EXAMINING THE MOTIVATING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENTS WITH AN ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE TO COMPLETE A BACHELOR’S DEGREE AT A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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EXAMINING THE MOTIVATING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENTS WITH AN ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE TO COMPLETE A BACHELOR’S DEGREE AT A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

IN

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

BY

RUDOLPH D. SMITH

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 2011
Community College Leadership Doctoral Program

Dissertation Notification of Completion

Doctoral Candidate: Rudolph D. Smith

Title of Dissertation: Examining the Motivating Factors that Influence Students with an Associate’s Degree to Complete a Bachelor’s Degree at a Private University

Dissertation Chair: Martin B. Parks, PhD, National Louis University

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Final Approval Meeting: March 23, 2011

We certify this dissertation, submitted by the above named candidate, is fully adequate in scope and quality to satisfactorily meet the dissertation requirement for attaining the Doctor of Education degree in the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program.

Signature

Date

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my wife, Julie; daughter, Donna; and granddaughter, Jordyn for their support through this process. They have been extremely caring, patient, and supportive in my quest to complete this project. I promise to make up missed birthday parties, nights at the movies, and science fairs by returning to a normal life.

In addition, I wish to thank my loving sister, Jean Bumpus, and her supportive family, husband (my “brother”) Edward, my niece Lucia Clinkscales, and her husband, Joey, for their encouragement, and to Sydni and Noah Clinkscales, grand niece and grand nephew, respectively. I offer my love and thanks to each of you for encouragement, support, and keeping my Skype account alive.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with sincere appreciation that I acknowledge the many individuals serving on my dissertation committee who provided encouragement, expertise, leadership, and support throughout this journey. I extend sincere thanks to Dr. Martin Parks, my committee chair, for your steady hand and patience that you provided during my tough times. I value your positive attitude for encouraging me. I also wish to thank Dr. Dennis Haynes for serving on my committee and offering words of encouragement and advice when I needed it. I offer a big thanks to Dr. Nancy Prendergast for extending support and encouragement to help me to reach this goal. Further, I’d like to thank Dr. Rebecca Lake, who provided me with encouragement to pursue this program and for having faith that I would succeed in achieving this goal. I offer a final tribute to Dr. Wytress Richardson and Dr. Carrie Johnson for making their classes available for my much needed interviews; to Nancy Rosenbaum who flawlessly transcribed many hours of interview tapes, and Maxine Milks who provided encouragement and directions on this project.

I extend to all coworkers, colleagues, friends, contacts and well-wishers my sincere thanks for the encouragement you provided by saying, “You can do it.”
Abstract

The intent of this study was to shed light on the reasons and factors that influence the decision for community college graduates to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private, not-for-profit university. In addition, this study sought to identify and describe why students persist during degree completion programs, as well as the inhibitors and facilitators found throughout such programs.

This research was built on the qualitative research paradigm employing semi-structured interviews and focus groups to investigate how the elements of motivation theory influenced students to complete a bachelor’s degree program. The findings from the study validate that students are motivated to complete a bachelor’s degree when support is provided in the form of faculty and staff advice and encouragement from both the sending and receiving institutions.

Implications resulting from the data analysis include the following: (a) a greater degree of collaboration needs to be initiated between the sending institution (community college) and receiving institution (university) transfer personnel; (b) individual colleges at the receiving institution should consider employing specific personnel to serve transfer students interested in bachelor’s degree programs within each college; and (c) some form of learning communities should be developed specifically for transfer students at the university to help smooth the transition from community college to university student.

The primary recommendation for improvement is for the university to consider the creation of an Information and Service Center for Transfer Students. Transfer students would have access to trained counselors who could help the student find available resources to help in completing the bachelor’s degree program of choice. A recommendation for further research is
investigating the success of transfer students as compared to non-transfer students in terms of degree completion success.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

Historically, near the turn of the 20th century, community colleges began as transfer institutions and were known as junior colleges. The early mission of the two-year post secondary institution fulfilled two goals. The first was to accommodate the students who would successfully complete two-year college coursework in order to transfer to a four-year college or university. The second was to relieve universities of teaching first- and second-year students. Following World War II, with the establishment of the GI Bill and the U.S. President’s Commission on Higher Education of 1948, there was immense support for the expansion of junior colleges. The number of junior colleges throughout the nation grew exponentially in the 1960s and 1970s, and the number of students enrolled annually rose to more than one million students in the 1990s (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Because of this rapid growth, the mission, academic programs, and student services of junior colleges also grew in breadth and scope. In 1992, as the mission of the junior colleges evolved, the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) resolved that junior, technical, private, and proprietary two-year institutions could all be referred to as community colleges (National Profile of Community Colleges: Trends & Statistics, 2008).

