & Tan (2002) observed, the older the student, the better is his or her psychological well-being. In conjunction with nontraditional students' psychological well-being, academic well-being usually follows. One may then deduce that older students, who are products of their many life experiences including challenges and obstacles, are focused on their goals, one of which is baccalaureate degree attainment.

This increased focus and determination which many nontraditional students acquire as a result of their length of years, may be attributable to Evans' (1996) adult development perspectives. The life stage approach suggests that individuals become more complex as they age and developmental tasks in the later years build upon earlier tasks in a predictable pattern. As revealed in a previous section on role theory, these predictable patterns result in behaviors. So, once nontraditional students consider the idea of working toward a bachelor's degree, they draw upon their past experiences in order to help them meet this goal. For example, they may be able to reflect on their earlier years in school and expand upon those study skill strategies that helped them when they were younger. Conversely, they will be able to avoid those behaviors, such as cramming for exams, which may have been less beneficial.

Unlike the life stage approach which focuses on internal forces to provoke change, Evans' (1996) life events perspective stresses the influence of environmental factors on developmental change. For example, in the life events perspective, nontraditional students may see the connection between attaining a bachelor's degree and advancing in their chosen careers. Of course, it is the student who must adopt the behaviors that lead to the goal of a bachelor's

degree, but the external factor of a depressed economy may provide the student with the motivation for this life events perspective that promotes returning to college while also managing various roles.

Evans' (1996) third perspective, the individual timing perspective, suggests that the timing of events in someone's life is important, and when events do not happen according to their proposed timing, adults experience stress. Nontraditional students who embarked on a college degree earlier in their lives and then failed to persist may carry around this stress for many years. Then, as a way to alleviate this stress or make amends for unfinished business, they may decide to return to school in order to get their timing back on track.

Each of these developmental perspectives relies on the strength of an individual's needs and motivation in order to lead them to action and behave in a way that leads to degree attainment. Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory states that individuals act in order to satisfy unmet needs, and people's needs are arranged according to importance. For example, when individuals are young, their focus may be on raising young children or starting a career. Then, once those needs are met, they may entertain the idea (need) of returning to school to advance in their career. Lussier and Achua (2004) define motivation as the inner desire that someone has to satisfy a need, and people act in order to meet a need so that they can be satisfied. According to Krager, Wrenn, and Hirt (1990), nontraditional students usually have a higher level of motivation and commitment to their educational goals than some younger students. So, motivation is a concept related to the life stage and individual timing perspective and then influenced by the life event perspective which is related to environmental factors. Consequently, nontraditional students' motivation and commitment may be a product of their developmental stage.

The reader has already been introduced to the overall historical perspective of adult education and its importance as well as the characteristics of nontraditional students. This review of adult development stages goes deeper into the psyche of nontraditional students by providing an explanation for their reasons to act. As a result of their stage in life, the events that have occurred in their lives, and their need to satisfy an individual timetable, nontraditional students may make the decision that an education is worthwhile or even necessary.

The following section on adult learning theory helps to provide information about which types of learning are effective for adults, given their characteristics, including their multiple roles, and their developmental stages and situation in life. By understanding under which circumstances and learning environments nontraditional students are more likely to succeed, institutions of higher education can implement programs and learning activities that promote success toward completion of degree requirements.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory focuses on nontraditional students' characteristics as well as adults' life situations. (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). In order for the reader to appreciate the role of adults as students, it is important to understand how adults learn given the situations in their lives. Richardson (1994) found that nontraditional students take their studying and learning very seriously and focus on understanding the meaning of what they learn rather than simply learning facts. Adult learning theory coupled with adult development theory and role theory may provide insight into how multiple roles influence nontraditional students' ability to persist toward baccalaureate degree attainment.

Characteristics of nontraditional students as learners.

Malcolm Knowles (1970), a leader in adult learning theory, believed that nontraditional students are different from younger students, and therefore require a different approach to learning. Unlike pedagogy, which is often defined as the art and science of teaching children, andragogy is defined as the art and science of helping adults learn. Knowles also believed that the process of maturing begins early in childhood, and as children mature and learn, they increasingly develop the traits of the adult on which andragogy is based, which is not unlike the life stages approach to adult development. When comparing and contrasting andragogy with pedagogy, Knowles stated that pedagogy-andragogy is a continuum where both techniques are appropriate at different times in different situations based more on a learners' development than their age. The pedagogy endpoint of the continuum focuses on teaching children. Children may be viewed as blank slates, so to speak, with limited experiences. Teaching children often requires introducing them to subjects and ideas with which they are completely unfamiliar, such as teaching them to read or teaching them to tie their shoes. However, according to Knowles, pedagogy may not be reserved solely for children. For example, if an adult has no experience with driving a car, then they have no frame of reference for the task, and it may be helpful to use pedagogical techniques. Andragogy, on the other end of the continuum, focuses on how best to help adults learn. Since adults have experienced more developmental stages than children, it is likely that they can relate new ideas to their life experiences. For example, nontraditional students who take a human resources class may be able to use some skills that they acquired as parents to help them to understand conflict management. Those adults, however, who have had limited experience with the dynamics of human relationships may not have as much familiarity with conflict management. So, although nontraditional students are typically defined as those

over the age of 24, younger students who have many of the same responsibilities of those older in years may share many of the same obstacles in their persistence in higher education.

Nontraditional students share certain characteristics that differ from younger learners: (a) their self-concept is a self-directing human being rather than a dependent personality, (b) they accumulate life experiences that become a resource for learning, (c) their readiness to learn is increasingly related to their social roles; (d) they desire to immediately apply their knowledge, and their learning shifts from subject-centeredness to problem-centeredness, (e) adults' learning is motivated by internal factors rather than external factors (Knowles, 1970). Since Knowles identified the relationship between adult learning and the social roles of nontraditional students, he suggested that grouping learning activities, just as adults group their multiple roles, may prove beneficial to the nontraditional student. For example, instructors of nontraditional students may include assignments that focus on their roles: A writing assignment that focuses on a student's work as a legal assistant. This suggests the interaction between and among the concepts of multiple roles, adult development stages, and adult learning.

Cross's (1981) model of adult learning focuses on adults as learners and is based on differences between children and adults. Although Knowles (1970) acknowledges these differences, his theory of adult learning focuses on the development of the person rather than an individual's chronological age. Cross's model offers a framework for understanding about what and how adults learn. This model consists of two main variables: personal characteristics and situational characteristics. Personal characteristics include physical, psychological, and sociocultural characteristics which are similar to Maslow's first three needs in his hierarchy. Situational characteristics are those variables specific to nontraditional students, for example,

part time status and voluntary participation in education, which is similar to situational barriers and the life events perspective where students cope with their environment.

According to Cross's (1981) model, teachers cannot change the personal characteristics of nontraditional students, such as physiological aging; however, they may be able to promote learning in these students by focusing on the growth of intelligence over time. Students may lose some of their reaction time as they age, so educators may stress the depth of learning rather than the speed of learning (Cross). Teachers may also facilitate learning for nontraditional students simply by creating a favorable environment for learning by providing comfortable chairs, effective lighting, less auditory confusion in the classroom, and slower speech when delivering lectures (Cross).

Cross's (1981) model also stresses the importance of adaptive and adjustive learning in teaching nontraditional students by suggesting that educators should capitalize on the life experiences of nontraditional students and incorporate these experiences into educational activities. Since many nontraditional students view a return to school as unfamiliar territory, Cross suggests that teachers provide challenging educational tasks as a means of creating motivation in nontraditional students. By encouraging nontraditional students to face their fears about academics through challenging tasks, teachers may also help nontraditional students to develop a sense of accomplishment, motivation, and ultimately persistence in their educational goals.

According to Cross (1981), situational characteristics of adult learning provide a sharp distinction between pedagogy and andragogy. For example, nontraditional students' participation in education is often on a part-time basis and is typically voluntary. Nontraditional students choose to go to school; they are not forced to go to school by parents. However, nontraditional

students understand that education is usually necessary for career advancement. Cross suggests that in order to account for the situational characteristics of nontraditional students, institutions of higher education should emphasize ease of procedures, class schedules and availability, and convenient locations to aid in the learning of these students. Cross also stresses the inclusion of self-directed learning to address the voluntary aspect of the situational characteristics and variables of nontraditional students. This focus on learning in considering the voluntary characteristic of nontraditional students' participation in education is consistent with Knowles (1970) distinction between andragogy, which provides a focus on learning, and pedagogy which provides a focus on teaching.

Situational life experiences

McClusky's (1963) theory of margin, Knox's (1980) proficiency theory, and Jarvis's (1987) model of the learning process focus on an adult's situation in life including experiences, roles, and responsibilities. This learning perspective ties in with the adult development and role theories already presented. They each include both internal and external (environmental) factors that contribute to nontraditional students' experiences in addition to how adults respond to these factors. According to McClusky, adulthood is a time of growth, change, and integration where the individual is seeking balance between the amount of energy available and the amount of energy needed. The load of life dissipates energy, and the power of life allows the person to deal with the load. The energy left over when load is subtracted from power is called the "margin of life." When load exceeds power, the situation becomes vulnerable. McClusky's theory relates to the events that all adults encounter. McClusky's model addresses when formal learning is most likely to occur, which is when there is a reserve of energy or margin of power. This is similar to the discussion about role theory that suggests that in order for individuals to be successful in

their various roles, they must have balance. Too many roles may lead to stress which can result in nontraditional students' departure from college. However, just as support from others, including the institution, and the reciprocity of roles can help students achieve success, this support can also lead to a reserve a power according to McClusky, which may also allow students to function effectively in their various roles.

Knox's (1980) proficiency theory is also situational and suggests that there is a discrepancy between an individual's current and desired level of proficiency. This idea of proficiency is also related to the concept of motivation and needs discussed earlier. Adults choose to enroll in college for many reasons, including economic, social, cultural, or the result of a life changing event such as divorce (Cross, 1979; Justice & Dornan, 2001; Kasworm, 2003; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). This theory draws on the concepts associated with role theory and adult development theory discussed earlier. Adults expect to be proficient in their many major roles. This theory includes several components: the environment, past and current characteristics, performance, aspiration, self, discrepancies, and learning activity (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Knox defines the purpose of adult learning as a way to promote proficiency in order to improve performance.

Jarvis's (1987) model of the learning process also begins with an adult's situation and experience. This model is based on a discrepancy between who an individual is at a given time and an experience that a person is not prepared to handle. This idea is similar to the concepts of life stage, life events, and individual timing theories. According to Jarvis, all experiences are related to a social situation, also a component of role theory. Jarvis outlines nine routes that an adult may take in the learning process: presumption, non-consideration, and rejection do not result in learning. The other six responses: preconscious, practice, memorization, contemplation,

reflective practice, and experiential learning refer to different types of learning. The first three of these are non-reflective learning, and the final three are reflective learning, which are the higher forms of learning and require more involvement and interaction. Jarvis's theory, like Maslow's theory, represents a hierarchy. In presumption, non-consideration, and rejection, adults do not value what is being taught since it may have no relevance to their own lives, so learning does not occur. The other six learning responses form the hierarchy of learning. Reflective practice and experiential learning are cornerstones of adult learning theory as expressed by Cross (1979) and Knowles (1970) several years before Jarvis's theory.

Adult learning in practice.

According to Kasworm (2003), adults choose to participate in higher education for many reasons. Many adults decide to pursue education because it can offer them work and financial stability and other opportunities. Adults enroll in higher education because it allows them to advance both professionally and personally as they acquire new knowledge for their careers as well as for their personal enrichment. Nontraditional students typically enroll in institutions that are accessible, cost effective, flexible in course scheduling, supportive of their needs, and relevant to their needs. Adults may be motivated to complete their degree requirements because they see it as a fulfillment of their need for self-actualization. They are motivated to learn when they can relate new knowledge to their life experiences (Knowles, 1970). They expect to be proficient in their many roles, but they may underestimate the amount of time that is required to be successful in each of their roles (Weil, 1986).

According to Knowles' (1970) views of adult learning theory, in order for adults to relate to the learning experience, the environment should be physically comfortable. An informal setting where students are free to express their ideas and interact with other students and

instructors is vital for the success of nontraditional students. Nontraditional students must feel respected and supported by both their fellow classmates as well as the instructors. They must also feel that they are contributing to their own learning. They must be able to decide for themselves what their needs are, and then allow the instructors or other students to help them facilitate their own learning. Brewer, Klein, and Mann (2003) found that nontraditional students who worked in small groups showed more confidence and motivation than those who worked individually. According to Donaldson (1999), since nontraditional students often question their academic abilities and may drop out if they believe that they are unable to achieve success, this support from their peers, which also helps them to maintain their multiple roles, may allow them to persist toward degree attainment.

Nontraditional students' needs and goals are as important as those of the traditional age college students, but somewhat different. These nontraditional students are in a different place in life, usually at a different maturity level, and they view their world and their future differently from their younger counterparts (Kasworm, 2003). Just because of their age, nontraditional students may feel a sense of urgency to meet their academic goals that younger students do not experience. Although nontraditional students comprise one of the fastest growing segments of the higher education population today, most institutions are not adequately equipped to meet the diverse needs of the nontraditional student population (Fairchild, 2003). By providing convenience in student services such as web-based services, extended office hours, online registration, and adequate parking, higher education institutions can begin to address the unique needs of nontraditional students. These factors are examples of the institutional barriers discussed earlier.

Of course, addressing these concerns is only a portion of what colleges and universities must do to provide nontraditional students with the quality educational experience that they desire. Institutions of higher education must address the issue of curriculum development as it relates to nontraditional students and their specific needs. In order to effectively serve this growing population of students, colleges and universities must respond to the curricular needs of students who attend school part-time, continually enter and exit institutions, hold adult roles in family, work, and community, and are engaged learners with a lifetime of experiences (Kasworm, 2003). For example, by offering weekend, accelerated, and online classes, institutions of higher education can begin to address the time constraints that nontraditional students often experience. This addresses the concern of situational barriers suggested by Cross (1979). Instructors may also include assignments that draw on the nontraditional students' experiences especially since this is an important component of effective adult learning theory according to Knowles (1970). There is evidence that nontraditional students experience the college classroom environment differently from younger students (Graham & Donaldson, 1996b). Nontraditional students are influenced by their prior academic experiences as well as their life experiences, and their metacognitive abilities may differ from those of traditional age college students (Justice & Dornan, 2001). Each of these factors may also be related to an adult's developmental stage, including life stage, life events, and/or individual timing.

Richardson (1994) found that older students are more likely to favor a comprehension-focused approach to learning whereas younger students favor a more assessment-focused learning approach. Older students use study strategies aimed at comprehension of subject matter while younger students prefer rote recall (Justice & Dornan, 2001). This concept is associated with Jarvis's (1987) hierarchy of learning where adults focus on higher order

learning. Nontraditional students often report memory difficulty; however, there is no definitive conclusion that memory performance declines prior to age 50 (Richardson & King, 1998).

Memorization, according to Jarvis, promotes a lower level of learning that adults may not favor. Older students are also more achievement oriented than younger students. According to Justice and Dornan, older students use two higher level cognitive study strategies than younger students: hyperprocessing and generation of constructive information. These two learning styles increase comprehension and interpretation of information. They require assessment of the task and selection of a processing strategy (Justice & Dornan). They also require assessment of a processing strategy, and these strategies are consistent with a comprehension-focused learning approach (Richardson & King).

Summary

The previous section on adult learning theory provides specific information related to the development of adults and how these developmental stages contribute to their learning.

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), adult learning theory focuses on nontraditional students' characteristics as well as their life situations. Knowles (1970) and Cross (1981) suggested that nontraditional students are different from younger students and require a different approach to learning. According to Knowles, nontraditional students have a self-directing self concept; their life experiences become resources for learning; their learning is related to their social roles; they want to use their learning to solve problems, and their learning is motivated by internal factors.

McClusky's (1963) theory of margin, Knox's (1980) proficiency theory, and Jarvis's (1987) model of the learning process focus on nontraditional students' situation in life. These situations include their experiences, roles, and responsibilities. These theories suggest that

nontraditional students' learning includes both internal and external factors and their learning is related to the management of their other roles. For example, learning is a way to promote proficiency, and some nontraditional students may choose to enroll in college in order learn a new skill that may help in their job or career. Learning is also likely occur when the idea of returning to school is a viable option. For example, according to McClusky, if a student believes that he or she is capable of devoting the time and energy to pursue a degree, and this new role of student does not increase their stress, then they are likely to view education as an achievable and worthwhile goal.

Finally, institutions can help nontraditional students in their learning by providing an environment conducive to learning. They can provide flexible class schedules and campus locations that are convenient. They can provide curriculum and assignments that focus on the nontraditional students' experiences which allow them to connect their lives as students with their lives as parents and employees. Adults want their learning experiences to relate to their lives and multiple roles. In order for them to be successful and persist toward degree attainment, nontraditional students want their education to be relevant to their needs and characteristics, such as their desire to immediately apply their learning to their everyday life and their independent personalities based on a lifetime of experiences. If they do not have confidence in their abilities as learners, they may not choose to persist. The following section on student persistence theory helps to shed light on why some students, nontraditional students in particular, are able to persist toward degree attainment while others may decide to drop out of college.

Student Persistence Theory

Finally, an understanding of student persistence theory may provide insight into revealing what factors may contribute to nontraditional students' success. Tinto's (1987) theory of

departure from higher education claims that student departure is a result of interactions between the student with given attributes, skills, financial resources, educational background, and commitments, and other members of the academic and social systems of the institution. Tinto's theory includes a focus on the environmental conditions which contribute to student departure, specifically inadequate intellectual and social integration into the systems of the institution, as well as the role of external obligations and commitments that students experience which may also lead to their departure. Although Tinto's departure theory is primarily sociological and recognizes that students themselves are ultimately responsible for their decision to leave higher education, it also argues that an understanding of the social and intellectual context within which students find themselves is important.

Risk factors.

Tinto's (1987) theory acknowledges that for many students, including nontraditional students, college is one of many responsibilities that they must balance in their lives. Consequently, external commitments may alter a student's educational goals, and this change in plans may be independent from anything that the higher education institution can do. Leppel (2002) suggests that nontraditional students may decide to leave college if their expected future benefits of attending college do not outweigh their current investment of time and money. Tinto's model further explains that students with a minimal amount of social and intellectual integration into the academic and social communities of the college are more likely to depart.

Further, Schlossberg's (1989) concepts of marginality and mattering provide insight into the effects that institutional support services can have on a student's decision to persist. Marginality can result in students' feeling that they do not fit in with the academic environment. As a result of these feelings of marginality, students feel inadequately prepared to take on the

role of student, and if these feelings of inadequacy are not alleviated, nontraditional students may choose to depart (Chaves, 2006). In contrast, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) defined mattering as the need to be appreciated and to matter to someone else. This idea of mattering is a component of all stages of development, including adult development, and influences behavior. According to Rosenberg and McCullough (1981), there are five dimensions of mattering: attention, importance, dependence, ego-extension, and appreciation. Nontraditional students need to know that someone cares, and often it is the institution that can provide this care and concern. Before nontraditional students can feel capable of initiating involvement in academic and social activities, they must feel like they matter to the institution (Schlossberg, 1989). So, as long as nontraditional students feel like they matter to the institution and to those around them they can then embrace other college related activities, and they are more likely to persist.

Tinto's model also asserts that the degree to which students have external responsibilities, including work and family, may also affect their persistence. If external commitments prevent a student's academic and social interaction with the college, then the student may choose to depart. So, although the research tends to claim that personal responsibilities affect students' performance in higher education, there is no clear assessment, either positive or negative, on just how these responsibilities outside of the classroom affect nontraditional student persistence since most nontraditional students, unlike many younger students, have amassed life experiences and wisdom that may also affect the interaction between personal responsibilities and persistence in the higher education setting.

Horn, Peter, and Rooney (2002) found that 27% of college students are parents, and parents are at a greater risk for dropping out of college for at least a period of time than are other undergraduates. Being a parent has an effect on nontraditional students' retention and

persistence. Parents often experience feelings of guilt when their studies prevent them from being available to their children. According to Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), the age of their children may affect the retention and persistence of female nontraditional students. Those female students with older children may persist to graduation while those with younger children may interrupt their education or stop attending completely (Fairchild, 2003). Divorced and single students may persist since they have more time to devote to their academic responsibilities instead of to a spouse (Hensley & Kinser, 2001).

In addition, Horn (1996) found that the seven characteristics associated with nontraditional status—financial independence, part time attendance, delayed enrollment, full time work, dependents, single parenthood, and lack of high school diploma—are called risk factors because they are negatively related to persistence. Among students pursuing a bachelor's degree, 50% of highly nontraditional students were no longer enrolled three years later compared with 12% of traditional students and among nontraditional students seeking bachelor's degrees, 27% interrupted their enrollment in their first year, compared with 14% of traditional students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002b).

Interaction with others.

Tinto's (1987) model of departure posits that contact with faculty and staff is important to student persistence since this contact affects a student's commitment to the institution. Tinto further explains that although interaction with faculty and staff does not guarantee persistence, the absence of interaction enhances the possibility of departure. Since nontraditional students have many responsibilities that take them away from the college environment, it is reasonable to conclude then according to Tinto's theory that these students are at a greater risk of departure due to their lack of campus interaction. However, Tinto's model also stresses that it is not

necessary for students to be fully integrated both academically and socially in order to achieve persistence; instead, some minimum level of integration is necessary for continued persistence. For adult students who often commute to campus, their classroom experiences provide the majority of social and academic interaction (Chaves, 2006). Tinto argued that the classroom provides the meeting place where faculty and students can interact. In the case of nontraditional students, this may be especially true since these students have already achieved a level of self-control and maturity that does not require the same level of socialization as their younger counterparts (Bean & Metzner, 1996). However, the interaction with faculty may be a contributing factor to nontraditional student persistence since these students are more typically concerned with academic issues than social issues (Bean & Metzner). Nontraditional students typically enter higher education degree programs, specifically baccalaureate degree programs, in order to advance themselves in a chosen career or field, or to provide an increased quality of life for their families. More than some younger students, nontraditional students have specific goals and are focused on attaining them in a timely manner since they do not have the same luxury of time that most younger students have. So, although socialization is important, nontraditional students may become socialized as a result of their multiple roles and classroom learning experiences instead of through collegiate extracurricular activities, which is more common for younger students.

Further, Kerka (1998) found that some nontraditional students face opposition to their academic goals from family and friends who feel threatened by their success. Since their roles as students prevent these students from devoting time to other personal responsibilities, this lack of attention may cause friction within students' families (Hensley & Kinser, 2001). Adults believe that higher education will provide a better life for their children; however, the challenge is to

balance their desire to provide a better foundation for their families with the time and dedication that this endeavor demands. The roles of spouse, parent, caregiver, employee, and student provide both conflict and growth to the nontraditional student (Graham & Donaldson, 1996a).

Although many adults enroll in college for career growth, work roles are both a key incentive as well as a barrier to adult participation in higher education, but employer support and flexible work schedules seem to influence adult participation in college (Kasworm, 2003).

Kasworm also found that the level of job responsibility may affect college participation and subsequent persistence for nontraditional students: 18% of nontraditional students have managerial roles compared to 10% of nontraditional students who are employed in sales or service jobs. A possible explanation for this difference is that those students who have managerial positions may be better able to afford higher education compared to those in service jobs.

Summary

As revealed in this analysis of student persistence theory, there are many reasons why nontraditional students choose to pursue higher education and just as many reasons for their decision to leave. Nontraditional students enroll in college in order to acquire a new skill for career advancement or simply as a leisure activity (Cross, 1979). However, they may decide to leave because they lack social and academic integration or because they have external commitments that interfere with their educational goals (Tinto, 1987). Horn, Peter, and Rooney (2002) found that nontraditional students who are also parents have a greater risk of leaving college.

But, under what circumstances do personal responsibilities outside of the classroom and conflicting role obligations affect the nontraditional student's decision to persist toward

attainment of an undergraduate degree? Tinto's (1987) sociological perspective regarding student departure acknowledges that students' external commitments may affect their goals related to higher education, but he also recognizes that students themselves are ultimately responsible for their decision to persist or not. Tinto also finds that students need social and intellectual integration as well as interaction with faculty and staff in order to be successful. However, nontraditional students rarely participate in activities outside of the classroom due to their many responsibilities. So, how then, do nontraditional students attending this continuing studies division continue to achieve success in their academic goals given these obstacles? Perhaps, as discussed earlier, the answer may be informed by nontraditional students' maturity, determination, and motivation to succeed for themselves and their families as well as their ability to balance their many roles and responsibilities.

Conclusion

The goal of this literature review is to provide a context for the topic of this study on nontraditional students, namely, the conflicting role obligations that nontraditional students at this continuing studies unit experienced and the factors that influenced their success in baccalaureate degree attainment. By focusing on the history of adult education in the United States in general and the history of this continuing studies unit in particular, the reader is able to understand and appreciate the importance of educating adults as adults strive to better their lives, both financially and personally. The reader also develops a better understanding of some of the programs that institutions can adopt (for example, tuition assistance programs, less restrictive admission requirements, various transfer credit opportunities, and flexibility of class schedules) in order to alleviate some of the stress that nontraditional students may experience as a result of their multiple roles. As revealed in the increasing number of adults enrolled in higher education

institutions today, this impact of nontraditional students on higher education is a phenomenon that dates back hundreds of years. Interestingly, the increase in female students today due to the need for job training and career advancement is surprisingly similar to women's involvement in higher education around the time of the industrial revolution in the 1800s.

Now, as a global economy and the need for highly skilled workers increases, it is not surprising that nontraditional students are continuing to enroll in credit classes that lead toward an undergraduate degree. Especially during this time of economic distress both in the United States and worldwide, it is likely that nontraditional students' enrollment in college will increase as they attempt to improve their marketability in the workplace. As unemployment rates rise, workers will look for ways to improve their skills and increase their ability to compete with others looking for employment. Those who do not already hold a bachelor's degree may see the attainment of a degree as necessary for them to find full employment. As a result, it is likely that enrollment in degree programs at colleges and universities will increase in the near future.

The literature concerning nontraditional students is necessary to provide a frame of reference for the participants in this study. Just as in the evolution and development of the United States, college students today have evolved to include a mix of gender, race, and age. College students today are not just the students just out of high school. They are also workers, parents, spouses, caregivers, and community volunteers who attend school part-time while also juggling these many other roles and obligations.

The drive and motivation that adults develop over time may allow them to succeed academically while also having several conflicting roles. As explained in the role theory literature, role theory provides a commentary on behaviors, and it is nontraditional student behavior that this study investigated. How are nontraditional students able to cope with and

negotiate their many roles in order to achieve success in their baccalaureate degree programs? Role theory can help to explain this phenomenon by pointing out that as long as the roles are manageable and do not cause overwhelming stress, multiple roles may be beneficial even to the point of promoting a physically healthy life. The question then becomes how many roles are too many? Role theory also helps to answer this question by highlighting the importance of supportive and reciprocal relationships, which may also be a factor that assists nontraditional students in reaching their academic goals.

In order to understand more fully how nontraditional students are able to juggle these roles and obligations, it is important to understand where they are in their development as human beings. Nontraditional students have a life of experiences, triumphs, and failures that they bring with them to the classroom. These experiences help them to become the people they are as well as impact their decision making abilities concerning what they think is important. They are able to focus on what is important and use the skills that they have learned over a lifetime to achieve their goals, including their academic goals. It is perhaps this drive and motivation that guides them toward success—a drive and motivation that are not always available or at least recognizable to some younger students.

Then, in addition to the historical background of adult education and this continuing studies division as well as information about nontraditional students, role theory, and adult development theories, higher education institutions should also consider the role of adult learning theories and student persistence and how they affect nontraditional students. After reviewing the literature on the history of adult education, the characteristics of nontraditional students, and the impact of role theory and adult development theories on an a nontraditional student's decision to make the sacrifices in order to receive a baccalaureate degree, these factors

may not matter if the higher education institutions do not appreciate and understand what nontraditional students need as far as their learning is concerned. Institutions must show that they understand how adults learn by incorporating their life experiences into their academic experiences. This concept is evident in adult development theories and role theory as well.

Life experiences are an integral part of adult development theories and role theory. They are also a major component of adult learning theory. Consequently, by understanding and incorporating these theoretical findings into academic programs for adults, higher education institutions could be taking a major step in contributing to the success of these nontraditional students. Further, student persistence theory can also help to inform institutions of what nontraditional students need as they progress toward their degree. According to the literature, nontraditional students may leave higher education if they do not believe that the benefits outweigh the costs. This is also a factor in role theory. Nontraditional students may be more likely to persist in their programs if they believe that the sacrifices associated with their many roles are worth their effort. By providing effective academic advising as well as a supportive learning environment where students work collaboratively with other students and receive feedback from instructors, higher education institutions may be able to promote persistence for nontraditional students by addressing this basic concern.

Conceptual Framework

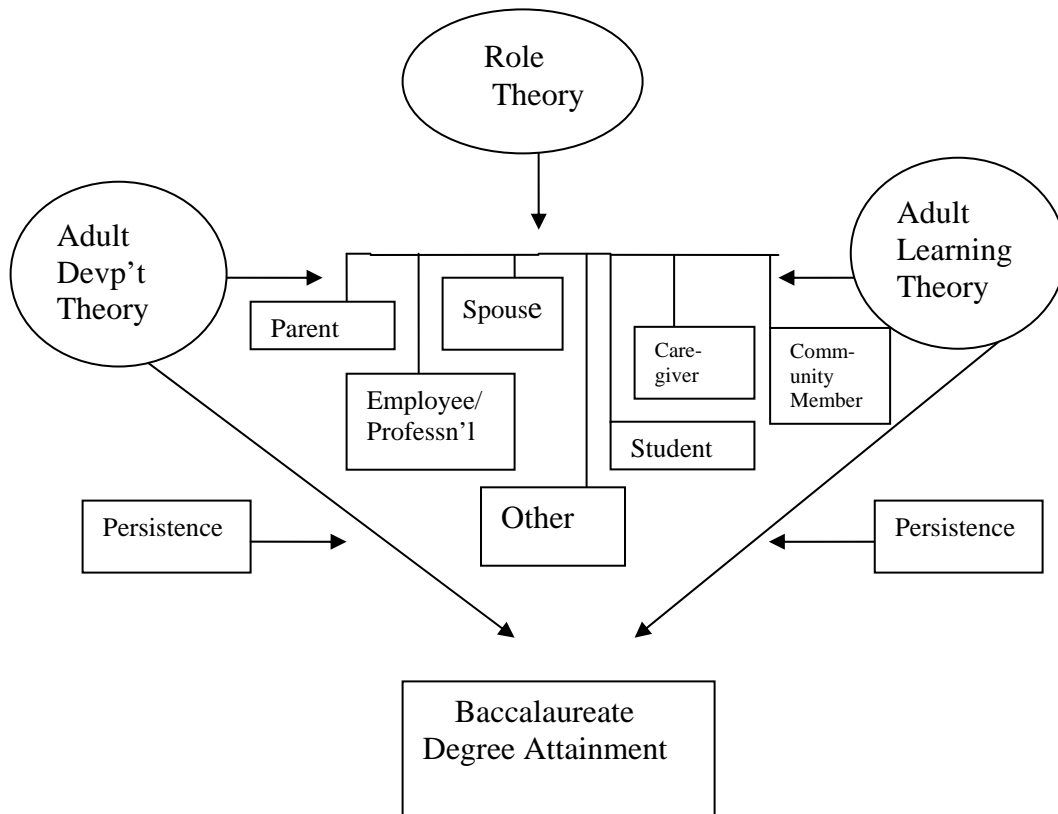
As detailed in this literature review and in the conceptual framework diagram that follows, three major theories guide this study: role conflict theory, adult development theory, and adult learning theory. At various times throughout a nontraditional student's academic experiences, both separately and simultaneously, the elements of these theories, such as behaviors, developmental stage, and learning methods, impact the various roles that these

students must juggle, including the role of student, parent, spouse, employee, caregiver, and community member. Likewise, the nontraditional student's various roles also impact their behaviors, developmental stage, and learning methods.

As nontraditional students progress toward baccalaureate degree attainment, their persistence may be impacted by their various roles and how they manage their conflicting roles. Further, how students manage their conflicting roles in order to remain on their track toward degree attainment are often determined by how they view their conflicting roles, how they progress in their developmental stage, and how they adapt to learning at this stage in their lives.

Since this study focused on baccalaureate degree attainment, persistence is also an important concept and an ultimate goal for these nontraditional students. This study considered how nontraditional students were able to navigate their many and often conflicting roles through the lenses of role conflict theory, adult development theory, and adult learning theory in order to achieve a bachelor's degree through persistence.

Conceptual Framework



Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate qualitatively how nontraditional students enrolled within a unique university context of a continuing studies division managed to negotiate the demands of multiple roles in order to attain a bachelor's degree. This study also investigated what motivated nontraditional students to embark on a bachelor's degree at this stage in their lives given their multiple roles. This study attempted to reveal the obstacles and challenges related to multiple roles that nontraditional students confronted and overcame in order to persist toward completion of a baccalaureate degree and what, if any, support systems they had that may be related to their multiple roles. This chapter includes the research methodology I used to conduct this study: (a) research design, (b) research participants, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis, (e) validity and generalizability, and (f) limitations of the study.

Autobiography of the researcher.

As the primary researcher in this study, I find it necessary to disclose my background and relevance to this study which focused on the experiences of nontraditional students. My personal journey of a baccalaureate degree was that of a traditional college student, and I received my undergraduate degree from the full-time division of the private university where this study was conducted. Eleven years after receiving my bachelor's degree, I received my master's degree. I began my Ph.D. studies 6 years after receiving my master's degree.

My professional career in higher education spans over 17 years, and I began my career at a community college where nontraditional students comprised a large part of the student population. I have spent the last 8 years of my professional life as an administrator at the study

context. So, although my undergraduate college experience was that of a traditional student, my professional career has focused on the needs of nontraditional students. However, I completed my graduate studies as an older student with multiple responsibilities.

As I reflected upon my professional and academic career and the experiences in my life that led me to research this topic of nontraditional students, my earliest recollection is that of a 10-year old girl accompanying my father, an instructor in adult education, as he taught adult students who were preparing for their GED (General Equivalency Diploma). He taught these classes two evenings each week to students who, for many diverse reasons I am sure, did not receive the traditional high school diploma. Although, I do not remember each of the students, I remember that most of them were much older than “typical” students. (Forty seemed much older to a child of 10 than it does to the woman I am now.) I remember one female student in particular, who was probably in her 40s and never missed a class. She came to class early, asked questions, and often spoke of what was going on in her life, including her children and her job. Since my father was also a high school teacher during the day, I was always familiar with the academic life. It was not strange to me that older people wanted an education just like everyone else. However, the difficulty that these students encountered as a result of their many roles did not occur to me until I worked with nontraditional students in my profession. I have developed a great admiration for these students as they refuse to give up on their goal of an education in spite of their many obstacles, including their multiple roles. This research, which has been a part of my development as an educator since I was 10 years old, is my attempt to discover how nontraditional students are able to achieve their goal of an education, specifically a bachelor’s degree, while also navigating their many responsibilities related to their multiple roles.

Research questions.

The following research questions as informed by the problem and the relevant literature helped to guide this study:

1. How do nontraditional students enrolled within a unique university context of a continuing studies division manage to negotiate the demands of multiple roles in order to attain a baccalaureate degree?
2. What motivates nontraditional students to embark on a bachelor's degree at this stage in their lives?
3. What obstacles and challenges related to their multiple roles must nontraditional students overcome in order to persist toward completion of a bachelor's degree?
4. What support systems do nontraditional students have as a result of their multiple roles? For example, does a spouse provide support as well as a conflicting role for the nontraditional student?

Research Design

Qualitative methods.

In order to understand why and how nontraditional students persist and succeed in a baccalaureate degree program in spite of their responsibilities and obligations outside of the classroom, I employed a qualitative design for this study in order to “listen well to others’ stories and to interpret and retell the accounts” (Glesne, 2006, p.1). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research is broadly defined as any type of research that produces findings that are not arrived at by statistical procedures. Further, qualitative researchers seek understanding and illumination of a phenomenon or context. By listening, reporting, analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing the stories of the participants, I was able to shed light on the factors that

influenced nontraditional students to succeed in baccalaureate degree programs in spite of their multiple roles.

Cronbach (1975) purports that statistical research does not have the ability to account for the effects of interaction and relationships that take place in social settings. Cronbach further states that the null hypothesis of quantitative inquiry ignores the effects that may be important but that are not statistically significant. In order to address this potential shortcomings, qualitative inquiry provides a mechanism for understanding the complexity of the social world (Hoepfl, 1997). By speaking with nontraditional students who achieved academic success, which is defined as attainment of a baccalaureate degree from a continuing studies division within a private university, I wanted to learn how their multiple roles, along with their learning preferences and developmental stages, influenced their academic success. I learned about the role of this continuing studies unit in the students' decision to strive toward completion of a baccalaureate degree. Enveloping each of these concepts was the history of adult education in the United States, which provided a backdrop to the importance of this issue of degree attainment for nontraditional learners.

Hoepfl (1997) devised a list that represents a synthesis of other researchers' descriptions of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative research uses the natural setting as the data source.
2. The researcher is the "human instrument" of data collection.
3. Qualitative researchers use inductive data analysis where themes emerge from the data.
4. Qualitative research reports are thick with description.

5. Qualitative research uses interpretation by the researcher as a method of discovering the meaning behind the participants' experiences.
6. Qualitative researchers seek to find the uniqueness of each case.
7. Qualitative research has an emergent design. It is not predetermined.
8. Qualitative research incorporates criteria for trustworthiness.

A main focus of qualitative research is to provide understanding of a social setting or activity from the perspective of the research participants. In addition to providing information about a phenomenon about which little is known, qualitative research methods can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is known or to gain insight about information that is difficult to convey quantitatively (Hoepfl). Although success, as determined by the definition of baccalaureate degree attainment, may be measured quantitatively, my inquiry into how nontraditional students' experiences may lead to their success was best investigated qualitatively.

Further, qualitative research methods are helpful in explaining a social phenomenon, in this case, how nontraditional students at this continuing studies unit were able to succeed in achieving a baccalaureate degree in spite of their diverse role obligations, from the perspective of the participants themselves. Qualitative research methods are also used to provide a contextual insight into the participants' social, cultural, and political perspectives as well as to address and possibly change social conditions (Glesne, 2006). Qualitative researchers attempt to understand as well as interpret how the participants view their world. In order to do this, qualitative researchers must access the various perspectives of the participants (Glesne).

In addition to conveying the experiences of the research participants, qualitative research can also help to more fully describe a phenomenon from the reader's perspective. According to

Lincoln and Guba (1985), the information learned from qualitative research can be expressed in a format that is readily understood by others because it is presented in a form in which they experience it. Because of this richness in detail and insight into the participants' experiences, qualitative research reports are identifiable and meaningful to the reader (Stake, 1978). Readers can then relate their own experiences of multiple roles, developmental stages, learning experiences, and even their college experiences to this study. This research helps to make real the experiences of the participants and the readers, as well as the researcher.

Phenomenology.

A main type of qualitative research is phenomenology which describes the lived experiences of people as they present themselves to consciousness. For this study, I used a phenomenological approach to the study of nontraditional students as they made sense of the relationship between their lives as students and their personal responsibilities and various role obligations outside of the classroom. In phenomenological research, the researcher identifies the meaning of human experiences regarding a particular phenomenon. These experiences are described by the research participants and interpreted by the researcher (Creswell, 2003). According to Moustakas (1994), a phenomenological approach to qualitative research involves studying a small number of participants extensively in order to develop patterns of meaning. Nieswiadomy (1993) stressed the importance of the role of the researcher and the researcher's ability to draw upon his or her own experiences in order to understand the experiences of the participants.

The research design included the use of individual, in-depth interviews. The qualitative interview study was relevant according to the following considerations outlined by Weiss (1994). The qualitative interview process promotes the development of detailed descriptions so that the

researcher can learn as much as possible about an event or phenomenon that the researcher did not experience first hand. In this case, I completed my baccalaureate degree as a traditional age student, so as I interpreted the participants' words, I relied on their reflections and experiences as I shared their stories with the reader. By interviewing several participants, the researcher can integrate multiple perspectives. Qualitative interviews describe a process of how an event occurs or what an event produces as well as develop a holistic description of the event. Qualitative interviews allow us to understand how a system works. In this case, qualitative interviews allowed me to understand how nontraditional students succeed given their multiple role obligations and responsibilities as well as how their development and learning intersects with their multiple roles. Qualitative interviews also promote an understanding of how participants interpret the events in their lives as well as provide a method of bridging subjectivities by helping the reader identify with the participants and their experiences. Finally, qualitative interviews can provide a foundation for quantitative research by providing descriptions of processes that can inform quantitative research questions. Further, since qualitative research design is an emergent process where data is continuously analyzed and interpreted for meaning, it is not possible for research strategies to be finalized before data collection has begun (Patton, 1990).

Pilot Study

Before embarking on this study, I conducted a pilot study that helped to inform the current design. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine how conflicting role obligations, such as employee, spouse, parent, caregiver, and/or community member/volunteer influenced the performance and thereby the success of undergraduate nontraditional students. A major difference between the pilot study and this study was that the pilot study did not define success

as baccalaureate degree attainment. Instead success meant different things to the participants in the pilot study: to one of the participants, success was the achievement of the bachelor's degree from the same continuing studies unit used in this study, but for the other participants, success was enrollment in an undergraduate degree program. Additionally, one of the participants was working on a second bachelor's degree after having completed a first bachelor's degree many years ago as a traditional student.

I found that having different definitions of success was problematic in the pilot study. Although the pilot study also used a qualitative research design, it became difficult to measure or explore the impact of conflicting roles for nontraditional students when each of the participants defined success differently. Not only did the participants define success differently, but they were at different stages in their academic lives. Two of the participants had already received a bachelor's degree, one recently and the other many years earlier. The other two participants were currently enrolled in a continuing studies program.

Furthermore, I used a snowball sampling technique to recruit participants. I identified one participant who referred the other three participants. Unfortunately, by using this type of sampling technique, I did not know to what extent each of the participants was a nontraditional student. For example, one of the participants was only considered nontraditional because of her age; she was fifty years old. However, she did not have other roles that usually define nontraditional students. She worked part-time instead of full time; she was not married, and she did not have any children. As a result of this problem with the snowball sampling technique, I used a more purposeful sampling technique when I conducted this study. In addition to identifying potential participants by age, I also included a questionnaire with my recruitment letter. This questionnaire helped me to identify the extent to which potential participants could be

considered nontraditional. The contents of this questionnaire are included in the next section. By including the questionnaire and then selecting participants based on their level of nontraditionalism, I was able to more fully investigate the influence of conflicting roles on nontraditional student success, defined more specifically as baccalaureate degree attainment in this study.

Interview protocol for pilot study.

The following questions were included in the interview protocol for the pilot study:

1. What motivated you to go to school even though you had other obligations and responsibilities?
2. What was it like for you going to school while also juggling family and work responsibilities?
3. Can you think of what was the most challenging situation you had to deal with while being a nontraditional student? How did you handle it?
4. What, if any, support systems did you have either at home or on campus?
5. Looking back on your undergraduate career as a nontraditional student, is there anything you wish you would have done differently?

Results of pilot study.

According to the results of the pilot study, I found that the participants' children acted as a motivator for them to persist toward their goal of a baccalaureate degree. Three of the participants in the pilot study had young children (under 18 years old), and their desire for a better life for their children prompted them to remain in school. Unlike some of the participants in this study, the pilot study participants did not stress the goal of a better job as a motivator for their enrollment in higher education. The participants in the pilot study also stressed the

importance of organizational skills and the ability to prioritize their many roles and obligations. They also depended on the support of family and friends to help them navigate their roles. Although the topic of tuition assistance programs was not included in the interview protocol for the pilot study, some of the participants did mention its importance in their persistence. As a result, I specifically addressed this topic in the interviews for this study. I also included questions about the participants' educational background and learning style in the interviews for this study in order to more fully appreciate and understand their histories and their experiences as nontraditional students. This information was especially helpful in order to make connections between the nontraditional students' persistence toward baccalaureate degree attainment and their ability to navigate their multiple roles.

Research Participants

Selection process.

In order to locate participants for this current study, I requested from the university a list of students who graduated from this continuing studies division within the last year. My request included name, gender, age, address, type of degree (Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science), and date of degree. Once I received this information, I sent a letter to those students who had local addresses. (Most of the students had local addresses since most of the students enrolled in continuing studies programs are commuter students.) A total of 119 letters were sent to prospective participants. In this letter, I explained the study and asked for the respondent's participation. According to Lofland and Lofland (1984), it is important to provide potential participants with a clear description of the research goals in order for them to choose to grant access to their lives and experiences. I included a questionnaire with this letter to ensure that the participants I selected matched the criteria for which I was looking, including multiple roles. I

also included a postage-paid envelope with the recruitment letter so that participants could easily return the questionnaire. Additionally, I borrowed Horn's (1996) term for determining and verifying the nontraditional status of the participants. I considered one nontraditional characteristic "minimally nontraditional"; two or three nontraditional characteristics as "moderately nontraditional"; and four or more as "highly nontraditional." My goal was to select students who were at least moderately traditional. The following questions were used to determine nontraditional status as well as to determine participants' demographic information. This process of identifying participants who have specific experiences is known as critical case sampling (Bradley, 1992). The following questions, in addition to asking for potential participants' name and contact information, were included in this questionnaire:

1. How old were you when you first enrolled in college?
2. How old were you when you began your studies at the study context?
3. How old were you at the time of your graduation from the study context?
4. What was your marital status while you were a student at the study context?
(Single, married, partnered)
5. Were you a single parent?
6. Did you work full-time (at least 30 hours per week) while attending college? (Full-time status is a characteristic of nontraditional students as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics.)
7. On average, how many classes did you take each semester?
8. Did you have any children under your care for whose upbringing you were responsible (not necessarily dependents)?

9. If so, what were the ages of your children who lived with you while you were pursuing your undergraduate degree?
10. Were you the primary caregiver for an elderly or disabled relative while you were in college?
11. Were you a member of any community organizations?
12. Were you financially independent?

I gave a \$15 gift card to the participants who were selected for the study as compensation for their time. In addition to selecting students over the age of 30, I selected participants who had at least two other nontraditional student characteristics selected from the following characteristics: married or partnered, children living at home, working full-time (at least 30 hours per week), primary caregiver for elderly or disabled relative, community obligations. This information was included in the questionnaire. The potential participants received their bachelor's degree from this continuing studies unit of a private university, between 2007 and 2008. Twenty-four graduates returned the questionnaires; four letters were returned as undeliverable. So, the overall response rate was about 20%; however, eight of the 24 respondents were removed from consideration because they were not considered at least moderately nontraditional according to Horn (1996).

After reviewing the responses, I selected 10 participants to be interviewed for the study. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling so that their level of nontraditionalism was adequate for this study. Purposeful sampling is the dominant strategy in qualitative research and searches for cases that can provide rich information that can be studied in depth (Patton, 1990).

Data Collection

I used an open-ended and semi-structured interview protocol. I used a prepared set of questions as a guide, but I also used additional probing questions as appropriate. By using this type of interview process, I was able to provide the reader with in-depth insight into the experiences of nontraditional students. Although an interview guide helps to ensure that the same information is obtained from each participant, there are not right or wrong responses, and in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer can explore further within this line of inquiry. Interview guides also provide an effective use of the interview time, and they help to keep the interview focused (Hoepfl, 1997). Further, when necessary, I adjusted the interview guide to focus attention on some areas. (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). I did not have to exclude questions as suggested by Lofland and Lofland since I had already evaluated the questions as a result of the pilot study.

Each participant completed a consent form, and I interviewed each participant at a location that was convenient for them; each interview lasted approximately one hour. I digitally recorded each interview and then transcribed each interview verbatim. During the interview, I took notes as necessary. However, most of my note-taking was done following the interview and during the transcription process. The interviews were semi-structured, with probing questions asked depending on the student's responses and/or my need for clarification. The interview protocol consisted of the following questions:

Interview protocol.

1. What motivated you to pursue a baccalaureate degree at this time in your life even though you had other obligations and responsibilities? Tell me about your educational background.

2. What are your obligations/roles in addition to your role as student? (For example, spouse, employee, parent, caregiver for elderly or disabled relative, community obligations)
3. Tell me about your various roles while you were enrolled at the study context? How Demanding were your roles in terms of time commitment, emotional involvement, etc?
4. What was it like for you going to school while also juggling your other roles (in addition to student) and responsibilities?
5. Can you think of any challenging situations related to your various roles of student, parent, spouse, caregiver, and/or employee that you had to deal with while pursuing your bachelor's degree? How did you handle them? Tell me a story or two about such a situation.
6. What, if any, support systems did you have either at home or on campus?
7. How did the institution affect your decision to persist toward a bachelor's degree?
8. What type of financial incentive, for example tuition discounts or tuition reimbursement, did you receive while enrolled (if any)?
9. Describe your learning style? What type of assignments do you prefer? Why?
10. Do you incorporate your life experiences into your academic assignments?
If so, how?
11. Given your roles and responsibilities while also going to school, what motivated you to persist in completing your bachelor's degree?
12. Would you like to add anything else?

Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and the interview settings were determined after consultation with each

participant. The participants were each able to select a site that was convenient for them; however, privacy was a factor for consideration.

During the transcription process, I made notes and commented on observations. For example, when the participant laughed, I made a note of this reaction. This strategy was important because the written word alone does not always tell the whole story. As an example, one participant chuckled when she relayed her reaction to a cancer diagnosis midway through her academic studies. Her laughter was a response to her dedication to completing her studies no matter what challenges she encountered as well as her reliance on the support of others in her life in to endure this additional obstacle.

Data Analysis

The qualitative process of analyzing the data is not linear. Instead, it involves constant comparison of the data. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define qualitative analysis as organizing the data, breaking it down into manageable units, synthesizing it, discovering what is important, looking for patterns, and deciding what to tell others. Qualitative analysis also requires that the researcher adopt a level of creativity so that data can be placed into meaningful themes and categories and then communicate the interpretation of this data to others (Hoepfl, 1997).

I used thematic analysis as the primary method of data analysis in this study. This process involves coding the data and then segregating the data by codes into larger groups of data for additional analysis and description (Glesne, 2006). Following the first review of each transcription, I identified codes to use for further analysis; namely, the cross-case analysis. These codes emerged according to the general themes that I discovered during the first reading. These codes included references to the following themes: AB (academic background); MO

(motivation); RO (roles); FI (financial incentive); CH (challenges); SS (support system); CS (coping strategies); II (institutional impact).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), this open coding allows the researcher to identify and name the categories into which the data will be grouped. Also, the data was coded according to the participant and the context. Once the data was collected and organized through the use of coding, I was able to link what the participant said in the interview to the concepts and categories that I interpreted and included in the final analysis (Weiss, 1994). Through axial coding, the categories were re-examined to determine how they were linked (Strauss and Corbin). This coding allowed for a description as well as new understanding of the phenomenon. Along with the coding process, I also used extensive note-taking in my reviews of the interview transcripts. Once the interviews were transcribed and then coded, I reviewed the data for emerging categories and themes. By using local integration, I organized and integrated the information I learn from the participants (Weiss, 1994). I used a cross-case analysis of the data to interpret the findings. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), cross-case analysis allows the researcher to view outcomes across many cases, in this case 10, in order to understand how they are defined by the context. Further, cross-case analysis allows for more complete descriptions and stronger explanations. Cross-case analysis using multiple cases allows the researcher to better describe the specific conditions under which a finding occurs as well as helps to form general categories of how conditions may be related (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although the participants in this study were nontraditional students, they had various attributes, including different roles. The coding process, including axial coding, integration, and cross-case analysis allowed me to interpret the findings according to the context.

Consistent with Patton's (1990) observation that qualitative research design is an emergent process where data is continuously analyzed and interpreted for meaning, the data analysis of this study did not begin with the transcription or the subsequent coding of the participants' words. Instead, the analysis was an ongoing process that truly began with the recruitment of potential participants, including their responses to the initial questionnaire. Before I selected participants from the general pool of students who graduated within a certain time-frame and were over the age of thirty, I reviewed the questionnaires that each graduate submitted. Some of the twenty-four potential participants were considered only minimally nontraditional according to Horn (1996); therefore, I chose not to contact them for this study. For the purpose of this study, I wanted to interview graduates who were at least moderately nontraditional since this status was more likely include nontraditional students with multiple roles.

Following the transcription process, which involved typing the words of the participants along with my notes and observations and printing each transcription, I began to further analyze the data. The first step was to read each transcription. While reading the transcription for the first time, I underlined important themes and ideas as expressed by the individual participants. For example, support from family and fellow students was an important theme that emerged. I wrote notes in the margins. These notes included observations by the researcher as well as questions and comments about the participant's story. As I transcribed and read more interviews, I made notes and comments about commonalities observed between and among the participants' stories and experiences. This technique was especially helpful since I used a cross-case analysis of the data to record findings.

In order to define and identify the codes and provide as clear and thorough analysis as possible, I color coded each abbreviation and reviewed the transcripts again, using these codes where I had previously underlined important themes and ideas. Of course, I found some overlapping and even stratification of codes or axial coding which further defined the themes into categories. For example, academic background and history and the initial desire to enroll in college as a young student led to a motivation to pursue a bachelor's degree later in life. Also, the role of spouse sometimes conflicted with the role of student, but the student's spouse also became a source of encouragement and support as the student worked to achieve the goal of a baccalaureate degree.

Generalizability and Validity

Although my research included analysis that allowed me to communicate my findings, generalizability in qualitative research is not a primary goal. However, by using a cross-case analysis, I was able to enhance generalizability since studying multiple cases, in this case multiple students, can increase generalizability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). On the other hand, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that generalizability is impossible due to the local conditions of the context. I do not agree that generalizability is necessarily impossible in this study. Instead, I believe that both students and institutions can select appropriate strategies, as detailed in the findings and discussion, that may lead to persistence toward degree attainment.

In order to check for validity in the analysis process, I looked for patterns and themes and categories as a result of coding. Internal validity refers to the extent that these findings provide an accurate description of reality (Hoepfl, 1997). As the researcher, I acknowledged the presence of multiple realities. Credibility allowed me to address this idea of multiple realities by relying on credibility through the use of triangulation and member checks where the participants

were asked to corroborate the findings. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These patterns and themes emerged after reviewing the interview transcripts several times. I also used peer-debriefing as a way of monitoring the understanding and readability of my report and analysis.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), humans are the “instrument of choice in a qualitative study because they are responsive to environmental cues and they are able to interact with the situation.” They are also able to collect information at multiple levels simultaneously, and they can provide immediate feedback (Lincoln & Guba). Imperative to the validity for this study was the acknowledgement of my subjectivities and bias concerning my role as researcher as well as a higher education administrator. I am employed by the study continuing studies division in this study, but the participants are recent graduates not current students. By selecting candidates who were no longer students, I addressed the issue of bias in this study. Similar to the participants in this study, I also have conflicting role obligations, and I continually monitored these roles throughout this process. I also monitored these factors while making notes, analyzing themes and categories, and interpreting participants’ experiences.

Limitations

As the researcher of this study, I am employed by the same institution where the nontraditional students received their baccalaureate degrees. Although I do not teach at this university, it is likely that some of the participants were aware of my role at the institution. So, not unlike any qualitative study, there is a degree of bias and subjectivity on the researcher’s part as a result of my affiliation with the university as well as my own background and 17 years of administrative experience in higher education. I attempted to limit this bias by selecting participants who were no longer students in this division.

This study focused on nontraditional students who were graduates of a baccalaureate degree program only, and the findings may not be applicable to other programs of study. Also, the participants in this study were predominantly female; results may differ somewhat for male students. Further, the participants agreed to participate in this study; their selection was not random and they may have had a specific reason, either positive or negative, for wanting to contribute to this study. Some of the participants were also employees at the university, and this may have had an impact on their decision to participate in the study.