According to the American Association of Community College (AACC) website, more than six million students are enrolled in credit programs at community colleges, and five million students are enrolled in non-credit courses at 1,157 institutions across the nation (2008). According to Richard Kazis, senior vice president of Jobs for the Future, adults and other
nontraditional students prefer community colleges for a number of reasons: the low cost, the attention given to the less academically prepared and low income students, flexibility of course scheduling and delivery of courses the occupational and technical skill focus, and the close relationship with employers. Laura Rendon, professor and chair of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University (1994), stated that the profile of a nontraditional student is usually someone who is the first from the family to attend college, is a member of the working-class, and is low-income.

To fully comprehend the basis of this research, two theories and a concept will be used as the lens to explore what motivates students with an associate’s degree to complete a bachelor’s degree. There were numerous theories and concepts from a variety of disciplines that could have been used for this study, including sociology, education, and psychology. However, motivation theory, decision making theory, and the concept of persistence were deemed as most appropriate to serve as the conceptual framework for this study.

The students served by community colleges represented various economic backgrounds, as well as race/ethnicity and level of educational experiences. The popularity of community colleges was a result of their mission, which stressed accessibility, affordability, and the service to the community where they reside. Today, community colleges provide five basic curricular functions: (a) career technical education, (b) academic transfer, (c) developmental education and remedial services, (d) continuing education/professional development and community service, and (e) business and industry customized training.

Today, it is not unusual for students attending post secondary institutions to study at their own pace or if needed, to drop out and return when appropriate. Students who graduate with a
postsecondary degree recognize the benefits of a college degree and the positive impact on their careers and personal satisfaction.

**The Evolving Mission of the Community College**

Near the turn of the 20th century, community colleges in the United States were conceived as “junior” colleges and served primarily as transfer institutions. As a result, the early mission of the two-year post secondary institution was to accommodate students who sought to transfer to a four-year college or university and, in doing so, relieve area colleges and universities of burgeoning enrollments of first- and second-year students (Townsend & Bragg, 2006). Following World War II, with the establishment of the GI Bill and the U.S. President’s Commission on Higher Education of 1948, there was immense support for the expansion of junior colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The number of community colleges grew rapidly throughout the nation from 330 in 1950, with an enrollment of 2,175 students, to 1,195 community colleges in 2009, boasting a student enrollment of nearly 11.5 million (AACC, 2009).

The popularity of community colleges has been linked most frequently to the mission which stresses accessibility, affordability, and service to the community where the college resides (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). As a result, today’s community colleges have expanded their original transfer function to include (a) career and technical education, (b) developmental education and remedial services, (c) continuing and community education, and (d) customized training for government, business and industry.

The students served by community colleges represent various economic backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and levels of educational attainment. It is not unusual for students attending
postsecondary institutions to study at their own pace, or drop out if needed, and return when appropriate. Students who graduate with a postsecondary degree or certificate recognize the benefits of a college degree, the positive impact on their careers, and personal satisfaction (Marcotte, Bailey, Borkoski & Kienzl, 2005).

**The Transfer Student: A Profile**

Community college students are a diverse group who report various reasons for going to a community college. In 2003–04, nearly 40% of community college students were dependent students (i.e., under 24 years old and not financially independent from their parents), 26% were 24 years old or older and financially independent from their parents, 20% were independent and married with children, and 14% were independent, single parents (Horn & Nevill, 2006). When students were asked to identify one or more reasons why they enrolled in a community college, nearly one-third of community college students reported that they enrolled in order to transfer to a four-year college, 33% reported seeking an associate’s degree, 17% reported seeking a certificate, 32% reported seeking job skills, and 18% reported enrolling for personal interest. In addition, compared with students attending four-year colleges and universities in 2003–04, higher percentages of community college students were older, female, and from low-income families and lower percentages were White (Horn & Nevill, p. 9).

Community college students also differed from their peers enrolled in public and private four-year institutions in terms of sex, race/ethnicity, and income level. Nearly 59% of community college students in 2003–04 were female, a greater percentage than at public four-year institutions (54%) and at private not-for-profit four-year institutions (56%). The majority of community college students were White in 2003–04, but Black and Hispanic students made up a
larger percentage of the student body in community colleges than in public four-year institutions: 15% of community college students were Black and 14% were Hispanic. Among community college students, general levels of commitment to completing a formal degree program also varied. Community college students were classified as “more committed” if they (a) were enrolled in a formal transfer, associate’s degree, or certificate program; (b) attended at least half time; and (c) reported that they enrolled in order to transfer to a four-year institution or to earn an associate’s degree or vocational certificate (Horn & Nevill, 2006).