Conclusion

The methodology used in this study, as well as the research design, was appropriate given the qualitative nature of the research questions. The selection of 10 participants provided an opportunity for breadth and depth of information concerning the experiences of nontraditional students in higher education. By using one-on-one in-depth interviews and an open-ended and semi-structured interview protocol, I was able to gain insight into how nontraditional students were able to balance their academic goals with their personal and professional roles and obligations in order to achieve a baccalaureate degree. By receiving this information in the participants' own words and then interpreting this information, I was able to provide additional knowledge about the experiences of nontraditional students in higher education. Further, through the use of cross-case analysis, I was able to understand and interpret findings across cases in order to discover commonalities among the participants' experiences.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate qualitatively how nontraditional students enrolled within a unique university context of a continuing studies division managed to negotiate the demands of multiple roles in order to attain a bachelor's degree. As a result, this study revealed some strategies that these students used in order to navigate their various and often conflicting roles. This study also revealed what motivated nontraditional students to embark on a bachelor's degree at this stage in their lives given their multiple roles. This study exposed the obstacles and challenges related to multiple roles that nontraditional students confronted and overcame in order to persist toward completion of a baccalaureate degree as well as the support systems they had that allowed them to attain their baccalaureate degree while also managing their multiple roles.

For this study, I interviewed nine females and one male. Seven of the ten participants were married throughout most of their enrollment. (One participant was widowed during the program.) Each of the participants had children ranging in age from infant to teenagers while they were pursuing their degrees. All of the participants were employed full-time throughout their enrollment. Four of the participants were primary caregivers for an ill or disabled relative or spouse, and six of the participants had community memberships and responsibilities. Four of the ten participants worked for the university and received a tuition waiver. Three participants took advantage of tuition reimbursement programs at their place of employment. Two students received federal financial aid along with tuition discount programs. The other participant was solely responsible for the cost of attendance, but also took advantage of tuition discount

programs. The ages at the time the students received their degrees ranged from 32 to 58 with an average age of 49. On average, the students completed their degrees within 6.6 years from the time they began their enrollment in continuing studies. Table 2 provides additional information about the participants' characteristics.

Table 2

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Race	Age entered college	Age entered study context	Age received degree	Marital status
Linda	C	<23	51	55	M
Marta	H	<23	52	58	M
Alice	C	30+	43	49	D
Jackie	C	30+	47	54	M/W
Stella	B	28	46	53	M
Mary	B	40	40	51	D
Francesca	H	<23	34	38	M
Elle	C	30+	40	49	M
Russell	C	<23	43	51	M
Amanda	C	<23	28	32	S/M

Note. B = Black; C = Caucasian; H = Hispanic; M = married; D = divorced;

W = widowed; S = single

Table 2 continued

Participant	No. of children ^a	Work full-time ^b	Primary caregiver	Community volunteer
Linda	1	Y	Y	Y
Marta	1	Y	Y	N
Alice	1	Y	N	Y
Jackie	3	Y	N	Y
Stella	1	Y	Y	N
Mary	1	Y	Y	Y
Francesca	4	Y	N	N
Elle	2	Y	N	Y
Russell	1	Y	N	Y
Amanda	1	Y	N	N

Note. Y = yes; N = No

^aChildren were infant – 18 years old.

^bAt least 30 hours per week.

Following the first review of each transcription, I identified codes to use for further analysis; namely, the cross-case analysis. These codes emerged according to the general themes that I discovered during the first reading. These codes included references to the following themes: AB (academic background); MO (motivation); RO (roles); FI (financial incentive); CH (challenges); SS (support system); CS (coping strategies); and II (an overarching theme of institutional impact). I will discuss these revelations in the following narrative.

Themes

Academic background referred to the participant's history as a student. It included such things as their academic abilities as a younger student and a reflection on their educational journey. Some participants indicated that they were average or above average students in their high school and early college careers while others revealed poor academic histories. Regardless of their academic histories, most revealed that they were fearful of embarking on a college career at this stage in their lives because they were unsure of what to expect from college and equally unsure of what a continuing studies unit of a top-50 university would expect of them. They also talked about their family history and values as they related to post-secondary education. Most of the female students married, had children, and began working shortly after graduating from high school. Unlike today, where female students at the study context comprise almost 60% of the student population, these female participants did not grow up in an era where higher education was particularly stressed for young women. The male participant did well when he first entered college as a young man, but he experienced financial difficulty and quit college when he realized that he could earn more money working than going to school, and his family did not prompt him to do otherwise.

The theme of motivation was included in the answer to the question of why these participants chose to pursue an undergraduate degree as a nontraditional student at this stage in their lives. Some simply stated that it was something they always wanted to do; others wanted to set a good example for their children. Each of the participants indicated that at this stage in their lives they were more focused on what they wanted out of life. Some had spent many years being a spouse, parent, employee, and/or caregiver. During these years, they focused on others; they focused on being the supportive spouse and child, the hard-working employee, and the devoted

parent. However, now they made the decision, perhaps a selfish decision as categorized by some people in their lives, to do something they had always wanted to do—earn a college degree. They were now ready to do something for the one person they had neglected—themselves. So, although they still had to manage conflicting roles, as older students they felt that they were better equipped to handle these conflicts. In many ways, these students followed the theories of adult learning behavior according to situational life experiences as explained in McClusky's (1963) theory of margin, Knox's (1980) proficiency theory, and Jarvis's (1987) adult learning model. Learning occurs when individuals are ready to accept it, and often their stage in life dictates their ability to accept and embrace learning opportunities. Adults are motivated to learn when they desire proficiency, which is something they strive for as they amass a lifetime of experiences where they understand and appreciate their own capabilities and desire to use their knowledge for personal advancement.

As developmental theory explains, these students were able to reflect on their previous experiences in order to manage their educational experiences. At this stage in their lives, they had a better idea of their individual strengths and weaknesses, and life's experiences taught them how to best navigate the needs of significant others in their lives in order to achieve their own personal goals, in this case the attainment of a bachelor's degree. Perhaps the most important reason that the participants in this study shared about why they chose to embark on a degree at this stage in their lives was because the timing was finally right. Their internal timing and the events in their lives led them to this new adventure of education, and they were ready to embrace the challenge and the new learning experience. They believed that they had fulfilled or at least partially fulfilled some important milestones in their lives such as raising families and acquiring some stability in their lives along with a sense of self-actualization, and they were now ready to

embrace the new role of student. Since these nontraditional students already were managing several roles, they considered the new role of student as another aspect of their *chaotic stability* which I define as a state of life where there are many things going on all at once, but the chaos is expected and therefore easier to handle. These students had already experienced many challenges throughout their lives, and they learned to approach these challenges with strength, courage, and confidence. Each of the participants had received some degree of satisfaction in their lives, but they wanted more out of life for themselves and for their families. As adult learning theory dictates, these students were fearful of embarking on an educational journey at this point in their lives, but they had developed confidence in their capabilities. They had also learned how to learn from their previous experiences and how to adapt this knowledge to new experiences. They were no longer on a journey to find out who they were; they were now focused on how to be the best person they could be, and they were ready to extend this confidence to include their abilities as students. They had survived difficult times in their lives, including financial stress, illness, divorce, and death, and they came to the realization that life is short, and the time was right for them to take on the role of student in addition to their many others.

The theme of roles referred to the various roles that the students undertook while they were enrolled in continuing studies programs and working on their undergraduate degree. These roles included parent, spouse, full-time employee, caregiver, and volunteer in social and church organizations. In one case in particular, the student also had the role of patient as the student was battling a serious illness while also going to school. Although these students had many conflicting role obligations, they were more assured than ever that they could handle the additional stress that the role of student would also add to their lives. They were accustomed to the chaotic stability of adulthood. Their personal and psychological development was at such a

place that they felt confident in their abilities to handle this new role. They were more aware of who they were and what they wanted out of life as older adults than they were as twentysomethings. They had lived experiences that taught them the value of higher education. For example, some participants saw others get promotions instead of them because they did not have college degrees. So, these participants wanted the same advantages that others with a degree seemed to have. They also realized that in order to gain these advantages, they would need to take on the additional role of student. Yes, they were hesitant and fearful at times at the idea of another role, but they felt strongly that the sacrifice would be worthwhile, and they had confidence in their ability to learn. They were sometimes apprehensive about their study and learning skills at this point in their lives, but they considered these obstacles temporary and even used their various roles to their advantage. For example, they relied on co-workers and even their spouses and children to help them with things such as writing, research, and computer skills. These students were considered to be at least moderately nontraditional where they had two or more nontraditional characteristics, and this ability to navigate their conflicting roles may have been more difficult if they did not have the learning experiences associated with these characteristics. If they had not had these various roles in their lives, then returning to school as a nontraditional student may have been even more overwhelming than if they had fewer roles. Without these various roles, their persistence toward baccalaureate degree attainment may have been negatively affected.

Another theme that emerged was that of financial incentive and included financial aid, tuition discount programs sponsored by the continuing studies unit, and tuition waivers and tuition reimbursement programs offered by employers. Each of the participants in this study took advantage of some type of financial assistance program while working on their degrees at the

study context. In fact, most of the participants indicated that the various financial incentives, particularly those offered by the continuing studies unit itself, were instrumental in helping them to make the decision to embark on a baccalaureate degree at the study context. Some received tuition discounts or tuition waivers offered by the institution itself. Many of the participants were drawn to the study context by its strong academic reputation, but then the financial assistance helped to make degree attainment a reality. However, once the students enrolled at the study context, they admitted that they probably would have continued even without the financial incentives. Perhaps a compelling reason for their persistence can be attributed to the uniqueness of the study context due to its academic reputation, focus on relevant degree programs, convenience and flexibility of class schedules, and faculty and staff who were attuned to and had an understanding of the complexity of multiple roles that nontraditional students experience.

The topic of challenges referred to those obstacles that nontraditional students needed to overcome in order to persist toward their bachelor's degree despite their many roles. Lack of time due to their various roles was an obstacle as were feelings of guilt which one participant felt because she believed that she concentrated on her own education at the expense of her teenage children's education. Consequently, the challenges attributed to the lack of time also resulted in role conflict and role stress (but rarely total role overload) as most participants struggled to provide adequate attention to their various roles. For example, meeting the demands of family and job obligations as well as community and volunteer responsibilities was not always easy for these nontraditional students. However, their confidence in themselves that evolved throughout their lives as a result of their developmental processes and the learning skills and coping mechanisms that they acquired proved helpful in meeting these demanding and conflicting roles.

Relying on support systems also helped these students to confront and overcome the challenges associated with conflicting roles.

Throughout the interviews, participants revealed how important these various support systems were in their attainment of a baccalaureate degree. This included the support of husbands and wives, older children, and parents. Support came in the form of such things as spouses taking a more active role in household duties; older children helping their nontraditional student parents with new technology, and parents who helped with the grandchildren. However, for most students, support was not limited to the family unit; support came from employers and especially members of the university community. These various support systems allowed students to feel less guilty about being away from their families and gave them the encouragement they needed to persist. Support from employers gave them the acknowledgement that their efforts were worthwhile and sometimes even rewarded through promotions. These students also looked to their workplace peers and fellow students as beacons of support. They admired their co-workers who had earned a degree while juggling many other roles, and they were in constant contact with other students like themselves who were able to successfully negotiate their conflicting roles and responsibilities while also working on their degree requirements. These students relied on others for emotional support in addition to practical support. The entire university community and this continuing studies division in particular were especially important to the persistence of these nontraditional students. As mentioned earlier, their financial burden was lessened due to the availability of several tuition discount and waiver programs. These financial resources helped to alleviate some of the financial stress that could have resulted from returning to school at this stage in their lives. Although these students often felt guilty over the time spent away from their families and other responsibilities, these feelings

of guilt were alleviated when they realized that their going to school was not also a financial burden for their families. So, although many participants said that they would have continued without the financial assistance, this assistance certainly helped them to embark on going to school in the first place. Then, as they became accustomed to juggling their multiple roles and adapted to learning new things at this stage in their lives, they were able to persist.

Another theme that emerged from this study revolved around the coping strategies that these nontraditional students employed in order to balance their conflicting roles and responsibilities that went along with their various roles. Most relied on their organizational and time management skills that they had acquired throughout their lives. As adults, they were accustomed to juggling many tasks, and they adapted to these increased roles by learning new behaviors. They learned how to prioritize their tasks, and they learned how to rely on others for assistance. Through age they gained wisdom and confidence in themselves, and they used this newfound confidence and wisdom to pursue their personal goals. Further, they viewed their goals, in this case the goal of degree attainment, as something that they wanted for themselves, but also as something that could benefit those around them. If they found fulfillment in themselves then they could better handle their roles as spouse, employee, caregiver, etc.

Some of the participants in this study used physical exercise as a means of coping with the demands of their many roles: interestingly, yet another role. This relates to their abilities to prioritize and have a better understanding of who they were and what they wanted out of their educational experience. As they became better acquainted with their own learning styles and development, they knew what they needed to do to persist in this educational journey. In some cases, physical activity helped with this process.

Interwoven throughout each of these previous themes and the findings that follow in the next section is the overarching theme of institutional impact or institutional prestige. The context for this study, a continuing studies division of a top-50 university, and how this division affected the persistence of these students is an important factor. This unique division, with its open admission policy, inventive financial incentives, and relevant degree programs influenced many of these students' decision to pursue a degree in the first place. For many of these participants, the impressive reputation of this institution was something that they were aware of throughout their lives. The history of this institution was common knowledge for each of these nontraditional students. To receive a degree from the study context was a great achievement. Moreover, the study context provided these students with resources other than financial ones that could assist them in handling their multiple roles and challenges. These resources included faculty and staff who were accustomed to the developmental needs and learning styles of nontraditional students, challenging degree programs that measured up to the reputation of the institution, and convenient schedules, locations, and course delivery systems that were designed to meet the diverse needs of these students who were negotiating many roles. The following paragraphs reveal the specific findings of this study. These findings further demonstrate these relevant themes.

Strategies used by Nontraditional Students to Negotiate their Various Roles

In order to manage their various and conflicting roles including parent, spouse, employee, caregiver, and community member/volunteer, nontraditional students in this study developed organizational methods and strategies that helped in their attainment of a baccalaureate degree. These strategies included (a) time management; (b) stress management; (c) effective class scheduling; (d) effective study techniques as a result of learning style and experiences.

Time management.

Time management was a technique that each of the nontraditional students in this study relied on at some time or other. Marta, a 58 year old married woman and mother commented, “You have discipline in other areas of your life. You think if I can do that, I can do this, too.” Those with young children, tried to adhere to a routine as much as possible. According to Francesca, a 38 year old mother of four, “As long as I got the kids in bed by 10:00 p.m., that was the goal.” Elle, a 49 year old married mother of two teenagers tried to balance the time she spent on her school assignments with the time she spent with her husband so that he would not feel neglected:

I knew when I came home at night that I had to spend as much time with him as possible.

On the weekends, I would get up on Saturday at 4:00 a.m. and do school work so that if my husband was off on Saturday, and he woke up at 8:00 or 9:00, he wouldn’t see books.

I think I still don’t sleep well today because of my sleeping habits then.

Another student, 55 year old Linda, managed her roles by studying on Sundays and not choosing to work on weekends or holidays. Amanda, a student who was a single mother with a young child, bonded with her child through her school work:

He would eat at the table; I would sit down with my homework. A lot of time I would read it to him like a book. This was five years of his life with me being in school. He had a little fake computer; he would sit next to me and play on the computer while I typed notes. The little bit of time I had, I tried to spend with him, running between school to work to school. We would sing songs and count numbers in the car. I tried to make quality time with him when it wasn’t quantity.

Another participant, Mary, had a similar experience when she was caring for her ill mother while going to school: “I would go in and read stuff to her—whatever project I was working on. I’d ask her opinion. We bonded over school.”

In addition to developing time management skills with their families, these students also developed time management skills to use at the workplace. Several students mentioned that they would go to work early so that they could do school work in a quiet environment. They also devoted lunch hours to school work. Others stayed late at work to get the job done. One student reserved homework for weekends. Francesca, a mother of four young children commented, “I spread my time where I needed to so that I wasn’t totally exhausting myself.”

As these findings demonstrate, each of these participants was focused on their goal of degree attainment, and they were able to manipulate the other roles in their lives to align with their role of student. In some cases, they were able to prevent role overload by combining their various roles. For example, while caring for her mother, Mary also worked on her school assignments. Likewise, Amanda incorporated her study time with the time she spent with her son. Elle and Linda, on the other hand, strategically kept their roles of student and spouse separate. By doing so, they prevented conflict from occurring as a result of these two diverse roles. Each of these female students had a good understanding of the expectations of their spouses as well as expectations of themselves which are characteristics of their developmental stage. They knew what they had to do to make the situation work, and this knowledge was a result of their experiences and learning how to adjust to life’s circumstances.

Stress management.

Stress management techniques were also useful for these students as they were balancing their many roles and obligations. Stella, a 53 year old who also worked at the study context,

took a stress management class to help her cope with life's difficulties, but the other students just developed strategies as they went along. The development of their learning skills helped them not only in the classroom but in their coping strategies as well. They knew about how they learned best, and they adapted these learning styles to the various components of their lives. Stella also found that exercising helped her to manage her many and often conflicting roles: "I started walking and took my notes with me. I found that when I was moving and active I would retain things at a higher level. It was something I learned by accident." Francesca, a Hispanic student with young children felt that school provided her with adult time away from the kids: "I never took it as a burden; I got to get away from the kids for a little bit." In fact, assuming the additional role of student helped Francesca to better handle and appreciate her role as mother. She expressed that just going through adulthood and the challenges with work and family that go along with those roles improved the nontraditional student's ability to cope with other things, including school. As long as the additional roles did not result in feelings of being constantly overwhelmed or role overload, the students were able to effectively deal with the challenges associated with the role of student. Also, their development as adults and the normal transitions which that process involves, especially individual timing and the recognition that the timing was right to return to school, allowed them to persist in their educational adventure. Other students were able to recognize those times when school would be especially stressful: during exams or preparing for a research paper or presentation. However, the students became confident in their abilities as students and comfortable enough with their families that they could share these stressful times with others in order to survive them so that role stress, role conflict, and/or role overload would be held to a minimum. When Marta, 58, was experiencing stressful times at school, she would phone her sister, who was also going to school in another city: "We would talk

on the phone. . .what are you studying? How is your work coming on that paper? I know you're going to finish. We gave each other support." Jackie, 54, a widowed mother, sometimes took a Saturday class to alleviate the stress during the work week: "Sometimes I took a Saturday class. . .that was easier for different reasons. If things with the kids had to be done during the week, I thought a Saturday class would be better." By offering these flexible schedules, the study context was able to effectively assist with lessening the stress for these students. Mary, 51, wanted school to be fun: "I would go [to school] for fall and spring. It had to be fun, so I would take the summer off." Again, by offering a variety of classes, including the History of Rock 'n' Roll, that many of these students cited as fun because many of them were active participants in this history, the study context was able to meet the needs of these students by making their learning relevant, an important component of adult learning theory according to Knowles (1970). Mary's daughter also helped to alleviate some of Mary's stress associated with going to school: "My daughter was very encouraging. She would say, 'I'll type it [paper] up for you.' Then, I would say, well, let me go ahead and do this." Without her role of mother, Mary may have had a much more difficult time in her role of student.

Effective class scheduling.

Effective class scheduling also contributed to these students' abilities to navigate and manage their conflicting roles. Six of the ten participants took advantage of online classes as a way to manage their various schedules. Online classes allowed them the flexibility to take classes yet still be at home to watch over their children. Amanda, a single mother of a toddler said, "I could wait until he was asleep or after nap time, then I was still there if he needed me, and he took comfort knowing I was in the next room." Online classes made going back to school "doable" for one student. They also allowed Amanda to take more classes during a semester than

she would otherwise have taken because it didn't take her away from work or her family since she could participate at any time. Mary, a 53 year old mother who was also taking care of her elderly mother, only scheduled classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays: "It was a challenge, but I knew what I wanted to do. Tuesday and Thursday worked because if I had an assignment on Tuesday, I could do it in between. I didn't want to have too much to do on the weekend because I had other obligations." Students also took advantage of classes during their lunch hour so that they would not take away time from work or time with their families. Students had the flexibility of taking classes during the day or in the evening or on Saturdays or online. Summer classes were also important to some students. Some students took summer classes because they helped them to move along faster, while others took the summer off in order to be rejuvenated for the next semester. Mary needed her summers away from school: "I would go fall and spring; it had to be fun so I would take the summer off." The students needed this flexibility in classes in order to manage their roles and in order to avoid conflict in these roles.

In addition to the continuing studies division offering flexibility in the class schedules, the students were also appreciative of the various campus locations and relevant degree programs. For most of the time while these students were enrolled, there were three campus locations in addition to online classes. Having these various locations made it easier for students to take classes at various times because the locations were either close to where they worked or where they lived. These convenient locations were especially helpful to Mary as she was caring for her mother, "I didn't want to take on a lot of complications in my life at that time, but school was only 15 minutes away, so that was a good start." Mary was also drawn to the paralegal studies program because it allowed her to branch out in her management job and acquire more skills. So, as Knowles pointed out, Mary sought relevant and applicable learning and the

paralegal studies program provided that learning mechanism. Linda also enjoyed the convenient campus locations, “This campus was a huge attraction; I could pull my car right up to the door and not worry about the notorious parking problems at the main campus.” The adult learning environment and the adult development went together. The location was convenient for Linda especially since she had physical difficulty in walking long distances. Without this flexibility in campus locations, programs, and course schedules, these students may not have been able to persist.

Effective study techniques as a result of learning style and experiences.

Finally, developing effective study techniques was another strategy that these students used to help them to navigate among their various roles and lead them to their degree. Although most said that they did not particularly like study groups or group projects, Elle, a full-time employee and married mother of two, said that working with other students was helpful toward the end of their program:

I would meet with people to study. When I started to embrace that, it became a little easier. In the beginning I was leary of it because I didn’t have time for that; I was on a mission. So, when I opened a book, it wasn’t around anybody’s time but mine. Toward the end, though, I was able to embrace that [study group].

The idea of timing is important here. As people mature, they have a better sense of themselves and what they want and expect out of life, just as these students demonstrated. Elle was focused on her goal of degree attainment, and initially she believed that she did not have time for student relationships and activities. However, as she became more comfortable with her own learning, she was able to embrace new ideas that she thought may help her to achieve her goal. As a result of group work, this social and academic integration, which Tinto (1987) theorized was important

to persistence, became at least somewhat beneficial for these students as they embraced this new form of learning. In referring to group work, Marta, a Hispanic student who was dealing with her ill husband and financial struggles said, “You have to be prepared to jump in and take over.” She became a leader among her fellow students when they were working on a group project. Life had taught her that being passive can have negative consequences when her lack of involvement in her family’s finances eventually resulted in a declaration of bankruptcy. She transferred this life lesson to her learning style and became an active learner in the classroom as well and did not let others make all of the decisions or dictate how she would carry out her academic assignments.

In response to the specific question asking participants to describe their learning style, all of the participants indicated that they thought they were visual learners, but they also appreciated the auditory part of learning. Some expressed difficulty with online courses because they lacked the interaction with other students and the teacher. However, they were willing to sacrifice that interaction for the scheduling bonus that online classes provided. Eight of the ten participants indicated that they took extensive notes and then two of the eight stated that they would re-write their notes as a way of retaining the material. The participants in this study developed confidence in their abilities as students, even if they lacked this confidence in their younger years. They were focused and driven, and even though they became stressed during exam periods, they each indicated that they knew they did their best and that was all they could guarantee. Several of the participants indicated that writing assignments were especially stressful. Mary stated,

The stress of writing is a lot for me; pulling it together and coming up with an idea. It’s hard to get started. I’d rather do two papers instead of five. That’s when I would get overwhelmed; having to read those books and try to put it in the correct format the way

they wanted it. [Writing papers] was the worse part; having to go to the library, reading the books, doing the research, and then actually doing it.

Another said, “I hated doing papers; it was twice as hard.” Marta, 58, said, “The stress of writing was a lot for me, pulling it together and coming up with an idea. It’s hard to get started.” Alice, 52, on the other hand said that she liked research, and she liked gathering information. However, she also said, “I’m not good at sitting down and formulating an answer; I need time to formulate an answer.” For each of these students, writing may have caused them stress because writing assignments were less prescriptive than what they were used to as younger students. As younger students, they were more accustomed to the teaching methods of pedagogy than the learning methods of andragogy. However, their life experiences and development as adults was more in line with andragogy where they appreciated finding relevance to their lives in what they were learning. As Richardson (1994) found, these students took their learning and studying very seriously, and they were interested in the meaning of what they learned rather than just learning facts. Interestingly, although the writing process was stressful, Marta, 58 said, “I learn a lot with writing, and I retain more.” This comment, however, was consistent with the concept of andragogy and its focus on learning. These students were interested in learning that they could apply to their lives. They were looking to school as a method by which they could apply their learning to something tangible, for example, a promotion, a role model for their children, or the achievement of a personal goal. So, once the students developed an appreciation for the applicable knowledge gained from writing and once they acquired a better understanding of the mechanics of writing, they were able to perform the writing tasks.

When asked if they incorporated any of their own personal experiences into their academic learning experiences, the participants overwhelmingly replied affirmatively. Linda,

who was a married mother, working full-time, and caring for elderly parents while enrolled said, “All of it was life and work experiences; all of my assignments I tried to pull from family, work, or church.” Other students took classes that revolved around subjects that they experienced first-hand, such as the Vietnam War and the History of Rock ‘n’ Roll. So, for these students their roles came together in the classroom and they were able to understand the relevance of their learning. Marta, 58, used her own experiences to give a speech in a communications class. She said, “You were given a pattern, and you used the fabric of your life to put it together. You start researching things, and you find out I really do care about this subject.” Her life experiences became a resource for her learning, another aspect of andragogy. Her life experiences shed light on her classroom experiences and her classroom experiences helped her to understand her life experiences, like the continuum of pedagogy and andragogy. Similarly, Alice, a divorced mother, commented that juggling things in life, including kids and work, allowed her to draw from that experience in order to juggle her academic assignments, another example of the nexus of adult development, adult learning, and the various roles that these students undertake.

Motivation for Nontraditional Students to Pursue a Baccalaureate Degree at this Time in their Lives

The nontraditional students who participated in this study shared several reasons for choosing to undertake a bachelor’s degree at this time in their lives and at this continuing studies division despite their many roles and obligations: (a) affordability due to tuition waiver/reimbursement/discounts; (b) interest in career advancement; (c) lifelong goal of a bachelor’s degree; (d) role model for their children; (e) change in a current role due to life event/life stage. So, due at least in part to each of these reasons, the timing for embarking on a college degree was right for these nontraditional students.

Affordability.

Seven of the ten participants indicated that the affordability of the continuing studies programs provided the motivation they needed to return to school or begin their college education. Each of the participants dreamed of a college education in their younger years, but as they got older and became aware of various tuition discount programs, their interest escalated. Four of the ten participants were employed by the university that housed the continuing studies unit where they eventually enrolled. The university provided (and still does provide) a tuition waiver for up to six credits each semester. Three participants received a tuition reimbursement from their employer. The terms of the tuition reimbursement programs varied but usually included a maximum yearly benefit, reimbursement based on grades, and relevance of courses to job duties. The other participants took advantage of financial aid and/or tuition discounts offered by the continuing studies unit, including 50% tuition discount for employees of certain agencies and a “Seventh Class Free” incentive where once students pay for six classes, they get the seventh class free. Alice said, “My employer would pay tuition. They would pay books, fees, the whole thing. So, I told my boss that I was ready to go back to school. Then, I realized that they had a program where employees could get their degree. So, that was good.” Francesca, a mother of four young children added, “What helped me with making the decision to go back to school was I worked for a company that had tuition reimbursement.”

The role of the continuing studies unit in providing financial incentives for students was highlighted by the participants. Although once enrolled, most students stated that they would have continued without the financial assistance, these special discount programs did provide initial motivation. By contrast, some of the other institutions briefly discussed in Table 1 did not offer as many tuition discount programs, and their tuition rate was higher than that of the study

context. The decision of this continuing studies unit to directly address the issue of affordability in higher education had a positive impact on these nontraditional students' ability to juggle their roles when they realized that the additional role of student would not also be a financial burden, which could have resulted in role overload and eventual departure from college.

Career advancement.

Another reason that participants indicated they wanted to return to school even though they had other roles, including spouse, full-time employee, caregiver, etc. was that they wanted the opportunity for career advancement. Francesca said, "At first, I looked at it as a career opportunity." Marta said, "I realized that if I had a degree at least I would be taken seriously." Elle, a married mother of two commented, "Promotability was based on my continuing my education. Any promotions I received, I got based on the requirement that I was in school." Stella, a married mother who was working full-time stated, "I knew that the job market would change, and I always wanted to be prepared. I wanted to get more skills to do something on a more professional level." So, being a student, even though it meant taking on another role, benefited these participants because it also made them better employees with greater potential.

These students wanted to immediately apply what they learned and this focus on career advancement helped to achieve this goal. They had already been exposed to various careers throughout their adult lives, and they now had enough information to know what they wanted out of a degree. They were at that stage in their lives and they had accumulated enough experiences that they considered the timing to be right to assume the role of student. Yes, they were fearful of the level of their academic abilities, but their desire for advancement both professionally and personally seemed to be stronger than their fear of failure. They were at a time in their lives

where they had already experienced success and failure; triumph and disappointment, and they felt confident that they could handle the outcome in this journey as well.

Lifelong goal.

Each of the participants developed a goal of achieving a bachelor's degree. Russell, a 51 year old married father, said, "I always did well in school, and I just felt that it was something left undone." Russell experienced financial constraints as a younger student, but now the timing was right. He had a better idea of who he was and what he could achieve, so he revisited the idea of a college degree. Amanda, a single mother said, "I think I always knew I would go back. It was never a question, just a matter of time and when I stumbled onto something that struck me." Amanda had a young child that she cared for on her own. She did not feel that she had the luxury of waiting to return to school because she wanted a better life for her son while he was still young.

Some participants indicated that they had a lifelong dream of attending this university, in particular, due to its stellar reputation. Linda had a family connection to the university: "I always wanted to graduate from here. My uncle was a graduate, and my family always held this institution in high esteem." The reputation of this institution seemed to matter to these students. They were local residents in the community, and this institution had a long history of excellence. However, reputation was not the only factor. When these students realized that they could financially handle the cost of returning to this school at this stage in their lives, then the goal became attainable. Although the tuition was higher at the study context than at most other universities in the area, these students took advantage of the tuition discounts and believed that the value of a degree from this institution mattered and was worth the sacrifice.

For many of the students, when they developed a clearer focus on what they wanted out of life and education, they were motivated to return to college. Marta thought, after dropping out initially, “I can always go back to school.” Elle added, “I always aspired to get my degree.” Jackie, a widowed mother of three said, “It seemed that as I progressed, I was more determined to finish.” Linda, a 55 year old married mother said, “I knew it was going to be tough, but I was raising a child with exceptionalities that no one understood; I raised a family; I’d been through a bad marriage, so I was confident I could handle this, too.” So, after interviewing these nontraditional students, I found that they all valued a college degree, but they sometimes lacked the drive and focus when they were younger. Then, when they were older and had full-time jobs, families, and other roles, they felt more driven and dedicated to their goals. They were fairly successful in handling these other roles, so they were confident that they could tackle the role of student as well. As a result of their developmental stage and familiarity with their learning capabilities and what they expected from an education, they were ready to embark on this new challenge. As adults, they were more decisive about how they would fulfill their own needs. As theorized by Maslow (1954) they had already achieved lower order needs of survival and just experiencing the everyday challenges of life, and now they were ready for more challenging roles. They believed that they had achieved a lot in their lives: families, careers, etc., but they still had a goal that was unmet—the goal of a bachelor’s degree. Although they still experienced doubt, these feelings of doubt no longer prevented them from moving forward like it did when they were younger.

Role model.

Interestingly, I found that some of the same factors that prevented students from attending college when they were younger also provided the motivation for others to return later.

Amanda, who became a single mother shortly after she returned to college after having left for financial reasons commented,

[My son] further instilled my desire to go [to school]. I think your children have a 50% greater chance of going to college if one or both parents have a college degree. I really wanted to show my son that it was important; that you really could achieve more with a degree.

So, even though she struggled with being a single mother and going to school, she believed that the sacrifice was worth the effort because it would ultimately benefit her son. Elle said that her motivation changed from a professional one to a personal one: “I want to show my son and my daughter that this is what you need to do. You need to do it the right way.” Jackie said, “Even if it’s just an example for my kids and my grandkids to say, ‘Grammy completed her degree’, so you have to stay in school.” In speaking about her daughter, Alice, 49, said,

I think it meant a lot to her. I think it made a big impression on her. I always impressed a college education on her. For her to see me through that and handle all of the stuff, she was real proud of me. I emphasized education forever with her and for her to see me finish it, it shows her to complete what you do. It was important for her to see that.

Mary, 51, added, “I always tell my daughter that you’re never too old to learn new things.”

Going to school was Mary’s way of showing her daughter. Elle, 49, indicated that she felt that she was a role model for her colleagues at work who were following in her footsteps and returning to school, “I always tell them to take one class; get your feet wet. I tell them don’t look ahead; look at what you’ve done and what you’ve accomplished.” Francesca, 38 and the mother of four, said, “It was a big thing to graduate. I’m making sure that my kids do it, too. It was

worth the sacrifices. By taking on the additional role of student, these nontraditional students believed that they were improving in their role as parent.

In effect, these students evolved as human beings. When they were younger, they had far fewer responsibilities, but they still lacked focus; they did not know what they wanted to do with their lives or daily living interfered with their desires. However, after a lifetime of experiences, they were able to see beyond their own needs of survival and include the needs of those around them as well. Returning to school still fulfilled a personal need, but this need was expanded to include the needs of others; namely, their children and families. As they realized that they had to take on new roles, expand their learning and continue to stretch their development in order to achieve the goal of degree attainment, they were able to persist toward that important goal. Further, these students were able to manage their roles so that they did not experience role stress or role conflict to the point that it prevented their persistence. Instead, they mingled their roles so that their sacrifices regarding their families, jobs, and other responsibilities were minimized.

Role change due to life event/life stage.

Finally, I found that these students were motivated to return to school because their roles at home were changing. Some of the participants waited to return to school until their own children were older than the age of 10. These students felt that they were not needed as much by older children as they were when their children were toddlers. They determined that the timing was right to continue with their educational pursuits. Francesca explained the following:

Every time I had a baby, it put the thought [of going to college] on the side. I still had the thought; for some reason I did always want to go back to school. Every time I got pregnant I put it aside. After my third child, I did start school then, and I stuck with it. I had backups; my mom always kept my kids; my husband was there.

Stella also waited to return to school until her daughter was older and less dependent:

My daughter was nine years old, but it was really too difficult [to go to school]. Then, after she grew up, by the time she was a teenager, I said this is my time. It's something I always wanted to do because I knew the job market would change, and I always wanted to be prepared.

Elle also tried to go to school when her children were young, but experienced difficulties, "With the children, it was just the thing that would act up. I couldn't get them to settle down." Then, when her children were a few years older, and she returned to school and then was rewarded with promotions, Elle said, "I was on a mission. My children were now teenagers."

As suggested by adult developmental and learning theories, their lives were more complex at this stage, but their experiences allowed them to cope with these complexities. They were able to reflect on what they learned and how they learned during the various stages of their lives, and they felt confident that the timing was right to assume the additional role of student and that they could cope with the challenges of returning to school. Linda shared,

There's never a good time to start. Life is going to happen. I made the decision I was going [to school]. I'm just going to press on because it's always going to be something. I already raised a child with exceptionalities that no one understood; I raised family; I'd been through a bad marriage.

In one case, Mary's daughter, who was a teenager at the time, encouraged her mother to return to school because doing so would prevent her mother from being so actively involved in her life. So, in this case, the student was facing a change in roles. Mary said, "I've always been involved in her [daughter's] activities. I was always there. Then, my child told me that I needed to get a life and get out of hers." By enrolling in school herself she was slowly shifting her focus from

her daughter to herself although both were important to her decision-making processes. She was transitioning from her role as active parent to active student. She was addressing the life-changing event of her daughter's new role of adult by adopting her own new role of student. Another student, Jackie, became widowed while she was pursuing her bachelor's degree. However, instead of quitting, she embraced the role of student even more than before because it helped her to feel useful and kept her mind occupied: "It made me stronger." Her husband's death was a life-changing event in her life. She managed this life-changing event by transitioning to the role of student. In many ways, going to school was a coping mechanism for these students in dealing with the various stages and events in their mature lives.

Mary never even considered dropping out even after she was diagnosed with a serious illness: "School helped. I think I went overboard with studying and different things because I wanted to keep my mind busy, and that helped." Marta, 58, experienced severe health problems with her husband as well as a huge financial setback. However, she looked to school and receiving her bachelor's degree as a way to deal with these problems and provide for her future and for her family's future: "You have discipline in other areas of your life; you think if I can do that, I can do this." [go to school] So, taking on the role of student in addition to caregiver and breadwinner was necessary for her family to survive: "At this point, I'm like I need this. I got an iron in my backbone; I changed my personality." As adults, these students needed different things from life than when they were younger. They needed survival, but they wanted something more than survival; they wanted a future, and a baccalaureate degree was an answer to this need.

In response to the question about what motivated them to pursue a bachelor's degree at this time in their lives, participants also talked about their educational background. Marta, 58, said,

I started college at 17; I wasn't good enough to go anywhere else, and there wasn't any family income. I was completely unfocused. I flunked out, and I said I can always go back to school. How stupid was I?!

Many years later and in large part a factor of her stage in life and life events, Marta changed her attitude, "I decided I can do this." [complete her degree]

Another student, Elle, 49, went to a college preparatory high school where higher education was encouraged. She married shortly after graduating from high school and then quickly had two children, but she always aspired to get a degree. Russell, 51 and the married father of a son, started his college career right out of high school, but he dropped out due to financial concerns. When he finally returned to college over 20 years later, he said, "I wanted to finish the degree that I started years ago." Like Marta, Alice, 49, said that she lacked focus when she started college immediately after high school. Both Francesca, 38, and Linda, 55, were good students in high school and wanted a college degree. Francesca dropped out to raise her son, and Linda dropped out due to lack of both emotional and financial support from her parents. Stella, 53, and Amanda, 32 and a single mother, also aspired to receive a bachelor's degree, but they also lacked focus and commitment when they were younger. Jackie and Mary, however, did not initially consider a college education immediately after they graduated from high school. Their parents and high school counselors stressed finding suitable employment rather than a college education even though they were academically successful in high school. Then, after they were working for a while, they considered a college degree a worthwhile goal especially when they received both emotional and financial support from their employers and the study context.

A significant factor related to these students' motivation was their belief in themselves to accomplish this educational goal. Their life experiences had taught them important lessons: they

had faced struggles before and they survived. As found in adult learning theory, these nontraditional students expected to be proficient in the learning environment, and they expected to apply what they learned in the classroom to their everyday lives so that they could find solutions to their problems and obstacles, for example, financial problems associated with bankruptcy. The events in their lives had materialized in such a way that a focus on their education was possible. Their children were either older or well cared for, they were aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and they were somewhat settled in their careers, but they knew they could achieve greater things. Then, when the study context was affordable due to the tuition and various discount programs, they believed that the dream of a bachelor's degree could become reality. Although they knew that they would encounter obstacles and challenges along the way, they took on the role of student with a keen sense and understanding of where their lives had led them at this point and where they wanted to go.

Obstacles and Challenges Related to Nontraditional Students' Various Roles

The nontraditional students I interviewed for this study revealed several obstacles and challenges related to their various roles that they had to confront and manage in order to persist in their studies toward a bachelor's degree. These obstacles were generally related to their (a) job responsibilities; (b) family commitments, and (c) community/volunteer activities.

Important to this finding is the method by which nontraditional students were defined by this study. The nontraditional students in this study were at least 30 years of age, and they were considered at least moderately nontraditional by Horn's (1996) definition. This means that, in addition to being over the age of 25, these students also had at least two other nontraditional characteristics. These characteristics included full-time jobs or the equivalent, married, children, and community responsibilities. Since these students had several roles that often conflicted with

their role of student, challenges and obstacles were found. However, this study also found that these challenges due to their multiple roles sometimes were also alleviated by their multiple roles. For example, employers and university support staff and students provided needed emotional support and understanding; older children and parents helped with younger children; spouses assisted with daily chores. Had these students been less nontraditional, then they may not have benefited from the support that resulted from their multiple roles and which eventually led to their attainment of a baccalaureate degree. So, multiple roles led to challenges, but they also opened up avenues of support. Without these multiple roles and without the chaotic stability associated with these multiple roles or their moderately nontraditional characteristics, these students may not have been able to handle their challenges, and they may not have persisted.

Job responsibilities.

Since all of the participants were working full-time while they were also students, they experienced conflicts between these two roles. Mary, 51, recalled stressful situations each semester around the time of midterms and finals because that was also the time that was the busiest at work: “They [midterms and finals] always came at the time when I had committee meetings and other activities at work which involved a lot of my time.” Similarly, Jackie, 54, said that certain times of the year were stressful and challenging: “There were times when I couldn’t be at a function for work because I had an exam or test, so I would try to get there late rather than not be there the whole time.” In each of these situations, though, the participants indicated that they had the assistance of their colleagues at work who would fill in for them when necessary. As a result, the conflicts were manageable. Elle, 49, commented that the conflicts were minimized because her job always took precedence over school and unfortunately, she would sometimes have to miss class because of her job responsibilities. In this case, Elle had a

clear picture of what she could do and what she could not do. She knew beforehand when she needed to make accommodations for her work schedule, so she was not entirely surprised when stressful situations arose. As a result, she was able to handle them better than if she were blindsided for these conflicts. So, these students had enough experiences and events in their lives that they were able to anticipate the struggles ahead and then approached these struggles with solutions that they learned were previously affective.

Amanda, 32, decided that the challenge of one full-time job was too much of a conflict with her role as student, so she found three part-time jobs instead that would give her more flexibility in both her work and school schedules. She was at a developmental stage in her life where she knew what she could handle, and she adjusted her schedules and roles accordingly. She learned what worked for her by trial and error and then adapted the situation to meet her needs. Marta, 58, initially had difficulty juggling her work with school, "There's no way I can go to school and work. I'm slaving at work. I'm really working very hard, but I also saw more potential for me to grow professionally and personally and school allowed me to do that." In Marta's case, she initially thought the obstacles of going to school and managing her commitments at work was just too stressful. However, she then realized that if she wanted more for herself, if she wanted to fulfill the higher need of self-actualization, then she was willing to endure the sacrifices. For Marta, the benefit of persisting toward her educational goal was worth the cost involved.

Family commitments.

In addition to job responsibilities, the participants also experienced conflicts related to their family commitments. Although those who were married had supportive spouses for the most part, sometimes the students were torn between their academic responsibilities and their

responsibilities to their spouses. Marta, 58, said, “It was difficult; he [husband] wanted to do something and I was like ‘no’ I have to write this paper.” Stella, 53, shared a similar story:

He [husband] just felt like I should be home. I’m having to fight with him, and we’re getting into arguments; he wants me to tell him that I’m going to commit to going somewhere over the weekend, and I’m going to spend time with him. I just had hoped that he would have been more understanding. It was extremely stressful.

Russell said that his wife probably had a harder time than he did because “I was gone more, and when I was home I was more focused on class work so I made sacrifices there.” Linda, 55, said,

It was challenging from the get-go. We were living in an apartment at the time; everything was in storage. My husband said we couldn’t afford it, and I was angry about that. I lost my father and my niece. . . everything was a challenge. I don’t know where I got the resolve to do well, but I know that I loved being here [in school].

Francesca, 38, said that it was very difficult going to school while also raising four children.

There were times when she had to make a choice between going to class or going to games and meetings for her children:

My dilemma was going to school and the kids was when my son was in high school and my daughter starting playing sports in her grammar school. That was a dilemma for me.

I’m going to miss games. There were times when I had to make the choice between going to class or going to games.

Each of these students had to partially sacrifice some of their family roles in order to perform in their role of student. Without making such concessions, then they may likely have experienced role overload or role stress. Unlike their role as parent or spouse, they viewed their role as student as temporary. So, they believed that could sustain these conflicting roles and the

challenges and choices that resulted because they felt that the conflicts would not last indefinitely.

Time management became difficult but something that each participant had to do as much as possible. Elle, 49 and married and working full time, expressed feelings of guilt about not being around as much for her children, but she thought that they would be motivated to stay in school if they saw her working so diligently to complete her degree,

I had a mother's guilt. I felt that maybe if I'd have pushed them a little more [instead of focusing on her studies] they would have done better in school. At the time, I thought if they see what I'm doing then it would motivate them. If she can do it, I can do it. I had lots of guilt, though.

Elle was able to rationalize her feelings of guilt so that she could persist in meeting her educational goal. She acknowledged the validity of her feelings, but she did not let them overwhelm her. Instead, she focused on completing whatever task she was working on, and saw each task as a piece of the puzzle that she needed to complete in order to move forward in her life and her career.

Dealing with family illnesses also caused conflict for these nontraditional students. Linda, 55, experienced the death of her father and young niece while she was in school. She also was the primary caregiver for her elderly mother. When asked why these obstacles did not result in her dropping out of college, she stated, "I came to the decision that there's never a good time to start. Life is going to happen, and I just made the decision that I was going to stay in school; I didn't care who was living and who was dying." Timing was important for Linda. She had experienced enough hardship in her life to realize that the timing was never perfect, so she needed to make the conscious decision to focus on herself and her degree. As life had taught her,

achievements do not always come easily and struggles are a part of life. A younger student or a student with fewer nontraditional characteristics may have come to a different conclusion, but Linda's life of learning and experience had taught her that persistence must come from within; external reasons for continuing her education were not nearly as important as her internal drive and determination, a significant component of adult learning and development.

Marta, 58, had to manage her husband's chronic illness. This was stressful for her because it added a financial burden as well. However, earning a bachelor's degree was her way of providing financial stability by increasing her marketability in case the worse happened and she became her family's sole source of income:

I'm dealing with the depression of my husband's illness—he's had his third heart attack.

I'm thinking, let me just do this; let me commit to this [going to school]. I made the decision that I was going to graduate.

Unlike Linda's experience noted above, Marta was somewhat externally motivated to focus on her degree attainment in this case. Although she was personally focused on receiving her degree and enduring the obstacles to get there, she also had a practical reason to continue. She related a degree to her ability to financially provide for her family if necessary. She did not see herself as a victim of circumstances, and she took action to overcome her financial difficulties. She expected her attainment of a degree to have a direct impact on her life. She expected a return on her investment and her sacrifice, and she expected the study context to meet her needs by providing a quality learning experience. In order to receive these returns, she was willing to appreciate and confront the obstacles and challenges that resulted from her multiple roles.

Pat, 51, also experienced her own health scare as well as the illness of her mother and former husband. Pat shared,

During my sixth year [going to school] I found out I had cancer. I would go through the ups and downs, but school helped me. I wasn't at home moping because I had to study.

My mother was also sick, and I'd sit with her and do my papers. We bonded over school.

Jackie, 54, experienced the death of her husband while she was working on her bachelor's degree. Jackie added, "I knew I had to finish [her degree] and [school] kept my mind off of it [husband's death]. Rather than sit at home and worry about things, going to school made me stronger."

For both Pat and Jackie, having multiple roles allowed them to focus on things other than the turmoil and to work toward chaotic stability in their lives. In some ways, going to school helped them to handle the difficulties in their lives by providing them with a purpose and goal. Going to school was not without its stress, but these students had more control over their school issues than they had over the life and death issues of living. If they focused only on illness and death, then they may have experienced emotional problems. So, going to school while also managing their multiple roles may have saved their sanity and even contributed to their physical health and well-being as suggested by Verbrugge (1987).

Community/volunteer activities.

In addition to work and family roles and the resulting conflicts with their role of student, some of these nontraditional students also had roles in community and volunteer organizations. Russell, 51, was active in the Boy Scouts, but curtailed some of those activities when he resumed his college studies: "I was in between some long term commitments—my obligations to Boy Scouts and that sort of thing so I had a void in my time schedule." Mary, 51, on the other hand, added to her list of volunteer activities after she returned to college. She said, "I was also involved in activities, and instead of letting things go, I found that I kept doing it and adding on."

Alice, 49, was active in her church as she was converting from one faith to another while she was also working on her bachelor's degree, "Faith is important to me. While in school, I went back to catechism. I took a Catholicism class [at the continuing studies unit]. I always wanted it, but I did it this time. I was RCIA (Catholic initiation) coordinator." Linda, who was majoring in paralegal studies, assumed an active role in the paralegal studies student organization, "I started a speaker series at TUPA." So, although these students had many roles during the time they were working on their undergraduate degree, they found ways to manage these roles so that they could continue with them while also focusing on their educational goals. These students acknowledged that they encountered obstacles while going to school, such as their job responsibilities, family commitments and illnesses, and community/volunteer activities, but they did not allow these obstacles to prevent them from completing their studies. Instead, they found ways to navigate through these obstacles and even use them to their advantage as learning opportunities.

Although reason may dictate that juggling many roles and navigating the obstacles associated with those roles would have a negative effect on academic persistence, this was not the case for these nontraditional students at this continuing studies unit. Instead, they used their role as student to help them to cope with these obstacles and vice versa. By relating their various roles to each other, they were able to make sense of life's circumstances. Instead of separating their various roles and responsibilities, they intermingled their roles which resulted in less stress and less conflict. Mary, 51, added, "My mother was sick, and I'd sit there and do my papers, read stuff to her from school, whatever I was doing at that particular time, I shared that with her." If they had fewer roles, then they may have been more inclined to keep the roles separate which is not usually helpful for nontraditional students, especially female students, in their developmental and learning processes since older students like to see connections among their various activities.

In the next section, I discuss the theme of support systems and how these various systems helped to influence nontraditional student persistence toward baccalaureate attainment. The role of this continuing studies unit, including its unique characteristics of open admission, degree granting status, financial incentives, and overall familiarity with the needs of nontraditional students, is a thread that can be found throughout this study.

Support Systems

Finally, the nontraditional students who participated in this study revealed several support systems that were available to them that were instrumental in allowing them to realize their goal of a bachelor's degree. These support systems included (a) family; (b) employers; (c) the faculty and staff at the continuing studies unit, and (d) fellow students. Interestingly, some overlap was discovered between these supports systems and the previously reported obstacles and challenges. In other words, these nontraditional students often found support, especially emotional support, in some of the things that also provided challenges; namely, family and employers. On the other hand, their fellow students and the continuing studies unit provided avenues of support that they did not really expect. Some participants did not expect that they would actually like group work with other students since they admitted that they did not have time for activities outside of the classroom, but many of these students were able to transfer their past learning experiences to the group setting when they realized that the support they received from their fellow students, both traditional age and nontraditional age students, was beneficial for them—a form of academic and social integration. The tuition incentives, honor society, and annual student activities sponsored by the continuing studies division were also perks that they did not expect, but that they said made them feel that they were an important part of the college community and that they were making strides toward their goal of degree attainment.

Family.

Each of the participants stated that their families played a pivotal role in allowing them to fulfill their dream of earning a bachelor's degree. The family's ability to adjust to the student's schedule and help with the chores at home allowed students to focus on their studies. Jackie, a mother who lost her husband while she was working on her degree, said, "I think the family had to adjust to mom not being there all the time, and then my husband had to pick up the load when things needed to be done or we had school meetings." Marta, 58, relayed a story about her husband's support: "Sometimes he wanted to do something, but I said, 'no', I have to write this paper; I have to study. But then sometimes he would say, 'Don't you have to study? What about that paper? When I did graduate, there was no one prouder than my husband.'" Linda added, "I have a husband who is extremely domestic; very routine oriented; very organized. He played a huge role in my success; he was highly supportive." Elle, whose husband was not initially as supportive as she would have liked, eventually changed when he realized how important the degree was to his wife, "When I had class at night and I got home, my bath was drawn; I had supper on the table, and sometimes he'd have a daiquiri waiting for me!" Russell said that he received a lot of encouragement from his wife because she had also received her degree as a nontraditional student so she was aware of the sacrifices involved in the endeavor. On the other hand, Stella, 53, did not always receive a great deal of support from her husband; he was eager for her to finish school and spend time with him so his patience was running out. However, she had other family members who provided support:

My daughter was high maintenance, but then my mom came to live next door, so that really worked. My mother took a lot of time with my daughter. Even if I had gotten home

late, she would already have eaten, her homework was done, and she would sometimes be in bed, so that really worked out.

Amanda, who was a single mother said, “My dad helped as much as he could. Eventually, toward the end, my son’s father’s grandmother stepped in and helped me out. She would watch him in the evenings.” Two students, Marta and Jackie, relied on their siblings for moral support as well as help with caring for young children. Jackie said, “I had one sister while I was going to school. She did a lot of traveling, and she wasn’t always in town, but she helped with the kids whenever she could.” Marta, 58, relied on the emotional support of her sister who was also going to school, “We would talk in the phone. We gave each other support. She said, ‘I know you’re going to finish; you can do that.’”

The support that most of these students received from significant others in their lives was very important for these participants. They did not expect their family members to help them with school assignments, but they did have some level of expectation when it came to assisting them with personal chores and responsibilities. By providing assistance with these personal chores, family members were able to help these nontraditional students prevent role overload which could have occurred if they felt that their responsibilities at home were not being adequately addressed. These students expected a level of understanding from their family members. If these students believed that their roles were competing with each other and resulting in conflict, then the response to role overload would have required that they abandon the role which they blamed for the overload. This role likely would have been their student role. However, extreme role overload did not occur for these students because they had the support of their family. When they felt that the family was still being cared for while they were in class or

doing school work, then the burden of going to school was somewhat lessened so that they could persist.

Employers.

In addition to relying on family members to provide support in their various roles, the participants were also fortunate that their employers and co-workers also offered encouragement and support. Elle stated, “Even in the office, when they found out I was going to classes, they were proud and happy and they made accommodations. If I had to work on a paper, they would help by letting me leave early.” Elle further stated, “My boss would tell me ‘you have to get the degree; I have plans for you.’ All I needed was one person to tell me that.” In Elle’s case, she worked for the university, and some of her colleagues were current or former students at the study context. So, these co-workers understood what it was like to juggle school and work responsibilities. They valued the goal of baccalaureate degree attainment just like Elle did; therefore, they may have been more inclined to offer support because of their similar values. So, belonging to a university community that supported degree attainment for their employees both financially and emotionally may have alleviated these nontraditional students of some of the hardships associated with their multiple roles.

Mary said that her employer made their legal library available to her for research and that was very helpful. Francesca, a student with young children said, “I had a pretty cool boss. If I needed to leave, I could leave. I could skip lunch if I needed to leave early. I could come in early, and we have flextime at work so you could come in early and leave early.”

Just as family support was instrumental to the success of these students in that it allowed them to focus on their studies without feeling overwhelmingly guilty which may have led to role overload, employer support was also helpful. When Mary’s boss offered her access to the

company's legal library, she felt that her role as a student was valued by others that she respected, an important component of role theory which suggests that individuals do not readily abandon roles that are valued both by the individual and by significant others in their lives (Epstein, 1987). She felt that her increased knowledge and learning made her an asset that others recognized, and this recognition helped give her the confidence she needed to continue. Further, flexibility in work schedules was as important as flexibility in class schedules. If not for these accommodating employers and co-workers, the goal of a bachelor's degree may have been impossible or these students may have sought employment elsewhere.

Faculty and staff.

The instructors and staff at the continuing studies unit also provided support to these students. Each of the participants was able to share a story about how they were helped in some way by the faculty or staff, and this support was helpful in allowing them to balance their roles. When Stella, 53, was contemplating dropping out, her advisor gave her the encouragement she needed to continue. About the faculty, she said, "The instructors were phenomenal; they wanted to contribute to the quality of your life. They cared and had compassion, and they made learning so interesting." Elle said, "The professors were very accommodating. When Russell was commuting a great distance and was unable to get to a class, the instructor allowed him to submit assignments online: "I didn't ask for that kind of thing very often, but it did help me to maintain momentum because I was fearful that if I stopped it would be the same thing as in 1974."