**Transferring from the Community College: Trends and Issues**

There is constant activity of community college students transferring to four-year institutions. A major issue confronting students transferring to four-year institutions is whether the transfer students are adequately prepared for the rigor of college academics.

Jain (2009) noted that not only is the majority of California community college students of color, but few complete their schooling and transfer to four-year institutions. Jean examined how leadership for students, especially women, of color affected their progress towards transfer. Further, she sought to uncover how race and gender affected a woman of color’s leadership engagement while attending a community college. Jain found that race and gender are a complex intersection that influenced these women's leadership simultaneously yet separately.

To examine issues and trends within community colleges, Stewart (2009) investigated the effectiveness of the transfer function among community college students subsequent to enrollment at a large, urban, doctoral/research-extensive university in Florida, using a course-based model of transfer success. Although first-term transfer students experienced “transfer shock,” native university students who were enrolled in three courses also experienced declines
in their Fall 2002 GPA when compared to their previous GPA at the university. Findings lend support to the effectiveness of Florida's community colleges in preparing students for upper-division undergraduate coursework, but that transition for some is not seamless, suggesting a need for greater collaboration among universities and community colleges.

Overview of the Theoretical Framework: Motivation Theory

Motivation theory was the theoretical foundation on which this research was based. The goal of this research was to explore and identify the motivation factors that influenced participants to return to college to complete their bachelor’s degree. Extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation are the primary components of motivation theory that psychologists have used to examine behavior. In this study, these components of motivation theory will be used to determine students’ reactions, and the impact on their decision to complete their bachelor’s degree.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation is typically defined as performance for some type of tangible payoff such as grades, money, or recognition. If rewards come from external sources and are unrelated to the value of an action, they are categorized as extrinsic (Covington, 2007). The student who seeks tangible rewards is influenced by the extrinsic factors. According to the Norman Davies Group (2005), developers of an online community for nontraditional students to share information, experiences, and inspiration, one of the primary reasons given by adult learners to seek higher learning has been that a new degree may lead to a better job or promotion. There is overwhelming evidence that college graduates earn more than non-graduates. Research by Elam (1983), Grubb (1996), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reveals that individuals who continue
their education beyond high school are more likely to receive higher salaries and higher-level jobs. It is confirmed that individuals motivated to attend college reflect higher economic returns and that there is a relationship between formal education and earnings.

**Intrinsic Motivation**

Intrinsic motivation occurs when individuals engage in activity for their own personal satisfaction (Covington, 2007). Robert J. Vallerand, professor of Psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal (1992), states, “An example of IM is the student that goes to class because he or she finds it interesting and satisfying to learn more about certain subjects.” In addition to extrinsic motivation, this study will explore the intrinsic factors that motivates adult learners to complete a bachelor’s degree.

**Persistence.** In today’s educational environment, persistence - in reference to remaining in school - implies that students will put forth the effort to pursue a degree (Hunt, 2007). In research conducted by Barbara Geisler (2007) of Widener University, she found that students who persisted were more likely to be successful when they implemented coping skills. In addition, students who persisted interacted more positively with administrators and faculty. This study seeks to explore the persistence of those returning to college and completing the bachelor’s degree program.

**Inhibitors.** In their educational pursuit, students will experience negative challenges at the colleges/universities they select to attend. These challenges are identified as barriers and/or inhibitors.

Inhibitors are often considered to be barriers, or hurdles, students must overcome as they seek educational success. If barriers can be overcome, success is more likely to be attained. The
barriers that will negatively impact students as they pursue education are time, money, support, and emotional care (Lane, 2004).

Time is considered the foremost inhibitor affecting education (Geisler, 2007). A balance must be maintained among family responsibilities, job, and outside responsibilities. The lack of money is another contributing inhibitor for educational success of persisters (Lane, 2004). Household responsibilities are priorities for many students seeking to further their education. At times, continuing their educational pursuit must be postponed indefinitely. Family support or lack of support can easily derail one’s efforts to continue his/her education. It is essential that family members collaborate regarding how responsibilities will be undertaken.

Additional inhibitors challenging educational pursuit are considered “institutional” in that they are created by the school. Class schedules that are developed by schools can inhibit student enrollment if they are not convenient for the student. Full-time jobs and busy schedules make it difficult for students to adjust their routines to accommodate the schedule of the university. This study seeks to provide in-depth research on the student’s persistence to overcome inhibitors in pursuit of completing a bachelor’s degree.