Since the staff at this continuing studies unit work primarily with nontraditional students, they have experience in identifying the needs and challenges facing these students. The advisors are familiar with the developmental and learning processes of adult students, and they are able to recommend appropriate classes given these characteristics. They understand that these students

are both focused and fearful, and they also understand that these students are sometimes overwhelmed with their many roles and responsibilities. This understanding helps them when they need to help these students navigate the course of higher education. This continuing studies unit also creates academic programs that are practical for nontraditional students since these students strive to pursue learning that is immediately applicable.

Most of the faculty at this continuing studies unit are professionals in their fields who, like these nontraditional students, are working during the day and going to class in the evenings. They understand that sometimes these students have family and work responsibilities that interfere with their school assignments, and they try to accommodate these students' conflicting schedules while at the same time upholding the rigorous academic expectations of the institution. Faculty members at the continuing studies unit also share many of the same roles as these nontraditional students, so faculty and students identify with each other and share similar behaviors as a result of their roles and life experiences.

Fellow students.

In addition to the support from family, employers and co-workers, and the faculty and staff at the continuing studies division, most of these students relied heavily on the encouragement and support of their fellow students throughout their academic career. Mary added,

Some classes would be just us old-timers. . .other times, younger students. I would say, 'Wait a minute; my mind doesn't click as quickly as yours.' If we had group projects, they took me under their wings; they said we're going to work with you. The students helped a lot. They were wonderful.

Jackie, 54, said, “Other students in the classes were a big support emotional wise and also as a tutor if there were things I was stuck on. We helped each other.” Elle, who was experiencing a difficult time when her father was ill said, “I really had good instructors and good people that I was in class with, especially toward the end when I was pushing so hard. I realized how important it was to have peer support.” Francesca added,

I wasn’t trying to make friends. After a while, I kind of got laid back. My last class, I actually had fun with the younger kids. They had football players in the class. They were just joking, ‘you have a son our age!’ What’s for dinner, mom?’ It grew on me at the end. Most of these students agreed that they were initially intimidated by other students, especially younger students who they believed were more accustomed to the current learning environment, but as they became more confident in their abilities, they began to relax around other students and even ask them for help when needed. As these nontraditional students became more comfortable with their student role, they were able to relate to the others as students as well. Linda shared, “I was computer illiterate; it was a huge challenge. If it weren’t for [fellow students] I wouldn’t have made it. I didn’t know people weren’t writing anymore. I grew up with no computer background. I missed the computer era because I was a stay-at-home mom.” They no longer focused on the difference in ages or the gap in learning styles, but they focused on what they had in common with other students which was their desire to get an education and succeed in their respective academic goals. In explaining her new level of confidence, Marta stated, “I took a really difficult history class, but I loved it. It was unbelievable work. Even though I’m taking classes, working, and doing respectably, I’m still not focused on graduating. After I took that class, though, I was like, I think I can do this.” In the classroom, the student role was important, and as they became more acclimated to their role as student, they exhibited the

typical characteristics and behaviors associated with students, especially the desire to succeed in the academic setting. When they achieved this level of comfort and satisfaction with their student role, these nontraditional students were able to identify with other students regardless of the difference in ages or academic background. Then, when they recognized that they were more alike than different from their fellow students, the participants were able to accept help and support from other students. When they were able to accept help from their fellow students, this support allowed them to persist and eventually succeed in attaining their bachelor's degree. Mary explained,

When I got into the courses, I was a little intimidated by these fresh minds and everything. They're all excited and asking questions, and I thought 'Okay, that's a good thing.' Then, they opened up and said, 'can we help you.' It was a good environment that helped as far as the stress because I knew that if I couldn't make a class or if I was running late, there was someone there that I could call or e-mail and get notes.

So, support from other students was a very important means of encouragement for these nontraditional students when they were faced with the challenges associated with being a student along with their other roles and obligations.

Institutional Prestige

As explained in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, institutional prestige was a thread that was woven throughout the findings of this study. The reputation and history of this top-50 research institution not only provided the motivation for nontraditional students to participate in higher education in the first place, but it also evolved to provide the motivation to persist toward degree attainment. The participants were academically challenged by the reputation of the institution itself as well as the academic performance and abilities of other students. These

nontraditional students were long-time residents of this community, and the history of this institution was also a part of the entire community's history. From its impressive academic credentials to its stately buildings and beautifully maintained main campus, this institution embodies academic excellence not only in the South but in the entire United States. The participants had high expectations regarding their learning outcomes at the study context, and they were determined to rise to the challenge because it mattered to them. Their experience proved to be hard work, but they had confidence in their abilities to succeed. Receiving a degree from the continuing studies division of this university was a noteworthy accomplishment for the participants themselves, but it was also recognized as an impressive accomplishment by their family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, and anyone else familiar with the reputation of this institution.

Several participants highlighted the institutional prestige of the study context as a motivating factor in desiring a degree from this institution. As young students, though, they did not have enough confidence in their academic abilities in order to succeed there. The cost was also somewhat prohibitive. Linda shared the following story:

When I was in high school, I did have someone that I worked for that was a graduate [from the institution that houses the study context], and they wanted me to go there—to apply. I needed \$25 to register to go there, and my stepfather wouldn't give it to me and he said, 'you're too stupid to go there.' I never forgot that. He didn't live long enough to see me graduate.

As a young student, Linda had not yet developed the self-esteem that she needed in order to face life's challenges. She knew that she wanted to go to college, but as a teenager she did not have the persistence and focus to realize her dreams and goal. Instead of being motivated by her own

inner drive at this time, she was influenced more by external factors in her life at this time; namely, her parents lack of confidence in her abilities and financial constraints. She allowed others to influence her decisions rather than being influenced by her own needs and desires. However, once she developed self-confidence and the ability to handle life's struggles and the multiple roles of parent, caregiver, spouse, and employee, she returned to her desire to receive a bachelor's degree from this prestigious institution. She could have chosen to attend other institutions, and she did attend others previously, but at this point in her life, receiving a degree from this institution mattered more than ever. As she became older and was contemplating a return to college, Linda was driven by the following thought,

I always wanted to graduate from there. My uncle was a graduate, and my family always held this university in high esteem. I knew I could go, and this is where I wanted to be. When I was around this campus, I always felt at home. I had memories of the stadium and going to ball games—my history. It's part of the memories and tradition, and it's also part of the fact that [this institution] was always in the news—how well regarded in the academic community, a research university. I didn't consider going anywhere else. I knew it was going to be tough; I knew this university wasn't going to give anything away, but I already raised a child with exceptionalities; I raised a family; I'd been through a bad marriage. I knew I could handle this.

So, Linda was motivated to attend and persist at this institution because of its reputation and its place in her own history. The study context, with its focus on nontraditional students, helped her to feel like she belonged there, unlike when she was younger and doubted her own abilities.

Another student, Alice, 49, also expressed great admiration for this prestigious institution. Alice was a lifelong resident of this city, and said, "I always loved [this university] as

a kid. I really don't know why. Then, a couple of other people in the office were going there, and the programs were appealing so I said let me look at this." Alice's comments speak strongly about the reputation of a prestigious and well-known university. Unlike Linda, Alice did not have family members who attended the institution, but her feelings about the high expectations and excellence attributed to this institution were just as strong. Alice was familiar with the academic reputation of the university because it was part of her history as a resident of this community. Just about everyone in this city was aware of this university's impressive reputation whether they knew graduates personally or not. This university was a part of the culture of the community and the city where it was located.

Russell, 51, was enrolled at this institution as a full-time student shortly after he graduated from high school. As a younger student, he made the decision to attend this fine institution; however, he lacked focus and then financial difficulties forced him to suspend his education. Then, years later as a nontraditional student, Russell decided to return to the school that he initially attended. He said, "I wanted to finish the degree that I started years ago at the school where I began." Like Linda and Alice, Russell grew up knowing about the reputation of this institution. It was something that persisted throughout his life, and when the opportunity rose as an adult learner to continue what he started as a young student, he made the decision to return to this institution through the continuing studies division rather than go elsewhere. For Russell, it mattered that he finished what he started at this institution.

When she was a senior in high school and investigating colleges, Francesca, 38, wanted to attend another prestigious and selective university in the same city as the study context. This university was not considered as elite and prestigious as the institution where the study context is housed, but it had an impressive reputation nonetheless. Due to financial constraints, though,

Francesca was not able to attend this institution and decided instead to attend a less selective and less historically significant institution in the same city. Francesca performed poorly at this institution and decided to drop out before receiving her degree. She stated, “I didn’t get to go to the school of my choice, and I hated [this school]. Then, later, when Francesca was able to resume her studies as a nontraditional student, she decided to attend the study context. Just as attending a prestigious university was important when she was a young student, it was also an important factor this time.

Conclusion

As detailed in this discussion of the findings, these nontraditional students all valued a higher education and never lost sight of its worth in spite of their conflicting roles and busy adult lives. However, more than just valuing and desiring a higher education, most of these participants desired and valued a baccalaureate degree from this prestigious institution. They were motivated to attend and then to persist at this continuing studies unit because it was a part of the history of this university, the history of their community, and their own history. Over the years, students who attended this institution were considered the “best and the brightest” and these nontraditional students wanted to be a part of that history. They had accomplished many things and overcome many obstacles at this stage in their lives, and they believed that they also were worthy of receiving a degree from this academically excellent institution.

These nontraditional students faced many challenges and obstacles along the way toward degree attainment, but by developing strategies to balance the many demands on their time, they were able to fulfill their goal of a baccalaureate degree. They also relied heavily on the important people in their lives as well as those at the continuing studies division to lighten their load and provide emotional support so that their academic dreams could come true. When asked what

advice she would give to other nontraditional students who are juggling multiple roles, Mary said,

Perseverance is the key. . . That strong desire and knowing that I'm going to do this. . . As long as you go into it with the notion that this is something you want to do, and you can make it fun with the understanding that you know it's not going to be easy.

In addition to this internal desire for satisfaction and achievement, these students agreed that others were instrumental in allowing them to maintain their focus and drive that allowed them to receive their degree while also handling their many roles and dealing with the obstacles associated with these various roles. These participants needed assurance that they could adequately handle their many roles, and once they received this assurance by realizing their academic abilities and by being able to rely on the assistance of others in their lives and the study context, then they were able to persist.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

After spending many hours with nontraditional students who were recent recipients of a bachelor's degree, I discovered that they were all eager to tell their stories, and they were extremely proud of their academic accomplishments, particularly at this stage in their lives. They were aware of the difficulties and sacrifices that returning to school involved, but by this time in their lives they had developed the confidence in themselves that they could adapt to their changing roles. They had endured a lifetime of ups and downs, and they learned how to face life's challenges in order to be victorious. Unlike in their younger years, they were now driven and focused individuals who had experienced a lifetime of challenges, and they greeted their role as student with the same dedication and perseverance that they had given to their many other roles, including parent, spouse, caregiver, employee, and community member. They had used their previous and current roles as building blocks for their new role of student. They learned from their past failures and successes and, as adults do, they used these learning experiences as strategies in their new role of students. At this stage in their lives, they had developed a better understanding of who they were and what they wanted out of their educational experience. They were aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and they guided their decisions accordingly. Unlike in their younger years, they were now motivated by their internal need of accomplishment rather than some external need promoted by others. They no longer needed the approval of parents, spouses, or children. Their development was at such a place that those previous external motivators were either already met or abandoned, and now they had moved on to higher level needs of self-fulfillment and accomplishment.

As a result of World War II and the GI Bill which led to greater access to higher education for nontraditional students, adult students have continued to participate in higher education in increasing numbers (Kasworm, 2003). As an example of this commitment to the education of nontraditional students, the institution that the students in this study attended has a division that addresses the needs of nontraditional students by offering programs and flexible class schedules that meet the demands of nontraditional students and their hectic lifestyles. This continuing studies unit as compared to other similar units was unique in several ways. The study context was a part of a regionally well-known and respected research university. Although the full-time university has a highly selective admission process, the continuing studies division has an open admission policy and accepts students who have a high school diploma or GED. Unlike other continuing studies units that offer non-credit programs in addition to credit programs, the study context is a degree-granting school within the larger university and offers credit classes only. Although the study context offers several popular applied programs, such as computing and paralegal studies, this continuing studies unit also allows students to enroll in traditional liberal arts and sciences classes that students throughout the university are eligible to take provided they have met the necessary prerequisites. In other words, as long as students (including nontraditional students admitted by the continuing studies unit) are academically eligible, they may take any credit course that they choose. So, students like those selected for this study are aware of and perhaps motivated by the strong academic background of this continuing studies unit. They were willing to undergo the struggles and challenges associated with returning to school at this stage in their lives while also juggling their many roles because, among several other factors, they were well aware of the reputation of this institution. They considered that their sacrifice was worthwhile because the institution was worthwhile.

Although the institutional prestige was important to these nontraditional students' initial motivation to attend and eventually to persist toward degree attainment, it may not have been enough without the flexibility offered by the continuing studies unit. This division was flexible in how and when it offered classes; classes were offered at various times throughout the day, in the evening, and on Saturdays; classes were also offered online and at several campus locations. This division also offered programs that met the needs of the community, including these students. Since nontraditional students typically search for learning opportunities that build upon knowledge they already have and that they can apply immediately, they were drawn to the practical and applied programs that this division offered, such as business studies, applied computing, media arts, and paralegal studies. Further, these students took advantage of several financial incentives offered by the continuing studies unit, including several tuition discount programs. Unlike similar continuing studies throughout the United States, the study context's tuition and application fees were sufficiently affordable. When the affordable tuition was coupled with the various tuition discount programs, the financial burden of attending college was significantly reduced for these participants. As a result, their ability to navigate their conflicting roles while also adding the role of student in order to receive a bachelor's degree was heightened.

Strategies Nontraditional Students Used to Negotiate their Various Roles

According to Biddle (1979), role theory is a study of behavior that focuses on people and the context in which the behavior occurs. Roles are defined and identified according to the behaviors associated with those roles. In this study of nontraditional students, these participants share their role of student with other students who have many of the same goals and many of the same conflicting roles such as parent, spouse, and employee. These adults may be able to persist

in their role of students because they recognize that they are part of a larger social system (Biddle). If these students were isolated in their role of student, then they may have been less inclined to persist toward degree attainment. For example, if these students were enrolled in online classes only where the interaction with others was practically non-existent, then they would not have been able to share the role of student with others and they may have decided to discontinue their studies. However, since these students were all at least moderately nontraditional, they shared not only their role of student with others, but they shared other roles with other nontraditional students. This common identity among students allowed these students to continue with their multiple roles and develop strategies along the way. Although Tinto (1987) suggests that social interaction is an important aspect of persistence for traditional age students, the students in this study did not share many social activities with other students, except for those initiated by the continuing studies division itself such as honor society inductions and crawfish boils, where families were also included. However, they identified with their fellow students in several important ways which allowed them to persist toward degree attainment even though they did not share many social occasions with other students. They shared many of the same conflicting roles, and they understood what it was like to attend college while also being a parent, spouse, employee, caregiver, and community volunteer. They were all also at that point in their lives where they wanted to concentrate on their own well-being. They may have decided to attend college at this time in their lives because they thought it would benefit their families as well, but their own internal timetable for success was their primary motivator. They also shared similar academic backgrounds and ways of learning. Their learning history focused on the pedagogy of their childhood and young adult classroom experiences, but at this stage in their lives, they were more focused on Knowles' (1970) characteristics of andragogy where they

wanted to be able to relate their personal experiences to their experiences in the classroom, and they wanted to immediately apply their learning to their own lives. Their development as individuals and the development of their learning styles at this time in their lives both converged and were both internally motivated by their own desires rather than an external need to please others. Further, this identity shared with other students and the interrelationship among goals also helped these students to avoid role stress and role strain which could have resulted in role overload if these students felt isolated in their various roles. So, although their experiences of social interaction were different from those of traditional age students as described by Tinto, these nontraditional students bonded with their classmates nonetheless around their common roles and developmental and learning processes.

According to adult development theory, older students usually have achieved a greater level of psychological and academic well being than younger students (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). The students in this study expressed a high level of motivation, determination, focus, and commitment to their educational goals that they did not have in their younger years (Krager, Wrenn, & Hirt, 1990). However, they still had reservations and fears about embarking on a college degree as a nontraditional student. The difference, however, was that at this time in their lives they still had the fear but they also had a lifetime of experiences to help them to cope with this fear. According to the life stage approach of adult development, as individuals progress through their lives, they become more complex and they rely on developmental insight that they gained in earlier years to help them cope with situations that arise in later years (Evans, 1996). These nontraditional students had also developed relationships throughout their lives to help them deal with problems. As Roberts and Newton suggest (1987), adults experience greater conflict in achieving more complex goals because they have more roles and relationships, but

this study found that these roles and relationships also helped these students cope with stressful situations. Through trial and error, they knew how much they could handle and they knew when to make adjustments and ask for help so that their various roles would not result in stressful situations. Support from family and friends helped these students cope with the psychological distress associated with the demands of school (Chartrand, 1992). At this stage in their lives, these students knew what they wanted out of life and they knew which behaviors they needed to exhibit to meet their goals. When they needed to ignore other roles or rely on help from others in order to do their school work, they did so. They had the internal drive to persist in their academic pursuits, and this drive was, in large part, a result of their personal development. Further, as suggested by the life events perspective of adult development, these students recognized that the timing was right for them to take on another role because the events in their life such as less dependent children, stability in their marriage, and satisfaction with their jobs, allowed them to take on this new challenge (Evans).

Some of the students in this study revealed that their previous academic experiences in college were less than ideal and as a result they withdrew from school. Weil (1986) found that when students are unfamiliar with the demands of college work, they often fail to realize that time spent in the classroom is only a part of the academic experience; they must also make time for assignments outside of the classroom setting. The students in this study either were already familiar with the demands of returning to school since they had already attempted it before or they quickly adjusted to the increased demands. They also expected that a prestigious university like the study context would require a lot of effort on their part and, unlike the students in Weil's study, these students were not overly surprised by the academic demands that they experienced. These students were at a place in their lives where they knew what they wanted out of a college

education. They knew what they wanted and needed in their lives, and the timing was right for them to realize their goals and meet their needs. They had already been successful in other areas of their lives such as their family and work lives, and now they were ready adapt what they learned from these experiences into the college learning environment. They were ready to embrace the idea of andragogy and concentrate on adult learning. As children and young adults, they were accustomed to the teaching centric idea of pedagogy where they were passive recipients of knowledge. As adults, whose developmental process progressed from passive acceptance to active participation, they desired and expected the more learning centric idea of andragogy. They wanted to use their new knowledge acquired in the college classroom for a specific reason, and this reason was often related to their multiple roles in that they wanted their learning to help them to serve as role models for their children and others; to help them advance in their careers, and even to help them cope with life's challenges such as financial and health setbacks. As the conceptual framework for this study of nontraditional students illustrates, role theory, adult development theory, and adult learning theory each operated concurrently as these students worked to negotiate their multiple roles in order to persist toward baccalaureate degree attainment. Unfortunately, for these students who failed to persist toward degree attainment when they embarked on a college career before enrolling at this continuing studies unit, they may not have yet developed the strategies or found an educational environment at this continuing studies unit that would eventually help them to succeed toward baccalaureate degree attainment while also managing their multiple roles.

In order to manage their various and conflicting roles including parent, spouse, employee, caregiver, and community member, nontraditional students in this study developed organizational methods and strategies that helped in their attainment of a baccalaureate degree.

These strategies included (a) time management; (b) stress management; (c) effective class scheduling; (d) effective study techniques as a result of learning style and experiences

Time and stress management.

Unlike most traditional age students, nontraditional students often have multiple roles that demand their attention (Home, 1993). In addition to being over the age of 30, the students selected for this study had multiple roles in addition to their role of student. They were also parents, spouses, employees, caregivers, and community volunteers. Some also had to cope with their own serious illnesses. Combining the demands of college and family can be problematic for nontraditional students since both roles demand loyalty, time commitments, and flexibility (Edwards, 1993). These students, however, according to Horn's (1996) definition of being moderately nontraditional where they had two or more nontraditional characteristics in addition to age had several roles. Since these students had to manage the time and stress associated with multiple and often conflicting roles, it may be reasonable to conclude that role conflict, role stress, and/or role strain would have occurred and then resulted in their lack of persistence toward degree attainment. As suggested by Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002, role conflicts, which include family responsibilities, may affect nontraditional students' academic experience. According to Backels and Meashey (1997), multiple roles can be associated with higher stress levels, anxiety, and depression for nontraditional female students. Difficulties can arise when the roles that a person takes on require additional time or ability, certainly factors that affected the students in this study. As a result, role conflict occurs when the person must deal with conflicting role obligations and he or she must do many things that cannot all be done (Epstein, 1987).

Although these factors were certainly observed in this study as the participants, mostly female, told their stories of being nontraditional students with multiple roles and although these

students experienced stressful situations and a lack of time to accomplish their many tasks, associated with their various roles, as suggested by Biddle (1979), these students never lost sight of their ultimate goal, attainment of a bachelor's degree. Instead, they developed ways to manage their stressful situations, and this effective management of their stress was likely attributable to the many stressful situations that they had already confronted and overcome throughout the course of their lives. Pomaki, Supeli, and Verhoeven (2007) found that health behaviors could help to alleviate stress as a result of role conflict. At least one participant in this study used physical exercise as a method of coping with the stress that resulted due to her conflicting roles. These nontraditional students also looked to their families, co-workers, and the faculty and staff at the continuing studies unit for support. This support from others helped them to handle their roles as well (Epstein, 1987; Thoits, 1987). Because these students found ways to manage their stress, they did not encounter role overload which can result when individuals are overcome by their many demands (Epstein). Further, these students were at a place in time in their lives where they were focused and determined. As adults, who had a lifetime of stressful experiences, disappointments, and challenges in their personal histories, these students expressed confidence in their abilities to handle the stress associated with being a college student.

So, then what differences existed between students attending this continuing studies division and nontraditional students attending other institutions? As cited in the previous chapter, these nontraditional students were energized to complete their studies for several reasons. Some wanted to be a role model for their children, some wanted career advancement, some just wanted to finish a goal that they began in their youth. A common thread throughout each of the discussions with these participants was that the timing was now right for them to focus on themselves and their dreams, and they wanted a bachelor's degree. They were no longer

motivated by others' wishes but by their own. However, the role of the continuing studies unit and its affiliation with an elite institution cannot be ignored. These students not only wanted a bachelor's degree, but they wanted a bachelor's degree from this institution. They were motivated to attend at this institution and to persist in some part due to the historical significance of this institution in the community (Baker & Brown, 1997). They grew up with the knowledge that this institution provided the best education possible. In their youth, they did not realistically think that a degree from this institution was attainable because of its highly selective admissions process and its prohibitive cost. By offering truly open admissions, reduced tuition, flexible schedules, and several tuition discount programs, this continuing studies division helped to make the dream of a college degree come true for these students with as little difficulty as possible. As Hu and Hossler (2000) found, the willingness to pay as well as the ability to pay were important factors in these students' decisions to attend a private institution. Yes, as the research indicates, these students had to deal with their own feelings of inadequacy as these feelings related to their academic abilities and the sacrifices they had to make in their relationships and responsibilities, but they did not experience insurmountable stress at least partially as a result of the policies of the continuing studies unit. Scott and Tobe (1995) suggested that high expectations are important to students, and the historical culture of this continuing studies unit implied a level of high expectations, and these students were ready to rise to the challenge because it was important to them. In fact, the continuing studies unit helped to alleviate some of the stress and obstacles by the policies and procedures cited above that were helpful to the nontraditional student.

Stress is associated with Evans' (1996) individual timing approach to adult development where students experience stress when they are faced with time constraints associated with fulfilling their multiple roles. Most of the participants in this study indicated that the timing was

finally right for them to focus on their educational goal of degree attainment. However, they did not indicate that they were compelled to complete their degree within a certain time frame. To the contrary, these students said that they preferred working at their own pace without the added pressure of finishing their degree requirements at a certain time. So, although these participants' lives were not without stress, they did not face stress associated with time constraints as Evans' suggested. Instead, these students indicated that they were able to handle the stress of being a student because they did not have a preconceived idea of when they should finish their bachelor's degree. Further, most participants indicated that the flexibility of the continuing studies unit in offering classes throughout the year and at various locations and delivery methods helped to assure them that adhering to specific completion date was unnecessary. Younger students are often pressured by their parents and peers to finish their education and then begin their careers. However, these nontraditional students did not express the same pressure to complete their education within a certain time. Instead, they were following their own individual time frame rather than a time frame imposed by others. They were confident that they would finish their degrees, but a specific completion date was no longer a guiding force. In light of these revelations, Evans' contention of time constraints and resulting stress may need to be reexamined, at least for nontraditional students like those in this study, who attend prestigious institutions and institutions that focus on the needs of nontraditional students. Perhaps, when students feel that they matter to the institution, they are no longer burdened with completing their academic requirements within a certain time frame. When nontraditional students are confident that they will get the support that they need from the institution and when they believe that the institution is committed to the needs of nontraditional students for the foreseeable future, they are no longer pressed to finish their degrees by certain deadlines. This university has a long

history that dates back to 1834, so these students are not fearful of it going away or ceasing its operation.

Swanson et al. (2006) suggested that roles are dynamic and vary in demands over time, similar to the stress of exam times, which is not a permanent state for students. These students were able to recognize when they were experiencing stress, and then they were able to adjust to the situation and find solutions. These students learned to expect these stressful times; they were not surprised by them. Again, as adults these students had a better idea of who they were and what they were capable of than they did as younger students. They knew what they wanted out of their learning experience, and they accepted that their role of student would not be easy. This ability to recognize and cope with stressful situations may also be the result of the life stage approach to development where individuals' current behaviors result from their past experiences. They know what type of behavior yields certain results, and they are able to duplicate these behaviors in similar situations. For example, one student opted not to take summer classes because that was her time to recover from the stress associated with the previous semester, and the break allowed her to re-energize herself for the next semester. This continuing studies unit allowed her to do take summer breaks since their course offerings were plentiful throughout the year, and she obviously did not feel compelled to take summer classes just to stay on track toward degree attainment. This action is consistent with Trueman and Hartley's (1996) observation that nontraditional students, because of their previous experiences, make better use of time management strategies than traditional age college students. Each of the students in this study knew themselves enough to know when to push forward and when to pull back. Younger students, who do not have a history of juggling multiple roles, may not be able to handle multiple roles as well as these students who have a lifetime of experiences to help guide them. Younger

students do not have the benefit of knowing which behaviors result in the most favorable outcomes simply because they do not have the lifetime of experiences that older students have in determining the results of their actions in certain situations. So, stress was alleviated for these students as a result of their developmental stage in life as well as the comfort in knowing that flexible schedules were offered by the institution.

Fortunately for the students in this study, college was not a huge financial burden due to the various financial incentives offered by employers and the continuing studies unit. All but one of the students in this study had full-time jobs that were managerial in nature, and students whose jobs tend to be managerial in nature have greater persistence (Kasworm, 2003). Only one had several part-time jobs. So, coupled with the tuition incentives offered by employers and the continuing studies division, these nontraditional students were probably better able to afford the cost of college attendance than when they were younger and had entry-level jobs. As a result, stress associated with finances was not exacerbated by the participants' college enrollment. This financial security that they achieved as adults may have allowed them to better negotiate the role of student with their role of spouse or parent since their families were not financially burdened by their decision to attend college. Horowitz (1982) found that this financial security also helped to reduce stress which often results from multiple roles. Without the financial assistance of employers and the continuing studies unit, however, the stress of attending school may have been too burdensome for these students, but the speculation is difficult to prove.

Effective class scheduling and study techniques.

Knowles (1970) characterized nontraditional students as relying on their experiences as a resource for learning. The students in this study were accustomed to juggling many demands and being able to prioritize those things of importance in their lives in order to meet their goals. Their

behavior of prioritizing and organizing their lives reflected the situational life experiences theories of McClusky (1963) and Knox (1980). Their situation in life was a result of both internal and environmental factors. They had families to raise, parents to care for, and job and community responsibility, but they were also ready to focus on themselves and work toward a bachelor's degree. When they added school to these responsibilities, they used the same organizational methods. As McClusky suggested, adulthood is a time of seeking balance, and these students were searching for the balance between their obligations and responsibilities and their own needs, and at this time in their lives, they believed that they had acquired the skills necessary to finally achieve this balance. According to Knox, adults are motivated to learn when they desire proficiency, which is something they strive for as they amass a lifetime of experiences where they understand and appreciate their own capabilities and desire to use their knowledge for personal advancement. The students in this study recognized that they wanted more out of life for themselves and even for their families. As they saw co-workers succeed and supervisors and significant others offer them words of encouragement, they too began to develop confidence in their own abilities, and they were ready to embrace learning at the college level.

Furthermore, these students' social roles were related to their readiness to learn (Knowles, 1970). Each of the participants, who were also parents, was dedicated to their learning experiences for their own well-being, of course, but also because of the effect that it would have on their children, grandchildren, and families. Some of these participants hoped that they could be role models for others in their lives. Consistent with Johnson and Robson's (1999) idea that multiple roles can provide multiple opportunities for success and a sense of well-being, I found that these students truly enjoyed their academic experience at this continuing studies unit in spite of the challenges. These students chose to attend school; they were not forced to go to school as

may have happened in their younger years. Instead, they were making a conscious decision and effort to achieve their degree. As adult learners, they looked to education as a kind of validation. They may have questioned their learning skills at the outset of the educational experience at the study context, but the longer they persisted the more confidence they gained. This sense of accomplishment may be due to the value that students placed on a degree from this university and this continuing studies unit. They knew the reputation of this university as a top-50 university in the nation, and as they succeeded in their studies, they felt empowered by their academic abilities. As a result, they were able to transfer these newfound academic abilities to other roles in their lives. As their confidence grew in their academic abilities, their confidence also grew in their abilities as employees, parents, and spouses. The longer they stayed in school, the less they questioned their abilities in other areas of their lives. Their success in their student role served as a springboard for their success in their other roles, and the notion of not persisting was no longer an option.

Tinto (1987) acknowledged that institutions may be limited to what they can do to influence a student's decision to persist; however, in this study, I found that the students relied on the flexibility of the class schedules, including online classes, as well as the convenience of campus locations to help them manage their conflicting roles and obligations. When Long (1983) conducted his study in the early 80s, flexible class schedules were not readily available for nontraditional students. However, for the students in this study, flexible schedules were instrumental to their success. Unlike the students in Bowl's (2001) study, who felt that the institution did not provide support, the students in this study had opposite experiences. The students took advantage of these various tools to help them achieve their goal of a bachelor's degree while also juggling their other roles, including full-time employee, spouse, and parent.

These strategies also helped to lessen the stress that these students experienced when navigating their multiple roles. They could choose to take classes on Saturdays or other particular days of the week if that suited their family or work schedule. They took advantage of online classes because they felt that they could take a class without taking time away from their children. They also took advantage of the various campus locations so that they could take classes that were either close to their home or close to their workplace. Although Tinto stressed academic integration as a major component of student persistence, these students relied heavily on the freedom to take classes when and where they liked, and this freedom allowed them to persist. Because this continuing studies unit is focused on meeting the needs of nontraditional students, many nontraditional students are enrolled there. As a result, these students share many common roles and experiences, and it is these shared experiences that provide social and academic integration more than any external methods of integration. Although Tinto cites persistence as a result of social and academic integration, these nontraditional students achieve social and academic integration and persistence through their multiple roles, which some researchers consider a deterrent to persistence (Backels & Meashey, 1997; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Home, 1993; Thoits, 1983). These multiple roles also allowed nontraditional students to recognize shared behaviors with other students who they then viewed as a welcome support system. This continuing studies unit provided few excuses for these nontraditional students not to succeed. As previously discussed, the stature of this university in the academic world also helped to provide these students with a concrete sense of accomplishment which they transferred to other roles in their lives.

Tinto (1987) also posited that contact with faculty is important to student persistence and success. As mentioned, the concepts of academic integration and social integration are pivotal

components of Tinto's theory. This idea of social and academic integration was helpful to the participants in this study, but not in the same way as Tinto theorized. For the students in this study, their multiple roles contributed to academic and social integration. These students were very focused on their goal of degree attainment, and perhaps this personal focus was more important than academic or social integration. Most of the students in this study stated that they did not have time for study groups or other types of social interaction. Toward the end of their programs, they realized that study groups were helpful but not a deciding factor in their decision to persist or their ability to succeed. Several students stated that induction in the honor society was a nice gesture, and they appreciated the recognition, but it was not necessary for their success as students. So, for these nontraditional students who had many roles in addition to that of student, their motivation was more internal than external. They did not need the approval of anyone else.

It is likely that nontraditional students, due to their multiple roles, already have ample opportunities for social interaction, so social interaction at school is not as important to their success as it may be for younger students who have more limited opportunities for socialization. Several participants acknowledged that although they did not ask for favors often, it was helpful to know that the option was available. For example, if a student needed to turn in a paper late or submit an assignment online, this was acceptable. Faculty who understood and appreciated what it was like to have demanding jobs and families allowed students to feel less isolated. By having role models for their instructors, nontraditional students may develop confidence in their own abilities. So, for these students the idea of academic and social integration is an added bonus, but lack of academic and social integration does not lead them to depart from college. Instead, their identity with multiple roles and these shared roles and behaviors among students were the basis

for integration. For nontraditional students, academic and social interaction may be considered a passive or secondary contributor to success. They are certainly helpful, but not necessarily determining factors in nontraditional students' persistence. In this study, the students readily credited the understanding faculty and supportive staff at the continuing studies unit with helping them to persist even when they were undergoing stressful times. The multiple roles shared by these students also helped to bond these students with each other. Another way to view academic and social integration for nontraditional students is that their academic and social integration originated from their multiple roles and not necessarily from the educational experience itself.

In Malcolm Knowles' (1970) adult learning theory, he provides several characteristics specific to nontraditional students that differ from younger students: (a) Their self-concept is a self-directing human being rather than a dependent personality, (b) they accumulate life experiences that become a resource for learning, (c) their readiness to learn is increasingly related to their social roles; (d) they desire to immediately apply their knowledge, and (e) adults' learning is motivated by internal factors rather than external factors. Each of these five characteristics can be found in the students who participated in this study. Although the students appreciated the efforts of the institution to accommodate their needs, they did not always expect it. However, the knowledge that the institution would treat them as individuals with unique needs due to their multiple roles seems to have helped to motivate them and alleviate some of their fears. They took control of their own learning in spite of their conflicting roles. They re-arranged their personal schedules in order to accommodate their school schedule (and sometimes vice versa). They selected the type of instruction delivery that worked best for them—whether it was an online class that allowed them to better manage their time or the traditional classroom setting that provided interaction with faculty and students. Also, they did not lose focus of their goal of

a bachelor's degree, and perhaps their developmental maturity and life experiences allowed them to retain this focus.

As a way of taking control of their own learning, these students were able to identify what they were good at it and what they wanted out of their educational experience. They began to accept the idea of study groups with other students and they wanted their experience to remain fun. By offering a wide range of courses that nontraditional students could relate to helped to make the educational experience fun for these students, which in turn may have led to their persistence. According to Biddle (1979), people differ in the roles they are willing to assume and in the grounds on which they make predictions about these roles. For at least two participants, the role of student had to be fun in order for them to add it to their other roles. If the student role did not meet their expectations or if it caused stress or conflict, they may have abandoned that role and dropped out. Sieber (1974) found that role overload, which could result when there are conflicting expectations among roles, may result in the abandonment of the role that the individual believes is responsible for the conflict. These participants, however, were able to adjust their responsibilities among their roles in order to persist. Some responsibilities were designated to others, and their management of limited time and stressful situations also helped.

These students also used their experiences as resources for their learning. They used their experiences of raising a family, working full-time, and managing the demands of elderly and ill relatives to inform topics for class assignments as well as to provide references for negotiating their various roles. Although their readiness to learn was often initially related to their role of employee since they looked to a bachelor's degree as a means of moving up in their chosen field, this was not always the source of their greatest motivation. Each of the participants indicated that they persisted toward degree attainment because they wanted it for themselves and not for

anyone else. They were internally rather than externally motivated to succeed. Although social integration is an important element of both Knowles' and Tinto's theories, it was achieved through the participants' multiple roles rather than an active pursuit of integration. It may have been an initial motivator and a bonus in the learning process, but it was not always necessary for them to be successful.

Nontraditional students also want to immediately apply their knowledge. For some students, this was the case. Linda wanted to use her degree to move into another career. Marta wanted a degree to prove to her supervisors that she had something to offer. Elle wanted to use her degree as a pathway to a promotion. However, for some students they just wanted the degree for their own sense of accomplishment. Jackie initially thought the degree would lead to professional opportunities, but when this did not happen as quickly as she thought, she did not stress over it. She still thought the degree was worthwhile. Like most of the students in this study, she did not have a specific timeline in mind for her degree make a difference in her life. Alice, Mary, Francesca, and Russell were already settled in their careers. A new opportunity that resulted from a bachelor's degree would be nice, but it was not their primary motivation for earning the degree. Consequently, for these students, Knowles fifth characteristic of adult learning where learning is prompted by internal rather than external factors was perhaps more appropriate than the idea of learning to apply knowledge. Although for some students, the initial goal of learning was to apply the knowledge, that goal was replaced by the need to acquire something, in this case a degree that they wanted for themselves. Fortunately, the continuing studies unit did not place obstacles in the way of achieving their goal.

*Motivation for Nontraditional Students to Pursue a Baccalaureate Degree
at this Time in their Lives*

Since the participants in this study did eventually persist toward baccalaureate degree attainment, it was important to understand what factors led them to pursue a degree at this time in their lives from this continuing studies unit and while juggling their conflicting roles. The following paragraphs discuss the specific findings, but an overall response from these nontraditional students was that they thought that the timing was finally right for them. Although they still had many roles and obligations, they were at a place in their lives where they believed they were better able to handle these roles. For some, their children were older and no longer demanded their constant attention; for others, they still had younger children, but they were experienced enough as parents to know how to handle the stressful situations that result from parenting. Most of the participants also had stable jobs or their spouses had stable jobs, so they felt comfortable with that part of their lives as well. For the most part, these students were in a state of *chaotic stability*, which I defined earlier as a state of life where there are many things going on all at once, but the chaos is expected and therefore easier to handle. For these students, chaos was a way of life, and they were no longer defeated by life's challenges and obstacles. They were aware of the roles that they were willing to assume and the roles that they would shed if that was necessary for them to achieve their dream of a college degree. Although they initially questioned their academic abilities, they knew that they would do whatever they needed to in order to get the job done. They also no longer allowed a perfectionist attitude to control their lives. They wanted to succeed, but they also realized that A grades did not define them as human beings. They would do their best in the classroom, but they focused more on the material that they learned rather than the grade that they received. They did not simply want to learn facts, but

they wanted to use the information they learned to help them to solve their problems. These students were at a developmental stage in their lives where they knew their own worth, but they wanted more. Their success was no longer defined by others. Instead, their dream of success was motivated by their inner sense of self. At this stage in their lives, their confidence had grown partially as a result of the hardships they had endured and the lessons they learned along the way. Compared to other things in their life, school was not nearly as stressful. For some, it was an escape from the demands of everyday life. So, for these participants school was not a role that they thought would add significantly more stress to their lives. If that had been the case for these students, then they would have dropped out, which is the typical response to role overload. Instead, these students saw college life as a positive force in their lives that even helped them deal with their other more stressful roles.

These students viewed a return to the academic setting as a solution to their often chaotic lives rather than an additional burden. Attending the study context became a strategy for coping with their other roles, and this willingness to assume another role can be traced to their developmental stage. They achieved psychological well-being at this time in their lives (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002) and they have a higher level of motivation (Krager, Wrenn, & Hirt, 1990). Then as their success in the classroom continued, they had an increase in self-esteem (Padula, 1994). This increase in self-esteem then gave them the continued motivation to persist. Additionally, these students believed that getting a degree was an important goal to pursue. Pursuing a degree met their needs of belongingness and self-esteem, and need is often a strong motivator for action (Maslow, 1954). These students wanted to believe that they mattered to others in their lives, to the institution, and to themselves. When they achieved this level of

matter to themselves and to others, they were even more motivated to persist toward degree attainment because it was a worthwhile goal.

These students were motivated to pursue a degree at this time in their lives because they wanted new knowledge that would perhaps lead to better opportunities. They realized that a college degree provided a road map for them to apply learning in order to succeed. For some, this success was measured financially, but most wanted a doorway for opportunities or personal enrichment. Their life experiences taught them that they were strong and now they wanted to build upon this sense of strength and this sense of self to go further in their lives. They were finally at that point in their lives where they knew what they were good at, and they wanted to apply this knowledge to making a better life for themselves and even for their families. They wanted to take control of their destiny rather than have their destiny defined by others. So, this belief in themselves encouraged their motivation and their willingness to accept new challenges and adopt the new role of student. Once they were on this road to new opportunities and they experienced the beneficial feelings associated with success, they were determined to persist toward degree attainment.

The nontraditional students in this study cited several factors that motivated them to pursue a degree at this time in their lives: (a) affordability due to tuition waiver/reimbursement/discounts; (b) interest in career advancement; (c) lifelong goal of a bachelor's degree; (d) role model for their children; (e) change in current role due to life event/life stage.

Affordability and career advancement.

As adults become more successful in their careers, they may also enjoy a more stable financial environment. Russell, a 51 year old married father, dropped out of school when he was

younger due to financial concerns. When he became more successful in his career, he also became more financially stable than when he was younger. As explained previously, tuition waivers and other financial incentives in addition to some success in their careers, allow students to more readily manage the financial burden associated with going to school. Since adding the student role to their other roles did not cause an additional financial burden, these participants were more inclined to embark on a college career than if they had to worry about how they would pay for this new role. The nontraditional students in this study often cited financial difficulty as a reason to suspend their college enrollment prior to enrolling in this continuing studies program. This finding was consistent with Bowl's (2001) finding that the initial higher education experience can be a struggle financially. Bowl also found that students' financial concerns were associated with the cost of tuition, fees, and books. However, this fear was alleviated for the students who attended this division because they were able to take advantage of several financial incentives that reduced the cost of attendance including employer tuition reimbursement programs and tuition discount programs offered by the continuing studies division. The practices of this continuing studies unit were directly related to these students' ability to handle the innate obstacles associated with being a student. Although these students admitted that they would have continued with their education if they did not have financial assistance, they may not have enrolled in the first place. According to role theory, role stress occurs when a person is overwhelmed by their many roles (Epstein, 1987). However, these participants did not experience role stress to the point of abandoning their role of student, and the financial incentives offered by the continuing studies unit helped to alleviate this stress.

So, in addition to lessening the stress associated with attending college, financial stability also helped to motivate nontraditional students to attend college in the first place. Moreover,

some students were motivated to persist toward their baccalaureate degree because they wanted to be eligible for promotions and other career opportunities. One student's job advancement was dependent upon her enrollment in college classes. Another chose to pursue a college degree because she felt that she was not taken seriously at her job without one. These comments were consistent with Kasworm's (2003) finding that adults enroll in college in order to advance in their careers or change careers. Bean and Metzner (1996) and Ely (1997) also concluded that economic factors, including the desire for better pay and better jobs, have contributed to the increased enrollment of nontraditional students in baccalaureate degree programs. One participant was fearful that her husband's illness would negatively affect her family's financial security, so she needed a degree for practical reasons. She believed that a degree would allow her to demand a higher salary. Further, this revelation of pursuing a degree in order to assist with advancement of a career is related to Knowles (1970) fourth characteristic of nontraditional students suggesting that they desire to immediately apply their knowledge, and they wish to use this knowledge to address a specific problem in their lives. For one student in this study, receiving a baccalaureate degree was directly associated with her ability to apply for a promotion. These participants decided to take on the additional role of student because they wanted to use their new knowledge as a means of achieving financial stability. They wanted to use their learning in order to advance personally, professionally, and financially. They also enrolled in the first place because, although this university's tuition was not inexpensive, the incentives offered by the continuing studies unit helped to make it affordable and less stressful.

Lifelong goal and role model.

Since many of the students in this study indicated that they had a lifelong goal of a college degree, this motivation is consistent with Justice and Dornan's (2001) finding as well as

Houle (1961) who suggested that nontraditional students are motivated to attend college because they have a goal and a need to do so. These students had already received success in other parts of their lives with their families and jobs, but now they wanted to receive a degree because it fulfilled a need for them personally. They were driven by an internal desire to succeed rather than an external need to meet someone else's expectations.

In order to appreciate what motivated these students to attend college at this stage in their lives, I found it necessary to understand their academic histories and their values relevant to education. Lack of focus was a common concern of each of the participants when they were young adults. At that time, they knew that they wanted to go to college and ultimately get a bachelor's degree, but they were unaware of what they wanted out of the experience. As younger students, their motivation was more external than internal. When they were younger, they looked to education as a way to plan their future. As older students, however, they saw a bachelor's degree as fitting in with their future rather than defining it. The student role was one they believed could live within and even provide support for their other roles.

When they were younger, these students were unclear of their strengths or their weaknesses. They were still searching for what they wanted out of life. They did not yet know what they envisioned for themselves in terms of a career, and they were unaware of where to go for information or support. Consistent with Weil's (1986) findings that family members are often unfamiliar with the higher education system, and students feel that they are on their own, some students in this study also felt that they lacked needed information and support when they considered going to college. Several participants were first-generation college students, and their parents did not stress a college education when they were younger. Work was stressed more than education. However, other students expressed a great deal of support from their family especially

as older students. Linda and Marta both had supportive spouses who were willing to help out with chores at home so that their wives could attend school. Russell's wife was also supportive and knowledgeable since she had completed her degree as a nontraditional student. Alice and Mary were fortunate to have supportive children who were more familiar with the role of student than they were. So, although the family support was not always evident when they were younger, these students did receive family support when they were older and returning to school. This support that they received as older students allowed these participants to better handle their multiple roles so that they would not experience extreme role stress and strain.

The students in this study were motivated to pursue a bachelor's degree at this time in their lives because they always aspired to have a degree, and they wanted to be a role model for their children. They believed that by acquiring a bachelor's degree they would be able to provide a better life for themselves and for their families. Consistent with Leppel's (2002) assertion that nontraditional students continue toward their educational goals if their expected future benefits exceed their investment in time and money, the participants in this study expressed their desire to continue their studies and succeed in spite of their conflicting roles because they viewed their sacrifices as worthwhile and necessary in order to reap future rewards. Historically, many groups in the United States, including women and minorities, looked to education as a means of improving their status (Fowlkes, 1987). This reasoning still holds today and for the participants in this study. However, although this advancement in status was important to most of the students in this study, their inner drive and determination was equally important. Further, this highly selective university and this continuing studies unit are located in a region of the United States that is not economically advanced. Therefore, the opportunity for nontraditional students in this area to receive a degree from a university like this is a goal that these students greatly

appreciated, and at this stage in their lives they were more aware than ever of the impact that receiving a degree from this institution may have on their lives. They viewed a degree from this university as an opportunity that they did not want to squander especially since the continuing studies unit was created to meet the needs of nontraditional students and even offered financial incentives for them to achieve their goal.

Role change due to life event/life stage.

As these students experienced changes in their roles or the addition of new roles, they were motivated to return to school or embark on a college career for the first time. As their children became older and less dependent on them for basic needs, these students then turned their attention to their own needs and fulfillment of their own goals. For one participant, when her children became teenagers, she decided that she could tackle the role of student along with the role of mother because her children no longer demanded as much attention as when they were younger. So, these students were able to handle an additional role because some of their other roles were minimized and they became more accustomed to the behaviors that allowed them to manage their roles. Again, they were at the point of chaotic stability in their lives. They were juggling many responsibilities but they were at the stage of development where they learned from their previous experiences and they were able to apply what they learned to various scenarios.

As Biddle (1979) theorized, role theory is a focus on context, people, and their behaviors. When a context undergoes changes, then people and their behaviors also change. For example, when nontraditional students' children became older and less dependent, the parental context changed. Although their parental role did not disappear, it did change in that parenting became less hands-on as the children got older. This role change occurred for these participants as well.

As a result, parents could then focus on their own needs and goals, which in this case was a return to their role as student. Their behaviors also changed as they assumed the role of student. For example, they used time management techniques to help them to balance their roles, and they acted like students: they did homework, went to the library, and studied for exams. As lives changed and values changed, these participants assumed new roles or new behaviors (Fowlkes, 1987). They also shared identities and behaviors with fellow students. They developed a new camaraderie with other nontraditional students since they had common interests and common challenges as they worked to balance their various roles. The social aspect of this new student role assisted nontraditional students in persisting toward degree attainment. So, although they did not engage in many extracurricular activities, they did experience a form of social interaction as they shared many of the same obstacles and challenges that other students experienced.

Further, Hensley and Kinser (2001) found that divorced students may persist since they have more time to devote to their academic responsibilities instead of to a spouse. Two of the students in this study were divorced mothers with teenage children at the time they enrolled in this continuing studies program. Although these students had many roles that included mother, full-time employee, caregiver to parents, and social obligations, they decided that they would return to school when their children were no longer as dependent on them as they were when they were younger. Perhaps, when their role as parent was no longer as prominent as it once was, they felt that they could focus on their own needs. Their roles as parent shifted which allowed them to feel confident about assuming a new role of student.

So, although younger children contributed to the stress and feelings of guilt for nontraditional students, older children were a resource and an asset as these nontraditional students embarked on their degrees. This finding is consistent with Justice and Dornan (2001)

who concluded that many nontraditional students enter college due to a significant life event, such as a divorce or death of a spouse or loved one or as the result of a re-evaluation of their goals. Further, when individuals have multiple roles, they experience higher levels of well-being because of their development of status and emotional gratification (Moen, Robison, & Dempster-McCain, 1995). This phenomenon was certainly evident in the students in this study and allowed them to persist in meeting their academic goal of a bachelor's degree. The role of the institution is also important here as these students associated a degree from this institution as a valuable asset. They believed that a degree from this university would be an accomplishment and would contribute to their personal well-being as well as the well-being of their family.

Obstacles and Challenges Related to Nontraditional Students' Various Roles

As is the case with most college students but especially nontraditional students, the participants in this study faced several obstacles and challenges especially as they related to their multiple and often conflicting roles. Cross (1979) refers to these types of challenges as situational barriers. As suggested by Donaldson (1999) and Weil (1986), the participants in this study were apprehensive about their ability to learn in the college environment at this stage of their lives, but they also had a certain level of confidence in their abilities to accept and overcome challenges since they had a lifetime of experiences as a guide. They had also developed ways of working with these obstacles and challenges in order to succeed. Once nontraditional begin to experience academic success, they also experience an increase in self-esteem (Padula, 1994). Johnson and Robson (1999) found that multiple roles also provide opportunities for success and a sense of well-being. These nontraditional students learned how to budget their time and they had learned how to rely on others and their own self-discipline to manage the stress in their lives. Epstein (1987) found that support from significant others was

important to when juggling multiple roles. Nontraditional students also were familiar with their own limitations so they knew when to push and when to hold back, and they had a high level of motivation and commitment to their educational goals (Krager, Wrenn, & Hirt, 1990). Each of these characteristics is found more often in older students than younger students. So, these nontraditional students seemed to rely on their multiple roles more as a means of support than a means of stress. These students did not relinquish roles in order to work on their degrees. Instead, they managed their roles better by using strategies they had learned throughout their lives. Yes, they made sacrifices, but not so much that they considered leaving their role as student. These students also relied upon the policies of the continuing studies unit to help them handle the obstacles they encountered. The continuing studies division offered flexible schedules, focused on the learning and developmental needs of nontraditional students, and provided degree programs that were responsive to the needs of students. Because of each of these factors as well as the participants' confidence and their drive to succeed and support form others they were able to persist toward degree attainment.

The nontraditional students I interviewed for this study revealed several obstacles and challenges related to their various roles that they had to confront and manage in order to persist in their studies toward a bachelor's degree. These obstacles were generally related to their (a) job responsibilities; (b) family commitments, (c) and community/volunteer activities.

Job responsibilities.

Kasworm (2003) found that nontraditional students who have managerial types of jobs may persist at greater levels than those students employed in sales or service jobs. Each of the students in this study either had managerial positions or owned their own business. Furthermore, each of the students in this study was able to take advantage of either tuition assistance programs

offered by their employers or tuition discounts offered by this continuing studies unit. Two students also received financial aid, but this topic of government sponsored financial aid was not a part of this study. So, financial stability was a contributing factor here. Those students who have conflicting roles, but do not have the added financial burden associated with attending college may be able to perform better and therefore persist toward degree attainment than those who do not have adequate financial resources.

The students in this study also expressed gratitude for their employers' and co-workers' willingness to work around their school schedules. Co-workers pitched in when the students had exams or projects to do. Employers were willing to adjust work schedules so that students could attend school. One employer even allowed employees to use vacation time in order to attend class. So, although these students experienced stress as a result of their multiple roles, they were able to handle their multiple roles because they had the support and assistance from others and they were able to persist. This fact may be attributable to Biddle's (1979) observation that people continue in their roles despite their difficulties and conflicts because they desire and approve of what they are accomplishing, in this case, a bachelor's degree. These students also believed that a degree from this institution was a worthwhile objective and one that would only result from sacrifice and hard work. Also, since some of the students in this study were employed by the university, their co-workers and supervisors valued education as well so they were likely to be supportive of the students' quest for a bachelor's degree. The participants were not alone in their quest for a degree. Even if their family members did not always understand their need for a degree, their co-workers and supervisors did since many of them had degrees themselves and some earned a degree while working full-time.

Family commitments and community/volunteer activities.

In addition to job responsibilities being an obstacle and a challenge for these nontraditional students, their family commitments and volunteer activities also caused conflicts and demands on their time. Horn, Peter, and Rooney (2002) found that 27% of college students are parents, and parents are at a greater risk of dropping out of college for at least a period of time than are other undergraduates and that parents often experience feelings of guilt when their studies prevent them from being available to their children. This phenomenon was evident in my discussion with these nontraditional students when they spoke of their earlier attempts at a college education. However, once these students' children were older or they had proper childcare for younger children, they were better able to adapt to their student role. Also, these students were all over the age of 30, and by that time, they had acquired a level of confidence and self-esteem that prevented them from being overtaken by feelings of guilt.

Bowl (2001) and Padula (1994) found that women experienced barriers to academic success that were directly associated with their role as mothers. This notion was supported in the findings when several students, who were mothers of young children when they made an earlier attempt at college, revealed that at that time the stress of going to school and fulfilling their parental obligations was just too much so that they had to drop out. As young mothers, their most important role was that of parent. They were still trying to define who they were, and they were unable or unwilling to share their role of mother with any other role. Then, as these students became older, they had developed confidence in their parental abilities so they were able to branch out into other roles that they considered important. This phenomenon is consistent with Carney-Crompton and Tan's (2002) finding that the age of their children may affect the retention and persistence of female students. This finding was also somewhat consistent with Fairchild's

(2003) observation that those female students with older children may persist to graduation while those with younger children may interrupt their education or stop attending completely. Elle dropped out at one time because she saw that the family was getting stressed and “the children always came first.” However, contradictory to Fairchild’s finding, Amanda, 32, continued with her education even though she was a single mother with a toddler. In order to handle her roles of mother and student and to lessen any role conflict, she integrated the two roles: While having dinner or driving in the car with her son, she used her school work as a way to bond with her son. She read to him from her textbooks, and she played number games with him.