Facilitators

Although inhibitors can challenge students, many colleges and universities put forth special effort to accommodate students returning to college. Schedules are developed to accommodate working students for evening and weekend attendance. Faculty members work diligently towards motivating adult learners who are returning to college. Stephen Lieb of the Arizona Department of Health Services states, “The best way to motivate adult learners is simply to enhance their reasons for enrolling and decrease the barriers” (Lieb, 1991, p. 4).
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the motivating factors that influence students with an associate’s degree to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private university. The identification and description of these facilitating and inhibiting factors can be considered by universities to improve the development and delivery of programs and courses for students who seek to complete bachelor’s degrees. Further, findings from this study can assist universities in the prudent allocation of marketing dollars designated for the recruitment of these students.

The intent of this study is to shed light on the reasons and factors that influence the decision to complete a bachelor’s degree. In addition, this study will identify and describe why students persist during degree completion programs, as well as the inhibitors and facilitators found throughout such programs.

Guiding Questions

The following guiding questions were derived from the purpose and served to focus this study:

1. What are the extrinsic factors that influence the participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?
2. What are the intrinsic factors that influence the participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?
3. What are the influencing factors that resulted in the participants’ decision to complete a bachelor’s degree?
4. What do study participants perceive as the primary motivations to complete their bachelor’s degree?
Research Design

This is a qualitative inquiry situated in an interpretive paradigm. Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as an assumption, viewed through the use of a theoretical lens, about the actions of individuals or groups to social or human problem. The researcher collects data from within a natural and controlled environment through interviews and observations and maintains the belief that behavior is fluid, situational, socially constructed, and viewed using wide angle lens to capture rich, thick data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Case Study Method

The case study methodology was employed in this qualitative research. Creswell (2007) defines case study as the research of exploring an issue through one or more cases that are bounded within the same context or situation. The guiding questions of this research afforded full exploration, comprehension, and understanding of the issues of students electing to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a private university. This research focused on the “how” and “why” of motivating factors influencing students to complete a bachelor’s degree. As Yin (1994) states, the case study is the preferred strategy to answer the questions of “How?” and “Why?” Further, the rationale of utilizing a single case study for this research is based on the characteristics of description (yielding information to reveal much of what is not known), interpretation (the researcher gathers rich, thick data with the intent of analyzing a phenomenon), and evaluation (the description is well grounded and clarifies meaning of the research) (Merriam, 1998).

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document review. Students enrolled in degree completion cohorts were identified and interviewed at the
designated campus. Interviews of the selected participants provided sufficient field data for rich thematic analysis of motivations, persistence, inhibitors, facilitators, and decision-making factors. In addition, focus group sessions were conducted soliciting responses to specifically designed questions supporting the purpose of the project.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2007) refers to three analysis strategies in qualitative research. The researcher implemented the following strategies in this research: (a) preparing and organizing data through the use of transcription, (b) data reduced into themes through the use of coding, and finally, (c) data represented through the use of key response tables. The researcher categorized the data according to similar responses by research participants to the four interview questions in support of the study’s guiding questions. Huberman and Miles’ (1994) process for analyzing data is similar. Data analysis consists of three current flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion. Following the collection of data through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observations, the researcher wrote summaries of the data, coded themes, and categorized the responses. The implementation of data reduction provided a clearer vision and understanding of the participants’ responses to the guiding and interview questions.

**Key Assumptions of the Study**

The following assumptions were made in support of this research study:

1. Participants were assumed to provide honest and candid responses to the interview questions;

2. Participants were assumed to be competent, responsible and at an appropriate leadership level at their places of employment; and,
3. Participants were assumed to be involved with professional development during their course of employment.

**Limitations**

The following limitations were identified for this study:

1. The study was limited to participants who completed an associate’s degree.
2. The study was limited to students enrolled in one of four accelerated degree completion bachelor programs at a private, non-profit university.
3. Data sources were limited to semi-structured interviews, field notes, relevant documents, and focus groups from a volunteer population.
4. The results of this study are limited to students who self-identified as meeting the requirements for participation in this research.

**Delimitations**

The following delimitations were identified for this study:

1. Research examined motivating factors of students enrolled in accelerated degree completion program at a medium-sized, urban, private university; therefore, the results may not apply to other institutions of different size, location, or complexity.
2. Focus group interviews were limited to participants in the Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) degree completion program, as the participants were available at a single site which facilitated the data collection. Participants in other degree completion programs may have identified other motivators related to completing their bachelor’s degree program.
Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms and definitions were utilized:

1. **Extrinsic Motivation** - Extrinsic motivation is typically defined as performance for some type of tangible payoff such as grades, money, or recognition. If rewards come from an external source and are unrelated to the value of an action, they are considered to be categorized as extrinsic (Covington, 2007).

2. **Intrinsic Motivation** - Intrinsic motivation factors include the satisfaction of completing a personal challenge or undertaking and learning something new (Covington, 2007).