These students experienced a lack of time to do all of the things that their various roles required; consequently, they had to develop time management strategies in order to juggle their multiple roles. Nontraditional students are fearful that their sacrifices may be too overwhelming and that they will be unable to fulfill the academic demands of college (Bowl, 2001). However, the students in this study quickly gained confidence in their academic abilities. Although some initially had anxiety about their academic abilities as suggested by Home (1993) and Klein (2000), this anxiety was short-lived. Donaldson (1999) found that adults use their previous successes and failures a way to monitor their learning approaches, study habits, resources, and motivation, and once they begin their college careers, interactions between their everyday lives and their classroom experiences influence their cognition. Consequently, as the students in this study matured and became more comfortable with their roles as adults, they were better able to manage their role as students. Cross (1981) observed that nontraditional students’ persistence in college is related to their commitment to their role as student, and the students in this study indicated that when they were in their 20s, they lacked focus and, therefore, performed poorly

and ultimately withdrew. However, when they were older and more confident and committed to their various roles, including the role of student, they were able to succeed.

As Cross (1979) suggested, situational barriers, including multiple roles and the time constraints that are a part of these roles, offer the greatest obstacles for nontraditional students. These students had many demands on their time, from job to children to husband to ill relatives (and themselves) and community obligations. However, they managed to make it work because they had the desire and drive to do so. They also had the support of their families, employers, and the institution, and this support from these various individuals gave them the encouragement to persist. The situational barrier of cost was not as much an issue for these students because of the financial incentives provided by the study context and their employers. Institutional barriers were also lessened because of the flexible class schedule and well-informed and accommodating faculty and staff. The students' dispositional barrier of lack of confidence as specified by Cross was found at the beginning of their educational journey at the study context but was not a significant factor for the students in this study.

Support Systems Available to Nontraditional Students

The participants in this study attributed their ability to succeed in acquiring a bachelor's degree, in part, to those people in their lives who provided emotional and day-to-day support. Since the participants selected for this study were considered moderately nontraditional with two or more nontraditional characteristics, their multiple roles served more as a means of support than as a deterrent to their success. As Fairchild (2003) suggested, nontraditional students' many roles and responsibilities may cause them to drop out before receiving a degree, but this is not what this study found. Instead, these multiple roles may have started out as competing roles but then seemed to effectively coexist and even benefit from each other. Students received emotional

support from spouses, children, and other family members; employers and co-workers provided assistance and guidance, and fellow students and the faculty and staff at the continuing studies unit provided understanding and help in navigating the world of higher education. Without these various roles, these students probably would have felt alone and isolated, and their insecurities about being productive college students may have resulted in their departure.

I found that the nontraditional student who was navigating many roles while working a bachelor's degree entered into a "perfect storm" where each of the variables, which on the surface seemed to be opposing forces, actually came together to provide them the strength and support to succeed and persist toward degree attainment. Fairchild (2003) and Tinto (1987) cited that nontraditional students' multiple roles and obligations may negatively affect their academic persistence, but Sieber (1974) and Thoits(1987) discussed some of the positive aspects of multiple roles such as personal gratification and feelings of meaning and purpose in their lives. These students were at a place in their lives where they knew what they wanted; they wanted to a bachelor's degree from a prestigious university, and they now had the confidence and life experiences to help them succeed. They also wanted to acquire new knowledge that would help them in the remaining years of their life, and they were aware of the sacrifices that it would take to learn new skills. They had many responsibilities as a result of their many roles, but they knew enough about themselves and the people in their lives to manipulate these roles to make them work on their behalf. They wanted a degree and they needed a degree at this stage in their lives because they desired the personal fulfillment and enrichment that came with a college degree.

The participants in this study relied on their own determination as well as the support of family and friends to help them achieve their goal of a bachelor's degree. Although Tinto (1987) implied that students' external commitments may alter their educational goals, this did not seem

to be the case for the students in this study. Instead, these external commitments and the roles that accompanied these commitments seemed to provide motivation for these students to persist. Tinto did not include nontraditional students with multiple roles in his initial model of student persistence and departure. So, it is not entirely surprising that the students Tinto studied were more affected by external commitments than older students.

The nontraditional students who participated in this study revealed several support systems that were available to them that were instrumental in allowing them to realize their goal of a bachelor's degree. These support systems included (a) family; (b) employers; (c) the faculty and staff at the continuing studies division, and (d) fellow students.

Family and employer.

According to Epstein (1987), emotional support of significant others is important to the success of multiple life roles. When family members are supportive of the nontraditional student's decision to embark on a baccalaureate degree, both are aware of the others' expectations. The participants in this study each mentioned someone in their families who was instrumental in their success. Husbands' roles changed as they assumed new responsibilities in the family. They helped with the cooking and the cleaning as well as monitoring younger children's homework. They also attended school functions and ball games. Older children were supportive as well. They helped their parents adapt to current technology, including the use of computers. They also helped their parents in their search for colleges and academic programs. Older parents and siblings also helped these students achieve their goal of a bachelor's degree simply by acting as sounding boards for assignment topics and projects. They also offered their quiet support by listening to these students when they were feeling overwhelmed and intimidated by their role of student.

Although Kerka (1998) and Hensley and Kinser (2001) found that some nontraditional students face opposition to their academic pursuits and this opposition may lead to their inability to persist, the nontraditional students in this study did not allow this opposition to interfere with the attainment of a bachelor's degree. Instead, they relied on family members, employers, fellow students, and faculty and staff at the continuing studies unit to provide the encouragement that they needed. So, consistent with the participants in Kerka's study and Hensley and Kinser's study, the students in this study faced obstacles to their persistence toward degree attainment; however, the students in this study decided to continue with their studies in spite of these obstacles. This determination may have been due, at least in part, to the support that the students received from their family, work colleagues, and fellow students as well as the support provided by the continuing studies unit. The notion of institutional prestige where students are drawn to a university's history of academic success and high expectations may have contributed to this determination as well. However, this determination was also due to their stage in development where they were internally motivated to succeed rather than externally motivated. The timing was right for these students to return to school, and it was right in part because their children were either older or well-cared for, and they had achieved chaotic stability in their lives. Their lives were complex, but they learned from their past experiences how to effectively communicate with others so that they could achieve their desires. In many ways, they manipulated situations so that they could get the best possible results. One participant depended on her teenage daughter to help her with the research about where to go to college and which programs are available. She also relied on her church members as participants in her various assignments. For example, for a psychology assignment she interviewed a church member so she was able to link her roles in order to make them manageable.

In addition to the support that the students received from others, the students also appreciated the benefits provided by this continuing studies division, including tuition waivers and discounts, open admissions for all students, flexible schedules, relevant programs, and the help and assistance from faculty and staff. More than the other institutions highlighted earlier, this continuing studies division focused primarily on credit programs; non-credit programs are not offered. This continuing studies unit also had open admissions for all students unlike some of the other elite institutions mentioned earlier that required entrance exams or interviews for students. The application fee of \$25 for this continuing studies unit was less than the other institutions which required fees of \$50, \$70, and \$100. Although this continuing studies division is a part of a highly selective research institution, the tuition for part-time students is substantially less than that for full-time students. Also, part-time students at this continuing studies unit had greater access to all courses offered throughout the university than part-time students at the other highlighted continuing studies programs. So, this continuing studies unit provided a unique experience for these students. They believed that their efforts were worthwhile if it meant receiving a degree from such a prestigious university.

Faculty, staff, and fellow students.

The participants in this study also commented on how the faculty and staff at this continuing studies division as well as their fellow students offered them encouragement especially when they were doubting their own abilities, including the ability to manage their conflicting roles. Especially important was the honor society that helped the students feel like they truly belonged to the educational community. This honor society as well as the support of faculty, staff, and other students (both traditional and nontraditional) allowed these students to feel a sense of belonging which helped to alleviate some of the fear associated with returning to

school. It also helped them to feel better about themselves and to trust that they were making the right decision in pursuing their bachelor's degree. This concept of social integration, which is a major component of Tinto's theory, was helpful to some of these students and related to Biddle's (1979) idea that roles are associated with social positions. These participants each shared the role of student with their fellow students. This helped them to identify with each other as a result of their common roles, which in turn provided them with the encouragement and support needed to persist. Cross (1979) found that just being older was a barrier for nontraditional students. Some older students faced physical limitations as well as anxiety about their academic abilities. Although at least one student in this study had some limited mobility, she was able to deal with this by selecting a campus location that had ample parking near the campus building. Online classes also helped to alleviate some of the problems related to limited physical mobility. For the most part, the students in this study used their age to their advantage, especially when confronting their perceived academic shortcomings. Younger students willingly offered their expertise, especially in areas of technology. They took the older students "under their wing" and this worked to their advantage. Again, this is another example of manipulating the situation in order to gain something and ties in with adult learning theory where students' learning is a reciprocal event. They used what they learned in one situation and applied it to another. Younger students do not have this advantage of cross-learning because they do not have the life experiences that teach them how to apply the events in one learning environment to other learning environments. They also have not achieved the stage of development like these nontraditional students where they were able to focus on their own needs and desires rather than external motivators. So, although these situational barriers existed for these students, as Cross

suggested, they were able to overcome these barriers or even use them to their advantage in order to persist.

Conclusions

Each of the previous discussions helps to draw conclusions about the four research questions that this study attempted to answer:

1. How do nontraditional students enrolled within a unique university context of a continuing studies division manage to negotiate the demands of multiple roles in order to attain a baccalaureate degree?

In order to do this, these students used several strategies to accomplish their goal. They used time management techniques as a way to organize the many tasks associated with their various roles. They knew what they wanted and needed to accomplish, and they set aside the time to write papers and study for exams as well as found time to spend with their families and get their jobs done at the workplace. As their stage of development dictated, they were more focused on their individual needs, and their needs were now more complex since they were more complex than in their younger years. They already had jobs and families so that need was already met. Now, they wanted to concentrate on an unmet need, which is what motivates behavior, and that was the need to enrich their lives and, for some students, to enrich the lives of their families through learning. Then, they framed their learning around Knowles' (1970) learning characteristics for nontraditional students and wanted to use their learning to better their lives and give them personal fulfillment rather than meet any external needs. Not only were they focused in their desire to pursue a bachelor's degree, but they were also focused in what they hoped to gain from a bachelor's degree. They wanted to apply their learning to their everyday lives, and they wanted to apply their learning immediately. They were not interested in just learning facts; they wanted

their knowledge to benefit their lives. This focus then gave them the ability to manage their roles through time and stress management in order to achieve their goal. Unlike in their younger years, they were focused and driven, and they had confidence in their abilities to get the jobs done. They were able to prioritize their obligations, and when things became stressful, they re-evaluated their situation and sometimes responded by taking fewer classes, or online classes, or summers off in order to prevent role stress or role overload. They did physical activities to handle the stress and a couple of students relied on their spirituality to see them through the especially rough times. These students were able to compensate for any deficiencies such as time constraints and difficulties in the classroom by relying on their coping skills acquired in past experiences. They even relied on fellow students, colleagues, family members, and college staff and faculty to help them to carry the load or just provide words of encouragement. The continuing studies unit was extremely helpful in allowing nontraditional students to negotiate their demanding roles by offering flexible schedules, various locations, and a wide range of courses that students found interesting. In short, these students did what they had to do in order to achieve their goal of a bachelor's degree because not doing so simply was not an option. It is generally accepted that nontraditional students do not persist to degree attainment because they have too many demands on their time and they are unable to reconcile their various roles with the role of student. However, this study found that students with multiple roles do, in fact, persist, and it is their multiple roles that help them persist. Multiple roles gave them a shared understanding with their fellow students that provided encouragement. Multiple roles and the success they had achieved so far in their lives helped them to understand that they mattered to themselves and to others. Their lives were valuable, and they wanted to share their value with others. Although they did not have much social interaction with other students outside of the

classroom, they did have a lot in common with other students and the continuing studies community in general, and these common behaviors helped to form a bond similar to that of social interaction which Tinto (1987) cites as important to persistence. So, it was not the social interaction that these students needed since they already had multiple roles to fulfill that need. Rather, these students needed to be able to identify with others in the academic community, and this continuing studies unit provided that identification through a large nontraditional student population and through faculty and staff who shared similar histories as well. Were it not for their multiple roles, which provided a basis for continued learning and psychological and social development, it is unlikely that these students would not have persisted toward degree attainment.

2. What motivates nontraditional students to embark on a bachelor's degree at this stage in their lives?

As for the research question about what motivated these students to pursue a degree at this point in their lives, the affordability issue and the reputation of the study context were huge motivators. Whereas these students had financial concerns when they were younger, this was no longer as much of a problem as before. Especially with tuition reimbursement from their employers and discount programs offered by this division, the financial stress associated with college was alleviated for these students. When the financial stress was alleviated, then the stress associated with the additional role of student was also diminished, and students were able to persist. According to adult learning theory, career advancement is a known motivator for nontraditional students and this was the case for these students as well. These students wanted to advance in their careers and they understood that a college degree would allow that. They also felt that a college degree also afforded them a level of respectability in the workplace that they

did not currently have. For each of the participants, they valued education and they had a lifelong goal of achieving a bachelor's degree. Achieving a degree from this elite university was also a motivator for them. They admired those family members and acquaintances who had college degrees, and they wanted that accomplishment for themselves and for their children. The timing in their development process was finally right for them, and they were ready to put their needs first. They wanted to be a role model for their children and to show them that anything is possible with hard work and determination. Their role as parent had a reciprocal relationship with their role as student. Then, when the children became older or they became more confident in their careers, they were willing to take on the new role of student and fulfill a lifelong dream. As they saw that their multiple roles were a help rather than a hindrance because they experienced support as a result of their roles, then their motivation continued. As their belief in their own academic and learning abilities grew, they were motivated to persist.

In their response about what motivated them to embark on a bachelor's degree at this stage in their lives, many of the participants shared information about their educational background including those factors that prevented them from completing their college careers in the past. For those who felt that their young children prevented them from attending school in the past, they just waited until these children were a little older, never losing sight of their goal. For those who had young children while they were completing their bachelor's degree, they combined their roles of parent and student by taking the children to class or studying with the children. Lack of focus was no longer an issue because these students already had families and full-time jobs so they already knew what they wanted out of life and how to make it work. They had acquired confidence as older adults that they did not have as twentysomethings. The financial difficulty they experienced in their younger years was not as detrimental to their

success at this time in their lives because they could count on their employers or the discount programs offered by the continuing studies division to lessen that burden. They had no more excuses. Although they were fearful at first of the demands of being a student again, they become more and more confident of their academic abilities with each class. They did not like everything (writing was an issue for most participants) but they knew themselves enough to know how to deal with the stress. After all, they were dealing with children, full-time jobs, husbands, wives, elderly parents, illnesses, and death. Certainly, they could handle writing a paper. As for understanding how college worked, they were no longer ill-prepared. Some worked in a university setting; others had children who were almost college age. So, in the process of gathering information for their own children, they were able to educate themselves as well about the intricacies of higher education.

3. What obstacles and challenges related to their multiple roles must nontraditional students at the study context overcome in order to persist toward completion of a bachelor's degree?

Of course, as these students took on the additional role of student, they had to confront obstacles and challenges. These obstacles were generally related to the conflicts associated with their family and work responsibilities, but also with their volunteer or community memberships. Nontraditional students sometimes had to make the choice between attending class or attending their children's ball games. These difficult choices sometimes led to feelings of guilt, but the students believed that in the long run they were doing something to benefit themselves and consequently their children by focusing on their studies. As adult development theory suggests, these students were focused on meeting needs that would lead to their self-actualization and fulfillment. Then, students also were often torn between spending time with their spouse or doing

their schoolwork. In order to deal with this role conflict, they often had to manage their time so that both roles could be satisfied. They manipulated their roles in order to be successful in all of their roles. They let go of being perfect, which is something they learned as adults who had many responsibilities and roles to fill. When these students had to take care of young children or older relatives while also going to school, they incorporated their studies with their caregiver duties. They did homework with their children and they relied on their elderly parents as sounding boards for their school projects. When confronted with conflicts between their work and school schedules, they sometimes had to miss class or get special accommodations from their instructors, but they were fortunate enough to have the support of both their employers and instructors. Then, when church functions or other community responsibilities interfered with school activities, these students relied on others in their organizations to pick up the slack. They welcomed the challenges associated with earning a bachelor's degree because it made them feel like active participants in life. Instead of retreating from life at this stage of their psychosocial development, these nontraditional students looked to their educational experience as a measuring stick of what they could still accomplish and eventually did accomplish.

4. What support systems do nontraditional students have as a result of their multiple roles? For example, does a spouse provide support as well as a conflicting role for the nontraditional student?

This idea of the importance of support systems for nontraditional students in managing their multiple roles was the topic of the last research question and perhaps the most influential in allowing these students to attain their baccalaureate degree. This support included support of family and friends; employers and co-workers; faculty and staff, and their fellow students. Especially important was the support of the continuing studies unit itself. The continuing studies

unit and its focus on the needs of nontraditional students through inventive programs, flexible schedules, financial incentives, honor society, and family centered gatherings helped these students feel that they mattered. When students felt that they mattered, they were more inclined to accept the challenges and obligations related to balancing their multiple roles and to embrace academic and social integration which, according to Tinto (1987), aids in persistence.

Each of these supportive individuals and groups provided encouragement to the students. In addition to encouragement, they provided tangible assistance: they watched over younger children; they provided words of praise; they pitched in at home and at the office; they offered advice; they shared notes and provided tutoring. Without the support of these people as they helped these students negotiate their many roles and the responsibilities associated with these conflicting roles, the goal of a baccalaureate degree may never have been achieved. This support from others was a direct result of their multiple roles. Without multiple roles, these students' ability to persist may have been doomed. Their multiple roles "fed" off of each other so that chaotic stability was a positive force in their lives rather than a negative force. This concept of chaotic stability gave them purpose and focus. As adults with many roles, these students did not feel that they were all alone in their journey toward degree attainment. In fact, they relied on others to help with their goal, and their multiple roles made the difference in their persistence and their success.

Institutional prestige.

As the findings from this study suggest, institutional prestige was a key contributor to nontraditional students' persistence toward degree attainment. Initially, at least one reason that these students decided to attend this continuing studies division of a privately endowed research institution over other, less expensive institutions was because of its reputation of academic

excellence and its historical stature in the community. The students in this study were local residents for many years, and some of these students had family members or friends who received degrees from this prestigious institution. This institution was not only a part of the community's history, but it was a part of their history as well as they recalled attending sporting events and learning about the accomplishments of this institution and its alumni over the years. As Baker and Brown (2007) suggested, elite institutions have earned their credibility. They are already a proven commodity simply because they have lasted so long. The institution in this study has been operating for almost 175 years; potential students know what to expect.

This idea of high expectations is also associated with institutional prestige, and also affects nontraditional student motivation and persistence (Scott & Trobe, 1995). Full-time students who attend this institution are expected to graduate within a typical 4-year time frame, and the academic culture of this institution expects them to meet this goal. Since the part-time students who attend the study context are also a part of this academic culture that promotes success and degree attainment, it is reasonable to conclude that they also adopt these same high expectations for themselves. As a result, these nontraditional students in this study were motivated to persist until they achieved their goal of a baccalaureate degree.

Just as Baker and Brown's (2007) study found, the nontraditional students in this study found this institution to be more awe-inspiring than intimidating. They were apprehensive regarding their academic abilities at first, but, then, as these students adjusted to university life and as they gained confidence in their academic abilities and were convinced that they could compete with other highly qualified and motivated students at this institution, then they became more driven to succeed. Selective institutions also typically have low student-faculty ratios, advanced technology, and state-of-the-art facilities (Morphew, 2008). As a result of these

amenities, these nontraditional students believed that they had the support of the institution and its faculty and staff which would in turn help them to persist toward degree attainment. These students did not feel isolated from the rest of the academic community. Instead, they felt that they mattered, and they believed that the university in general and the study context in particular were focused on their success as much as they were.

As Morphey (2008) and Karen (1990) suggested, elite colleges and universities in the United States continue to attract students because these students believe that the quality of education that they receive at these institutions will open career doors and provide a better quality of life than some other institutions. Prestigious institutions also attract highly qualified students from all over the world, and nontraditional students see this as an opportunity to learn from the best minds. Since nontraditional students typically want to immediately apply what they learn to their own experiences and in order to make their lives better, they want to receive degrees from the best institutions possible. Elite universities also typically have well-known programs in various academic areas, and nontraditional students want to take advantage of this opportunity to be a part of cutting-edge programs (Baker & Brown). In the case of the study context, it offers credit courses only which may add to its reputation of educating students who want to concentrate on serious academic issues rather than recreational learning associated with non-credit courses.

The nontraditional students who attended this continuing studies division wanted to get “the best bang for their buck,” so to speak. Many students are willing to pay more for an education received at elite institutions because they believe that the benefits are worthwhile. However, as Hu and Hossler (2000) pointed out, although students are willing to pay more, they must still have the ability to pay. Unlike some of the other institutions discussed earlier, this

continuing studies unit offered several tuition discount programs that made the higher price of an elite institution manageable. Also, in comparison to the other continuing studies units, this continuing studies unit provided a lower tuition rate and a lower application fee. As discussed previously, this continuing studies division in this study also focused on credit programs. Other continuing studies divisions also offered non-credit programs which some nontraditional students may consider less demanding and less prestigious than credit programs. So, these factors associated with this prestigious institution and this continuing studies' unit determination to promote accessibility and excellence in curriculum helped to provide nontraditional students with the tools necessary to persist toward degree attainment.

Implications for Policy and Practice

As this study suggests, nontraditional students are indeed able to achieve the success of a bachelor's degree even though they are also navigating multiple roles, including parent, spouse, employee, caregiver, and community member/volunteer. This study also suggests that nontraditional students at this time in their lives and given their experiences, maturity, and developmental stage in life, have developed the focus, drive, and motivation to persist in degree attainment. Although they experienced stressful situations and challenges as a result of their many roles, they seemed to be equipped to handle these moments of doubt so that role stress did not result in role overload and eventual departure from the academic setting. This ability to handle these obstacles was a result of their increased confidence in their abilities in each of their roles, including their learning abilities, as well as the encouragement and support that they received from others in their lives. The continuing studies unit also had an impact on the success of these students by offering truly open admissions, tuition discounts, various degree programs, flexible schedules, and several locations. This unit made students feel that they mattered, and this

concept of mattering helped them to persist toward degree attainment. The continuing studies unit also had the impressive reputation that its association with a top-50 university provided. These students expected more from such an institution, and they believed that they received more in terms of tuition assistance, faculty excellence, and support from staff and administrators.

So, what can we learn from this in-depth qualitative study of nontraditional students, and how do we apply what we have learned in order to implement policy? First, the reader must remember that the participants in this study received a bachelor's degree from a continuing studies unit of privately endowed research institution located in the southern United States. As discussed earlier, many nontraditional students are aware of the reputations of elite institutions and at this stage in their lives, they believed that they were worthy of such an opportunity for academic excellence. Their life experiences may have taught them the lesson "that you get what you pay for" and they were willing to work hard in order to receive a degree from a top-50 institution, the only one in this part of the United States. They were willing to pay more for their education as long as they believed that the benefits justified the cost. Since this continuing studies unit did not offer non-credit courses, only credit courses, these students may have been even more convinced of its focus on rigorous academic training. So, if a university or continuing studies division wants to focus on baccalaureate degree attainment for nontraditional students, they may want to shift their focus away from non-credit programs (which may deplete resources from credit programs) and focus on innovative credit programs. Non-credit programs also offer the image that they are not part of a "real" college. Since the study context did not offer non-credit classes, the perception was one of an academically challenging institution.

Although this part-time division does not rely on the same highly selective admissions process that other full-time divisions of this university use, the highly regarded reputation of this

university is well-known. The students who attend this university, whether part-time or full-time, expect to receive an education of the highest quality, and they also understand the personal commitment that this involves. They knew from the beginning that their quest for a bachelor's degree would not be easy, but at this stage in their lives, they realized that hard work was usually necessary to achieve great things. After all, they were married, employed, and raising children—just to name a few of their roles—so they were accustomed to the struggles and triumphs of hard work. So, institutional prestige was an important factor in these students' decision to attend this particular institution as well as their decision to persist. They believed that a degree from this highly selective institution was worth the sacrifice, and they had confidence that the caliber of learning that they received from this institution would benefit them and their families.

However, as described below, this study has policy implications for all institution types and not just highly selective elite institutions. In order to meet the challenges that the additional role of student added to their lives, these students greatly appreciated tuition reimbursement programs and tuition discount programs. Although some indicated that they may have continued without the financial incentive, perhaps due to the reputation of this institution, all stated that these programs were instrumental in motivating them to attend in the first place. So nontraditional students should seek out and investigate those institutions and employers that provide tuition assistance. By doing so, they can greatly reduce the situational barrier of cost that many students cite as a reason for inability to persist. In turn, institutions of higher education should consider offering tuition discounts for certain groups such as senior citizens, state or city employees, university employees, teachers, etc.

By lessening the financial burden, the students in this study were able to better handle the challenges of their multiple roles. Since these students were focused on degree attainment as a

way to better their lives and the lives of their families, they may never have made the decision to enroll if they believed that the costs were greater than the benefits. So, educational institutions who wish to provide nontraditional students with a quality educational experience that leads to the outcome of baccalaureate degree attainment should strongly consider financial incentives. In addition to providing their own tuition discounts, these institutions could also partner with businesses and other organizations that provide tuition assistance programs so that those students who wish to pursue higher education have the available information to do so.

To further accommodate nontraditional students' usual hectic schedule and for learning to effectively contribute to both the economic and personal development of nontraditional students, a flexible course format that focuses on the adult as student is very important to include in the curriculum for nontraditional students (Tolhurst, 2006). By offering flexible class schedules, higher education institutions can address the unique needs of nontraditional students whose time is so restricted due to their many roles and accompanying obligations. As suggested by the students in this study, the ability to take classes in the evening, during their lunch hour, on Saturdays, online, and at various locations helped them to manage their time as they navigated their many roles. Furthermore, by offering classes at various times and locations and using alternative delivery methods, colleges and universities relay their understanding of the needs of nontraditional students. In turn, students should realize that many institutions offer flexible schedules and course delivery methods to accommodate their needs and roles. Online classes, Saturday classes, and evening classes may help them to juggle their roles. By taking advantage of these various formats and then selecting the ones that work best for them, nontraditional students can make their educational experience as rewarding as possible and hopefully advance toward degree attainment.

Nontraditional students favor programs of study whose curricula address their needs and aspirations. Since many of these students decided to participate in higher education in order to advance their professional and personal goals, they pursued a curriculum that combined what they already knew with what they could learn. A successful undergraduate program provides both breadth and depth and expands opportunities for knowledge (Ntiri, 2004). This strategy also allows nontraditional students to combine and connect their various roles so that their learning is enhanced and persistence is achieved. Students should consciously make the effort to combine their various roles. By using their experiences as parents, spouses, and employees as a frame of reference nontraditional students can incorporate their personal lives into their academic lives. By combining their roles, they may be able to alleviate some of the stress that is associated with having multiple roles. In order to facilitate this type of cross-learning for nontraditional students, institutions of higher education can first adopt programs that meet the educational needs of the community so that students can immediately apply what they learn in the classroom to their own careers. Additionally, faculty can provide assignments that use students' roles outside of the classroom as frames of reference. For example, students may be asked to make a speech in a communications class about their role as parent or community volunteer.

Likewise, educational institutions may want to re-evaluate their policies regarding non-credit courses of instruction. Although non-credit courses certainly provide educational opportunities to community members, it may be wise to separate them, both financially and administratively, from those continuing studies units that also offer credit programs. The continuing studies unit in this study did not offer non-credit courses, but only college credit courses that students may use toward a degree. When the same academic division offers both

credit and non-credit courses, students may have the perception that the academic preparation is less rigorous than if only college credit courses are offered.

Insofar as social integration is an important component of persistence (Tinto, 1987), flexible schedules may help nontraditional students feel less isolated, more connected to the mission of the institution, and more appreciated by the institution. Students may find it advantageous and comforting to interact with other students who share their challenges and obstacles. For example, evening classes will likely include nontraditional students who are working during the day. As a result, the students enrolled in these evening classes will be able to share their experiences of working full-time while also attending school. This interaction among students may provide encouragement and support and lead to helpful strategies that all students may find beneficial. As Knowles (1970) suggested, nontraditional students rely on their previous experiences to foster learning. When conducting research for their class assignments nontraditional students often rely upon their experiences with children, spouses, and employers to provide material for their assignments. In this study, one of the participants interviewed a young member of her church for a child psychology class assignment.

Moreover, colleges and universities may want to develop programs, such as honor programs or social outings that include students and their families, so that these students feel more attached to the university without the added burden of meetings, etc. These programs also relay the message to nontraditional students that they matter and that they are capable of achieving great things. As this study has revealed, nontraditional students want to feel that they matter, and when they do, they are likely to persist in order to achieve their maximum potential. This strategy may also help students join their various roles together so that they feel less guilty about not always being available for their families. Furthermore, when families are invited to

participate in school related functions, they may develop an appreciation for the sacrifices as well as the accomplishments of their loved ones. So, students should take advantage of any social outings and functions that the university provides. This will allow them to feel more connected to other students which may also foster emotional support among students, faculty, and staff. By including family in these social activities, the family of nontraditional students will also feel less isolated and develop a greater understanding for the student role that their loved one is so passionate about. In other words, the mystery of being a student disappears and appreciation is gained.

The students in this study were considered moderately nontraditional with at least two nontraditional characteristics in addition to being over the age of 30, and they had several roles and obligations in addition to their role of student; however, they were also successful in persisting toward degree attainment. Their multiple roles provided them support and encouragement rather than stress that may have resulted in their departure from academics. In light of this finding, institutions of higher education may want to pursue recruiting nontraditional who have multiple roles since these students, more than minimally nontraditional students, may be better able to navigate the higher education processes due to their vast learning experiences. By having multiple roles and responsibilities, moderately nontraditional students have more experiences juggling the conflicts that result from these multiple roles and obligations. They know how to best use their time and they have a better idea of how to handle stressful situations by using such techniques as physical exercise. They also know how to manage their relationships with significant others in their lives so that they can get the support they need to handle their conflicting roles. Higher education institutions may want to address parent groups, social organizations, and community activist organizations about the benefits of programs for

nontraditional students since these prospective students already have multiple roles, and this study found that students with multiple roles may have a better success rate than those with limited roles and responsibilities since multiple roles help to provide the support and experience that nontraditional students need to succeed.

Since many nontraditional students re-enter the education setting after a long absence and experience anxiety related to returning to school, it is important to provide support through advising. Effective advisors for nontraditional students should have an understanding of the characteristics of adult students and how adult students learn best. They should understand that nontraditional students often have many roles that they must balance and many sacrifices that they must make in order to be college students. In simplest terms, advisors should be compassionate regarding the many demands that nontraditional students must juggle, but they must also be truthful about the expectations of being a college student. College is not easy, and it involves a commitment from the student. However, in order to provide the best possible experience for students, advisors should make sure that students are aware of any student services, such as tutoring, career testing, and disability services. Advisors should also keep track of the academic progress of students so that when students experience deficiencies in their grades or attendance, advisors can suggest helpful strategies for improvement. Advisors should also maintain contact with these other student support services so that students can receive as much support as possible throughout their academic experience. In order to ensure that advisors are meeting the needs of nontraditional students, educational institutions should adopt policies that encourage the professional development of support staff through conferences and other professional programs.

As for students, they should make every effort to maintain a relationship with their academic advisors. In addition to being accessible and knowledgeable about degrees, programs, requirements, and regulations, which are what students attending a prestigious university expect, advisors can be an important source of support for nontraditional students by helping them to navigate curricular issues. They can be a liaison with faculty, staff, and administrators, and they can provide valuable information concerning course requirements and degree requirements. Students can communicate with them in a manner that is convenient, whether in person, by telephone, or electronically via e-mail. In order to negotiate the demands of their multiple roles in order to reach degree attainment and in order to overcome obstacles and challenges related to their multiple roles, it is important that students alert their instructors or advisors when they are experiencing difficulty academically or difficulty as a result of their diverse roles. Instructors or advisors may then be able to suggest the best course of action for them to maintain their progress. These actions may include tutoring services or disability services. It is also important that students share suggestions with advisors and administrators regarding class schedules and programs so that the institution can meet students' needs as much as possible. By meeting the curricular needs of students including maintaining high expectations for the students and for the institution and its programs, continuing studies units can assist in maintaining nontraditional students' motivation to persist.

Although the students in this study were very committed to earning a bachelor's degree in spite of the obstacles that they encountered as a result of their multiple roles, it is important for instructors to consider their diverse learning styles when developing curriculum and assignments (Ntiri, 2004). Faculty should follow some of Knowles' (1970) principles, and keep learning relevant to the lives of nontraditional studies. As Cross (1981) suggested, they should also stress

the importance of adaptive and adjustive learning where they incorporate the life experiences of nontraditional students into educational activities. In order to keep faculty current on the best learning practices available for nontraditional students, continuing studies units should consider providing professional development for faculty so that faculty can have a better understanding of the needs of nontraditional students and the obstacles they face. It may also be a good idea for faculty members to meet periodically with each other and with continuing studies unit administrators so that they can share their practical experiences about what works in the teaching and learning of nontraditional students.

The students in this study spoke about the importance of the advisors, staff, and instructors. They looked to each of these groups for information and guidance, but also for encouragement when they faced challenges. These students felt that they mattered, and as a result, they gained confidence in their abilities to do what was required in the classroom, as well as to also manage their other obligations. So, educational institutions must have an academic support system in place so that students know where to go to for answers, and they must feel confident in the answers they receive. In turn, students must take advantage of these support systems by actively pursuing them. In order to effectively accomplish this task, higher education institutions must do their best to ensure that their staff is well informed and that rules and regulations are communicated properly to faculty, staff, and students. Staff must also be skilled in customer relations. Of course, these strategies are necessary for all student populations and all institutions and not just nontraditional students or private universities. For nontraditional students in particular, however, faculty and staff must realize that college is just one of their many responsibilities and obligations. They should be considerate when nontraditional students' family and work roles cause them to be tardy for class or to turn in assignments late. I am not suggesting

that faculty ignore rules, but that they clearly communicate their expectations to students and that they exercise flexibility when possible. Likewise, staff should try to anticipate the needs of nontraditional students. For example, nontraditional students are often unfamiliar with the bureaucracy that is sometimes associated with higher education and they sometimes do not know the questions to ask. By anticipating these questions and informing nontraditional students of institutional operations, staff can positively affect the educational experiences of nontraditional students. Unfortunately, many educational institutions, especially in this current economic downturn, experience staff shortages. Faculty and staff may want to provide the best possible college experience, but lack of resources may prevent them from doing so. As a result, it is advisable for students to be active participants in their own educational experience. They must do their research so that they can ask appropriate questions; they must learn what is expected of them in the classroom; they must communicate with their fellow students.

In addition to receiving the support of the institution, nontraditional students also need the emotional support of their families, employers, and fellow students. This type of support, however, is much more difficult, if not impossible, to mandate. Perhaps by forming partnerships with employers, institutions can begin to address this concern. If students believe that their employers value education, then they may appreciate the value of a college education as well. When employers are willing to offer some flexibility in employee schedules, employees may also be able to negotiate their conflicting roles of employee and student. This encouragement may in turn result in their persistence toward baccalaureate degree attainment. University-conducted orientations for family members as well as for the nontraditional students themselves may also help family members become better informed about the sacrifices involved as well as the rewards available as a result of degree attainment. As for increased interaction with students,

study groups provided some benefit for the students in this study. However, this is difficult to mandate as well. So, instructors may want to include small group discussions in classroom activities as a way to promote communication among students, without adding demands on their time outside of the classroom. Students must also take an active role in their educational experience by forming relationships with their fellow students. Once students develop these relationships with other students in the classroom, they may choose to continue these relationships in the form of study groups outside of the classroom.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although this study does shed some light on the influence of conflicting role obligations on nontraditional student baccalaureate degree attainment, additional research will provide even greater insight that both universities and nontraditional students may find beneficial. This qualitative study focused on a sample of nontraditional students who completed their bachelor's degree from a continuing studies division of a privately endowed research institution. The students in this study were considered moderately nontraditional, and it was found that multiple roles associated with being moderately nontraditional may have had a positive effect on persistence toward degree attainment since students were able to use their various roles as a support. For example, nontraditional students accepted assistance from their co-workers, spouses, older children, parents, and members of social organizations in order to help them with their role as student. Additional research that focuses on students who are minimally and/or highly nontraditional and have either fewer or greater roles may yield different results regarding persistence. There may be an optimum number of roles that facilitate persistence so that too few or too many roles may lead to alternative findings. Additional research that focuses on other

levels of nontraditionalism may help to predict persistence for other categories of nontraditional students.

Further research that includes nontraditional students' experiences at different types of continuing studies units, such as those that offer both credit and non-credit courses is needed. Perhaps a comparative study between two distinct types of universities will provide additional information about the educational backgrounds and goals of the students who attend various universities as well as how their conflicting roles affect their persistence. By researching nontraditional students' experience at other types of universities, we may also develop a better understanding of the importance of support systems to nontraditional students' baccalaureate degree attainment. Is the support of faculty, staff, and instructors specific to this institution or is it evident at other institutions and to what extent? The students in this study felt that they mattered to this institution. These students were motivated to attend this top-50 institution because of its academic reputation, and their persistence was aided by the policies, faculty, and staff at this institution. Further research into the topic of institutional prestige and its effect on nontraditional student persistence is warranted.

Furthermore, the students enrolled in this continuing studies program felt that they had good relationships with their instructors and could count on them when conflicts arose among their various roles since many of the faculty members are also working adults themselves. Additional research about faculty perceptions regarding nontraditional students and their abilities to succeed given their multiple roles is warranted. This additional research should pay special attention to faculty members who customarily teach traditional age students. It may be interesting to find out what these faculty members think about teaching nontraditional students

and how their perceptions of teaching nontraditional students differ, if at all, from their experiences with teaching nontraditional students.

Since the students in this study expressed a reliance on their fellow students for support and encouragement, it may be helpful to research the benefits of cohorts in undergraduate degree programs for nontraditional students. Since students in cohorts share many of the same interests and similar roles associated with nontraditional students, we may be able to ascertain if cohorts are helpful in nontraditional students' baccalaureate degree attainment. Since this study suggests that multiple roles provide a sort of social interaction among nontraditional students which may benefit persistence, then cohorts may provide an environment that specifically meets the needs of nontraditional students which in turn may lead to persistence in degree programs.

Finally, in addition to studying the influence of conflicting roles on nontraditional students, it may also be helpful to investigate other groups of students who share similar roles; namely, student athletes and international students. A similar framework that was used for this study of nontraditional students may also be beneficial in revealing how other groups of students are able to achieve academic success. By looking at the psychological and learning development of other student groups, along with their shared behaviors as outlined in role theory, we may learn more about how these student groups are able to achieve success (persistence) or not. For student athletes and international students, it may also help to include their cultural backgrounds regarding education as well. Similarities among various groups may be discovered which can assist with the retention and persistence of all students.

References

- Aslanian, C. (2004). *Aslanian Group: Experts in adult learning*. Retrieved September 10, 2004, from www.aslaniangroup.com
- Aslanian, C. (2008). *Adult Student 2008: A profile of demand among classroom and online adult student*. Retrieved February 14, 2009, from www.aslaniangroup.com
- Backels, S., & Meashey, L. (1997). Anxiety, depression and the 4.0: Brief therapy with high-achieving, non-traditional female students. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 12, 45-56.
- Baker, S. & Brown, B. (2007). Images of excellence: Constructions of institutional prestige and reflections in the university choice process. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28(3), 377-391.
- Bean, J.P. & Metzner, B.M. (1996). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition (p. 137-173). Ashe Reader.
- Benshoff, J.M., & Lewis, H.A. (1992). *Nontraditional college students*. Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services.(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED34783)
- Biddle, B.J. (1979). *Role theory: Expectations, identities, and behaviors*. New York: Academic Press.
- Bogdan, R.C., & Biklen, S.K. (1982). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Bowl, M. (2001). Experiencing the barriers: Non-traditional students entering higher education. *Research Papers in Education*, 16 (2), 141-160.
- Bradley, C. (1992). Turning anecdotes into data—the critical incident technique. *Family Practice*, 9, 98-103.
- Brewer, S.A., Klein, J.D., & Mann, K.E. (2003). Using small group learning strategies with adult re-entry students. *College Student Journal*, 37(2), 286-298.
- Bruening, J.E., & Dixon, M.A. (2007). Work-family conflict in coaching II: Managing role Conflict. *Journal of Sport Management*, 21, 471-496.
- Carney-Crompton, S. & Tan, J. (2002). Support systems, psychological functioning, and academic performance of nontraditional female students. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 52 (2), 140-155.

- Chartrand, J.M. (1992). An empirical test of a model of nontraditional student adjustment. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 39(2), 193-202.
- Chaves, C. (2006). Involvement, development, and retention: Theoretical foundations and potential extensions for adult community college students. *Community College Review*, 34 (2), 139-152.
- Cook, A. & Leckey, J. (1999). Do expectations meet reality? A survey of changes in first year student opinion, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 23(2), 157-171.
- Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cronbach, L.J. (1975). Beyond the two disciplines of scientific psychology. *American Psychologist*, 30(2), 116-127.
- Cross, K.P. (1979). Adult learners: Characteristics, needs, and interests. In R.E. Peterson & Associates (Eds.), *Lifelong learning in America* (pp. 75-141). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cross, K.P. (1981). *Adults as learners: Increasing participation and facilitating learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Donaldson, J.F. (1999). A model of college outcomes for adults. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50 (1), 24-41.
- Edwards, R. (1993). *Mature women students*. South Bank University, United Kingdom: Falmer Press.
- El-Khawas, E. (1996). Student diversity on today's campuses. In S.R. Komives, D.B. Woodard, Jr. & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (pp. 64-80). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Elias, J.L. & Merriam, S.B. (2005). *Philosophical foundations of adult education*. (3rd ed.) Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company.
- Ely, E. (1997). *The nontraditional student*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Community Colleges. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Services No. ED411906)
- Epstein, C.F. (1987). Multiple demands and multiple roles: The conditions of successful management. In F.J. Crosby, *Spouse parent, worker: On gender and multiple roles* (pp. 23-38). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Evans, N.J. (1996). Theories of student development. In S.R. Komives, D.B. Woodard, Jr. & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (pp. 164-187). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Fairchild, E. (2003). Multiple roles of adult learners. *New Directions for Student Services*, 102, 11-16.
- Fowlkes, M.R. (1987). Role combinations and role conflict: Introductory perspective. In F.J. Crosby, *Spouse parent, worker: On gender and multiple roles* (pp. 3-10). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Glass, J. & Fujimoto, T. (1994). Housework, paid work, and depression among husbands and wives. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 35, 179-191.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Graham, S. & Donaldson, J. (1996a). *Adults' personal development in college*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. EDF452359)
- Graham, S., & Donaldson, J. (1996b). Assessing the personal growth for adults enrolled in higher education. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 44, 7-22.
- Harrington, F.H. (1977). *The future of adult education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hensley, L. & Kinser, K. (2001). *Adult learner persistence: A study of tenacity*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. EDF452359)
- Hoepfl, M.C. (1997). Choosing qualitative research: A primer for technology education researchers. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9(1), 1-16.
- Home, A. (1993). The juggling act: The multiple role woman in social work education. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 10, 141-156.
- Home, A. (1997). Learning the hard way: Role strain, stress, role demands, and support in multiple-role women students. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33, 335-347.
- Home, A. (1998). Predicting role conflict, overload and contagion in adult women university students with families and jobs. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(2), 85-97.
- Horn, L. (1996). *Nontraditional undergraduates: Trends in enrollment from 1986-1992 and persistence and attainment among 1989-90 beginning post-secondary students* (NCES 96-237). U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Horowitz, A.V. (1982). Sex-role expectations, power, and psychological distress. *Sex Roles*, 8, 607-623.

- Horn, L., Peter, K. & Rooney, K. (2002). *Profile of undergraduates in U.S. postsecondary institutions: 1999-2000. Statistical Analysis Report. National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED468124)
- Houle, C.O. (1961). *The inquiring mind.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Hu, S. & Hossler, D. (2000). Willingness to pay and preference for private institutions. *Research in Higher Education*, 4, (6), 685-701.
- Jarvis, P. (1987). *Adult learning in the social context.* London: Croom Helm.
- Johnson, S., & Robson, C. (1999). Threatened identities: The experiences of women in transition to programs of professional higher education. *Journal of Community and Applied Psychology*, 9, 273-288.
- Justice, E.M. & Dornan, T.M. (2001). Metacognitive differences between traditional-age and nontraditional-age college students. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 51(3), 236-249.
- Karen, D. (1990). Toward a political-organizational model of gatekeeping: The case of elite colleges. *Sociology of Education*, 63, 227-240.
- Kasworm, C. (1990). Adult undergraduates in higher education: A review of past research perspectives. *Review of Educational Research*, 60, 345-372.
- Kasworm, C. (1993). Adult higher education from an international perspective. *Higher Education*, 25, (411-423).
- Kasworm, C. (2003). Setting the stage: Adults in higher education. *New Directions for Student Services*, 102, 3-10.
- Kasworm, C. & Blowers, S. (1994). Adult undergraduate students: Patterns of Involvement (Final research report to U.S. Department of Education). Knoxville: College of Education, University of Tennessee.
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R.L. (1978). *The social structure of organizations* (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kemery, E.R. (2006). Clergy role stress and satisfaction: Role ambiguity isn't always bad. *Pastoral Psychology*, 54, 561-570.
- Kerka, S. (1995). *Adult learner retention revisited.* ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No.ED398880)

- Kett, J.F. (1994). *The pursuit of knowledge under difficulties*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Killeya-Jones, L.A. (2005). Identity structure, role discrepancy and psychological adjustment in male college student-athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 28(2), 167-185.
- King, P.M. (1996). Student cognition and learning. In S.R. Komives, D.B. Woodard, Jr. & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (pp. 218-243). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Klein, J.D., & Schnackenberg, H.L. (2000). Effects of informal cooperative learning and the affiliation motive on achievement, attitude, and student interactions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 332-341.
- Knowles, M.S. (1970). *The modern practice of adult education*. New York: Association Press.
- Knox, A. B.(1980). Proficiency theory of adult learning. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 5, 378-404.
- Krager, L., Wrenn, R., & Hirt, J. (1990). Perspectives on age differences. *New Directions for Student Services*, 51, 37-47.
- Laing, C., Chao, K.M., & Robinson. (2005). Managing the expectations of non-traditional students: A process of negotiation. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 29(2), 169-179.
- Leppel, K. (2002). Similarities and differences in the college persistence of men and women. *The Review of Higher Education*, 25 (4), 433-450.
- Levine, A. & Cureton, J. (1999). *When hope and fear collide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lofland, J., & Lofland, L.H. (1984). *Analyzing social settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc.
- Long, H. (1983). *Adult learning: Research and practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lussier, R.N. & Achua, C.F. (2004). *Leadership: Theory, application, skill development* (2nd ed.). United States: Thomson South-Western.
- Maslow, A.H. (1954). *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper.

- McClusky, H.Y. (1963). The course of the adult life span. In W.C. Hallenbeck (Ed.), *Psychology of adults*. Washington, D.C.: Adult Education Association.
- McMillan, J.H., & Forsyth, D.R. (1991). What theories of motivation say about why learners learn. In R.J. Menges & M.D. Svinicki (Eds.), *College teaching: From theory to practice* (New Directions for Teaching and Learning No. 45, pp. 39-52). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S.B. & Caffarella, R.S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M, (1994). *Qualitative data Analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Moen, P., Robison, J. & Dempster-McLain (1995). Caregiving and women's well-being: A life course approach. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 36, 259-273.
- Morphew, C.C. (2008). Policy makers must recognize higher education's 2-tiered system. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54(19). Retrieved February 23, 2009 from <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v54/i19/19a03401.htm>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2002a). *The condition of education* (NCES 2002-025). Washington, D.C: Department of Education, NCES.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2002b). *Nontraditional undergraduates* (NCES 2002-012). Washington, D.C: Department of Education, NCES.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2003). *The condition of education* (NCES 2003-067). Washington, D.C: Department of Education, NCES.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2008a). *The condition of education* (NCES 2008-031). Washington, D.C.: Department of Education, NCES.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2008b). *Digest of Education Statistics: 2007* (NCES 2008-022). Washington, D.C: Department of Education, NCES.
- Nieswiadomy, R.M. (1993). *Foundations of nursing research* (2nd ed.). Norwalk, CT: Appleton & Lange.
- Nunn, G. (1994). Adult learners' locus of control, self-evaluation and learning temperament as a function of age and gender. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 21(3), 260-264.
- O'Reilly, P. & Caro, F.G. (1994). Productive aging: An overview of the literature. *Journal of Aging and Social Policy*, 6(3), 39-71.

- Padula, M. A. (1994). Reentry women: A literature review with recommendations for counseling and research. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 73, 10-16.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Pomaki, G., Supeli, A., & Verhoeven, C. (2007). Role conflict and health behaviors: Moderating effects on psychological distress and somatic complaints. *Psychology and Health*, 22(3), 317-335
- Richardson, J.T.E. (1994). Mature students in higher education: A literature survey on approaches to studying. *Studies in Higher Education*, 19, 309-325.
- Richardson, J.T.E. & King, E. (1998). Adult students in higher education: Burden or boon? *Journal of Higher Education*, 69, 65-88.
- Roberts, P., & Newton, P.M. (1987). Levinsonian studies of women's adult development. *Psychology and Aging*, 2, 154-163.
- Rosenberg, M. & McCullough, B.C. (1981). Mattering: Inferred significance and mental health among adolescents. *Research in Community Mental Health*, 2, 163-182.
- Rozario, P.A., Morrow-Howell, N., & Hinterlong. (2004). Role enhancement or role strain. *Research on Aging*, 26(4), 413-428.
- Schlossberg, N.K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. In D.C. Roberts (Ed.), *Designing campus activities to foster a sense of community* (New Directions for Student Services, No. 48, pp. 5-15). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schlossberg, N.K., Waters, E.B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Schuetze, H.G. & Slowey, M. (2002). Participation and exclusion: A comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education. *Higher Education*, 44, 309-327.
- Scott, R.A. & Tobe, D.E. (1995). Communicating high expectations. *Liberal Education*, 81(2), 38-43.
- Sheldon, K.M. & Kasser, T. (1995). Coherence and congruence: Two aspects of personality integration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 531-543.
- Siebert, S. (1974). Toward a theory of role accumulation. *American Sociological Review*, 39, 567-578.

- Stake, R.E. (1978). The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 7(2), 5-8.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Stubblefield, H. W., & Keane, P. (1994). *Adult education in the American experience: From the colonial period to the present*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Swanson, V., Broadbridge, A. & Karatzias, A. (2006). Earning and learning: Role congruence, state/trait factors and adjustment to university life. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76, 895-914.
- Thoits, P.A. (1983). Multiple identities and psychological well-being: A reformulation and test of the Social Isolation Hypothesis. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 174-187.
- Thoits, P.A. (1987). Negotiating roles. In F.J. Crosby, *Spouse parent, worker: On gender and multiple roles* (pp. 11-22). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Thoits, P.A. (1992). Identity structures and psychological well-being: Gender and marital status comparisons. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 44, 236-256.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tittle, C.K. (1982). Career, marriage, and family: Values in adult roles and guidance. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 61, 154-158.
- Trueman, M. & Hartley, J. (1996). A comparison between the time-management skills and academic performance of mature and traditional-entry university students. *Higher Education*, 32, 199-215.
- Verbrugge, L.M. (1987). Role responsibilities, role burdens and physical health. In F.J. Crosby, *Spouse parent, worker: On gender and multiple roles* (pp. 154-166). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Weil, S.W. (1986). Non-traditional learners within traditional higher education institutions: Discovery and disappointment. *Studies in Higher Education*, 2 (3), 219-235.
- Weiss, R.S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York: The Free Press.

Appendices

Appendix A: Solicitation Letter to Study Participants

Appendix B: Questionnaire to Study Participants

Appendix C: IRB Approval

Appendix A

Dear _____:

My name is Rosaria Guastella, and I am a doctoral student in higher education under the direction of Professor Marietta Del Favero in the College of Education at the University of New Orleans. Professionally, I have worked in the field of higher education for almost 17 years.

I am requesting your participation in a research study, **“The Influence of Conflicting Role Obligations on Nontraditional Student Baccalaureate Attainment”** which is the topic of my dissertation. Your participation will involve a 60 minute interview with me. The one-on-one discussion will focus on how you balanced your role of student with your many other roles, including spouse, parent, employee, caregiver, etc. in order to receive your bachelor’s degree.

If you choose to participate, please return the enclosed questionnaire along with this letter in the postage-paid envelope provided. I will select the first 10 people who respond to this request and match the criteria for which I am looking. If you are selected to participate, you will receive a \$15 gift card as compensation for your time.

I would like to meet with you before **January 19, 2009**. I will be happy to meet with you at a time and location that is convenient to you.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. If you have any questions, please contact me at 504-858-2005 or 504-865-5330.

Sincerely,

Rosaria Guastella

Yes, I can provide information about my experiences as a nontraditional student who received a baccalaureate degree from the School of Continuing Studies.

Name: _____

Date(s) & Time(s) when I can meet: _____

Preferred location for meeting: _____

Daytime phone number: _____ Evening phone number: _____

E-mail: _____

*Please return this letter along with the completed questionnaire **within two weeks** in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.*

Your appointment will be confirmed. Thank you for your invaluable assistance!

Appendix B

Study Participant Questionnaire (All information is strictly confidential between the participant and researcher.)

Name (optional): _____

- 1) How old were you when you first enrolled in college?
23 or younger _____ 24-29 _____ 30 or older _____
- 2) How old were you when you began your studies at Tulane University School of Continuing Studies (SCS)
- 3) How old were you at the time of your graduation from Tulane University School of Continuing Studies(SCS)? _____
- 4) What was your marital status while you were attending SCS?(check all that apply)
Single _____ Married _____ Divorced _____ Partnered _____
- 5) Were you a single parent at any time while attending SCS?
Yes _____ No _____
- 6) Did you work full-time (at least 30 hours per week) at any time while attending SCS?
Yes _____ No _____
- 7) On average, how many classes did you take each semester of attendance at SCS? _____
- 8) Did you have any children under your care at any time while attending SCS?
Yes _____ No _____
- 9) If yes, what were the ages of the children who lived with you while you were attending SCS? _____
- 10) Were you a caregiver for an elderly or disabled relative at any time while you were attending SCS? Yes _____ No _____
- 11) Were you a member of any community organizations at any time while you were attending SCS?
Yes _____ No _____
- 12) Were you financially independent while attending SCS?
Yes _____ No _____ Sometime _____

***University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans***

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Marietta Del Favero
Co-Investigator: Rosaria Gustella
Date: December 5, 2008
Protocol Title: "The Influence of Conflicting Role Obligations on
Nontraditional Student Baccalaureate Degree Attainment"
IRB#: 01Jan09

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2 due to the fact that this research will involve the use of interview procedures. Although information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research wouldn't reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project!

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Vita

Rosaria Guastella was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and received her B.A. in economics and history from Newcomb College of Tulane University in 1988. In 1992, she began her career in higher education as an Admissions Specialist at Delgado Community College in New Orleans. After four years as Admissions Specialist, she became an academic counselor in the College of Education at the University of New Orleans. In 1999, she received a M.Ed. in higher education administration from the University of New Orleans. In 2000, she assumed the responsibilities of Academic Advisor at Tulane University's University College, the part-time evening division of this nationally ranked, private research institution in New Orleans, Louisiana. In 2004, Rosaria became the Director of University College's New Orleans Centre campus in downtown New Orleans. In the summer of 2005, Rosaria was accepted into the doctoral program in higher education administration at the University of New Orleans.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the New Orleans Centre campus, and University College, renamed the School of Continuing Studies in 2006, chose not to reopen a campus in downtown New Orleans. Following Tulane University's reorganization after Hurricane Katrina, Rosaria was named Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management, Marketing, and Advertising at University College/School of Continuing Studies. She continues to hold that position today.