3. **Motivation** - Motivation is a concept used by psychologists and educators to explain differences between learners in the amount of effort they put into their learning (Entwistle, 1987).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 has provided the background and context for this research. Further, it provides an overview of how participants were chosen and the method of study. In Chapter 2, a review of relevant research and literature explores *a priori* concepts and motivation theory to ground the findings of this study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the research, along with the data analysis and data management procedures. Chapter 4 reveals the findings from the various data sources employed, with particular emphasis on extensive semi-structured interviews with the six participants of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings and provides (a) conclusions drawn from the study, (b) implications for practice, and (c) recommendations for further research.
Chapter Summary

Enrollment in community colleges continues to thrive with students returning to higher education institutions to complete their bachelor’s degree. This research focused on the motivating factors that influence students with an associate’s degree to complete their bachelor’s degree at a private university. Chapter one presented four key questions that guided the research, after which the design, method of data collection, and data analysis of the study were outlined. The chapter concluded with a description of the key assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study and provided an overview of the organization of the remaining chapters of the dissertation. Chapter 2 will provide a review of research and literature related to student motivation leading to enrollment in a bachelor’s degree completion program.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

For many, achieving a college degree is a significant part of their American dream. It is viewed as an opportunity for a brighter future, improved career alternatives, and a better quality of life. Following the completion of an associate’s degree, students are motivated by extrinsic and intrinsic factors to complete a bachelor’s degree. Influencing extrinsic factors include the potential for job promotion, an increase in pay, a better job with another company, respect from fellow coworkers, and greater competitive advantage in the workplace. Influencing intrinsic motivation includes pride in completing a bachelor’s degree; being the first family member to complete a bachelor’s degree; the opportunity to gain more knowledge by completing a bachelor’s degree; fulfilling a lifelong goal; being influenced by family, friends, and coworkers; and the perception that their lives would vastly improve by completing a bachelor’s degree.

Unfortunately, there is limited research pertaining to students pursuing a bachelor’s degree at a private university following the completion of an associate’s degree. The literature examined in this chapter will focus on the impact of a college degree on transfer students, transfer functions, transfer as distinguished from career training and/or continuing education, and challenges in preparing students for transfer. In addition, other areas of literature will focus on the receiving institution’s processes of enrolling transfer students, performance as a “capstone” provider, marketing to and recruiting of transfer students, and the challenges receiving institutions face when enrolling transfer students.
The Impact of a College Degree

This research concentrates on students who complete an associate’s degree from a local community college and then go on to attain a bachelor’s degree from a private university. The advantages of completing a college degree are extensive. Those who obtain a college degree experience economic, health, family, and neighborhood benefits which are felt not only within the generation of the individual who completed the degree, but inter-generationally as well (Ayers, 2010). This research will draw attention to the degrees offered by community colleges to prepare students for workforce and community development roles and for transfer to four year baccalaureate-degree granting schools.

The Associate’s Degree

It is a lifelong dream for many to achieve a college degree and for many, they are the first in their family to pursue a college degree. It has been determined that students who persisted at the community college level to attain the associate’s degree were motivated by personal and career goals (Geisler, 2007). The community college is the educational starting point for many students who will strive eventually to complete a bachelor’s degree (Deitrick, 2008). For many first-time community college students, a curriculum consists of formal education activities including basic skills training, apprenticeships, work-related courses, and part-time college or university degree programs (NCES, 2002). Thus, community colleges play a vital role in training a skilled workforce.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008), 45% of all job openings through 2014 will require some type of skilled training or certification (p. 27). In many cases, the necessary training and certification are offered solely by community colleges. For example,
certifications in cosmetology, automobile mechanics, and welding are considered narrow in focus and do not align with the mission of four-year liberal arts institutions and are therefore excluded from their offerings. Many workplace-training programs have migrated from high schools to community colleges. It was common to find machine shops in U.S. high schools a few generations ago, for example, when machining was purely a mechanical skill. However, the increasing technology has prompted a need for more skill-specific training in highly technical fields than high schools are prepared to offer.

The Bachelor’s Degree

For many students, a positive impact of completing a college degree is the increasing need for some post-secondary education in the future (Shelton, 2009). Students perceived that attaining a higher level of education would lead to improved employment opportunities, improved self-confidence and personal pride, improved family relations, and a sense of accomplishment (DeCosta, 2003).

For many students, however, there are many barriers for those seeking an improved quality of life, improved career options, and a bright future. Students who are the first to pursue higher education are less likely to receive support academically, financially, and socially from family members (Coy-Ogan, 2009). On the other hand, although it is well-documented that students 25 years or older who enroll in colleges are underprepared and less likely to complete a degree or certificate (Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, & Jenkins 2007), many persist at two-year colleges and go on to successfully pursue a bachelor’s degree at public and private colleges/universities.
An example of the impact of a college degree is the conventional wisdom within the business environment that managers with business degrees are more competent in communicating than managers without business degrees. Research (McEwen, 1998) has concluded that managers are most competent in small group communication, meetings, interpersonal communication, and written communication. However, McEwen continues, because of the business community's increasing demand for managers with excellent interpersonal and communication skills, the educational preparation of managers has become a major concern for management educators.

**The Evolution and Growth of the Transfer Function**

During its establishment in 1901, the mission of the public junior college was transfer education. Since their inception, community colleges have provided a general education curriculum that was intended to provide students with the necessary academic skills and competencies to transfer to a baccalaureate degree-granting institution (Garza, 1998).

Tremble (2010) states the American community college historically has played an important role in providing a means for upward social mobility among lower socio-economic groups by providing an affordable and accessible path to a four-year baccalaureate degree. Over the years, the community college model has evolved from its original conception as a "junior" college to the community college of today, which employs a multipurpose model and serves a diverse student population with varied expectations.

Under the contemporary model, continues Tremble (2010), community colleges are expected to prepare students for eventual transfer to a four-year baccalaureate-granting school and to fill various workforce and community development roles. However, some critics contend
that the schools are placing too much emphasis on vocational programs and have lost sight of their primary purpose of providing the academic schooling that enables students to advance within the higher education system toward a baccalaureate degree (Tremble, 2010).

**Sending Institutions**

Upon completing a two-year course of study, students receive certification with an Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree at the community college (the “sending” institution). If the completion was in a specialized area of mathematics, science, or engineering, the degree would be an Associate of Science (A.S.) degree (Townsend, 2000). The transfer functions of the community colleges and the four-year universities engage in similar, yet different, capacities for transferring students. Community colleges prepare students to transition to employment following career training and to transition to a four-year college/university to complete a bachelor’s degree (Dougherty, 2006). Although many community colleges differ in their mission, most provide advising and assistance for students wanting to complete a bachelor’s degree.

West (1994) contends that transferring from a community college to a four-year institution is the mission of the community college. West continues by stating that the transfer function is not fully understood by decision-makers at the national level. He developed transfer rates for a national sample of community college students based on their demographic and ability characteristics. The rates were developed for two periods of time - two and four years after high school. His study developed a predictive model of transfer behavior based on demographic and ability variables of community college students two and four years after high school.
As sending institutions, community colleges offer a variety of programs available to
students that can be transplanted worldwide. Students who have a diverse and knowledgeable
view of the world, can communicate in another language, and can exhibit cross-cultural
adaptability will be able to function efficiently and take advantage of opportunities in a global
marketplace (Beer, 2009). Preparation for interacting with the global markets can be
accomplished within the community college system.

**The nature of transfer degrees.** The nature of transfer degrees today reflects a major
deviation from the intended purpose of completing an A.S. or A.A. degree at the community
college level. Students may begin their studies at a community college, yet fail to complete an
A.A. or an A.S. degree and transfer to a four year institution; transfer to another college with an
Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree, lacking required general education or non-liberal
arts courses; or transfer from a community college to another community college in a practice
known as “swirling” (de los Santos & Wright, 1989).

Current transfer patterns of community college students are summarized in the following
six ways: (a) transferring to a four-year college before completing the two year college transfer
degree, (b) transferring with non-liberal arts courses, (c) transferring in a swirling pattern, (d)
transferring high school dual credit courses offered by a community college, (e) transferring
summer courses, and (f) transferring courses taken through concurrent enrollment.

Students enrolled in a community college will transfer to another community college in a
pattern described as “swirling” (de los Santos and Wright, 1989). This switch can be caused by
students relocating from state to state, or from one part of a state to another. Students attend
community colleges during the summer to accumulate credits to transfer back to the four-year
college and, more importantly, to save on tuition costs. Finally, there are students enrolled in a four-year college who are simultaneously enrolled in transfer courses at an area community college. These community college credits are transferred at the end of the term into the four-year program.

According to (de los Santos & Wright, 1989), students who transfer prior to completing the associate’s degree are less likely to complete the bachelor’s degree. Students who transfer to four-year colleges with non-liberal arts courses are more likely to be motivated to continue to complete a bachelor’s degree.

The nature of occupational degrees. Serving approximately 35% of all students enrolled in postsecondary education, the community college has evolved over the years from an institution suited to providing the foundational general education curriculum for the first two years of postsecondary schooling to an institution with a multiple purposes. Today’s community colleges not only serve in their traditional function of providing academic training for transfer to a four-year school, but also provide a host of vocational and workforce development training programs, community and recreational service programs, and remedial and developmental educational courses, all while often serving as community centers advancing local arts and cultural events. With so many purposes, some have questioned the community college’s ability to serve its constituents aptly and meet their diverse needs (Tremble, 2010).

Morris (1997) states that the development of junior/community colleges in the United States has moved from the original purpose of the junior college - to offer the first two years of college for those planning to transfer to a senior institution - to the present multiple purposes of the community college, which include offering adult education, continuing education, training
for business and industry, "terminal" occupational degrees, and college transfer programs. Morris describes how the South Carolina TEC System evolved in a different manner than did many community colleges in the rest of the country. Beginning in 1961, a system of Technical Education Centers (TEC), which ultimately became a system of sixteen technical colleges, was created with the sole mission of creating a trained workforce to attract business and industry to the state. However, by 1990 all the colleges in the system had effectively become two-year comprehensive institutions after they implemented associate's degree programs in Arts and Sciences in fulfillment of a mandate by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, which by all accounts led the development of the occupational degree in South Carolina.

Hammond-McDavid (1996) states Illinois community colleges possessed the means to realize the new workforce preparation initiatives. Extensive preparation focused on the operating processes of planning, faculty development, advisory committees, and evaluation within the Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) occupational degree programs. The objective was to describe the current practices of these four fundamental processes in occupational degree programs with work-based learning experiences. Statewide governing agencies provided macro system-wide data on the impact of occupational degree program offerings and the extent of work-based learning and internship experiences among Illinois community colleges. A survey of the chief occupational officers among the Illinois community college system provided input for the occupational degree programs and the impact within the Illinois community college system. All indications reflected that sufficient collaboration between the colleges and business community were well established to pursue development of the occupational degree.
**General education.** Cohen and Brawer (2003) suggest that general education within the community college is considered freedom enjoyed by an informed population (p.334). Community colleges are charged with educating the public about cultural elements through ritual, schools, and apprenticeships within society. Providing general education to today’s diverse community college population requires creative programming to meet their educational challenges.

Taylor-Mendoza (2010) identified instructional strategies and support services of five learning community programs that focus on the retention of African American students at California community colleges. This research indicated that colleges and universities have historically structured their curricula, student services programs, and campus environments based on White middle-class norms. A number of previous studies have suggested the effectiveness of the freshman seminar and learning-community models in helping institutions retain students of color.

The five learning community programs reviewed by Taylor-Mendoza (2010) have been in existence for more than 18 years at community colleges in the northern and southern regions of California. The research revealed that the majority of students prefer to study or work in groups either during or outside of class, to meet with teachers or tutors one-to-one outside of class, and to communicate with instructors and classmates online. The findings also suggest that guidance/counseling courses were instrumental in helping students obtain information about the college, develop stronger study skills, and access support services such as tutoring. Overall, participants thrived in environments that used multimedia and multimodal teaching strategies to deliver general education.
Challenges in preparing students for transfer. Community colleges face many challenges in preparing students for transfer. The State of California detected an inefficient number of minority students transferring to selective four-year public institutions within the state. Due to Proposition 209 enacted in 1997, the consideration of race and gender were eliminated as considerations for college admission. To reverse this lack of minority students transferring to the University of California Berkeley and the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), UCLA developed the Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCP). Students who participated revealed reasons for its success, which included the sense of community it fostered, becoming more academically focused, the development of a support system, and being more focused on transferring to a four-year university (Barrio-Sotillo, 2007).

Another challenge community colleges encounter in preparing students to transfer to a four-year institution is a student’s lower grade point average. Research (Buckle, 2010) provided evidence that a student would not complete a baccalaureate degree within six years of beginning his matriculation at a four-year institution. Sinwell (2008) indicated that community college students provided valuable input on the important and effective factors for transferring to four-year institutions. Students noted improved transfer information from counselors and faculty, rigorous academic programs to prepare them for university coursework, more financial aid, and reasonable tuition rates as factors. Encouraging input from community college students transferring to four-year institutions on issues to improve the transfer experience requires increased attention by community college administration.

Another activity initiated to prepare community college transfer students prior to entering a four year institution was developed by the Florida Community College System (FCCS). The
FCCS examined academic performance in upper-division undergraduate courses between native and FCCS transfer students. Results found that FSSC transfer students performed better than native students due to the preparation Florida community colleges provided in upper-division undergraduate coursework (Stewart, 2009).

Finally, research conducted by Johnson (2002) discusses the preparation of community college students transferring to a four-year state university. Johnson describes the accommodating environment and comfort level students experienced while attending community college. However, after transferring to the four-year state university, students experience “transfer shock” - a term describing students’ emotional and physical reaction after transferring to a four year state university - and a significant decline in their Grade Point Average (GPA). Overall, their transfer presented a major challenge because students were underprepared for the university culture and academics.

Additional research regarding preparing students for transfer was provided by Tenbergen-Klaus (2010). This study provides important information for the benefit of students and academic articulation officers and administrators, and helps to reach an understanding of the impact of articulation agreements, policies, and procedures on students who desire to transfer articulate coursework within the higher education environments. The research revealed that students starting at a two-year college and transferring to a four-year university will accelerate the degree completion time frame dramatically. This research provides data and findings to administrators and articulation officers interested in continuous improvement, allowing them to plan their implementations to avoid pitfalls, break down any existing barriers, and enhance the benefits of
any student who desires to complete a bachelor degree in these systems in a timely and acceptable manner.

Tenbergen-Klaus (2010) continues to observe that the failure of the community colleges and state four-year universities to agree on common transfer requirements creates tremendous confusion. It has become one more factor discouraging students from pursuing a four-year degree. Unsure to where they will transfer, community college students hedge their bets by taking more courses than they need. Once the students have been re-admitted to a four-year university, community college transfer students learn they often have to take extra courses particular to that school's requirements for a major.

**Receiving Institutions**

Many of the four-year institutions that receive transfer students, including minorities, have developed special programs to accommodate students who are academically challenged, first in their family to attend college, and those who are financially challenged. McDonough (2000) revealed that community college students who transferred to the teacher education program at Towson University in 1999 needed substantive preparation from the community college teacher education instructors and the Towson University teacher education instructors regarding teaching philosophies, clarifying the role of the community college in teacher education, and providing transferring students with concise academic advice. Recognizing the need to intervene on behalf of the students seeking teacher education, the Towson instructors recommended intervention for transfer students in other disciplines.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides successful academic support for student-athletes attending NCAA Division 1 schools (Kelo, 2005). Kelo provided
evidence that student-athletes attending Division 1 schools represented the top 10% of graduation rates. The success of the student-athletes attending a selective private school in a major conference was a direct result of people in the academic community monitoring the progress of student-athletes and providing study hall accommodations for at-risk student athletes.

Schneider (2008) researched factors associated with the persistence to graduation of transfer students by examining records of students at an independent, four-year university in the state of Washington. The students had transferred from other institutions of higher education between summer quarter 1997 and fall quarter 2002. The purpose of Schneider’s research was to determine the most accommodating services needed by community college transfer students. Results revealed that the strongest predictor of graduation was credits earned in the first year, which in turn was predicted by first quarter credits, with first quarter credits predicted most strongly by academic preparation and financial factors.

Schneider (2008) concluded that knowledge of student characteristics derived from extant institutional data can be highly beneficial to service design and planning, particularly in the identification of groups of students needing specific services. He also indicated that students who transferred from community colleges performed as well as students who transferred from four-year universities. Recommendations from the study suggest that services to transfer students should focus on transition support, from preparation for transfer through the first quarter of enrollment at the receiving institution in such ways that the number of credits earned the first quarter will be maximized.

Rice (2008) presented a study that explored factors that influenced the completion of a bachelor's degree by community college transfer students. One-on-one interviews were
conducted with thirteen Bowling Green State University seniors who transferred to the university from a community college. Data included interview transcripts, academic transcripts, and observations noted in a research log. Reasons why participants chose to attend a community college included low cost, convenient location, feeling unprepared to attend a university, and having unclear goals. Several themes emerged from the data that pertained to their experiences of their journey to the baccalaureate, including receiving quality teaching at both the community college and BGSU, having a fairly smooth transfer process, experiencing financial difficulties, feeling out of place at both the community college and BGSU, and balancing school and work responsibilities. Influences that helped the students persist to graduation primarily included psychological factors, such as high educational aspirations and strong motivation, and social factors, such as supportive relationships.

**Serving as a capstone provider.** Colleges and universities serve as capstone providers to community college graduates by offering degree completion programs. Today, many of these programs are referred to as accelerated degree completion. Community college students who complete an Associate of Arts (A.A.) or an Associate of Science (A.S.) degree qualify to enroll in accelerated degree completion programs of many four-year institutions. These two degrees include the general education courses required for admission to four-year institutions that Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees often omit.

National Louis University provides a capstone program to graduates of area community colleges. In some cases, students who complete an associate’s degree can complete a bachelor’s degree in Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) at their community college campus without having to travel to an NLU location. Whether on-campus or off-campus, classes are taught by NLU full-
time instructors, one night a week for four hours. These capstone/accelerated degree completion programs can be completed in thirteen months if students transfer with 60 semester or 90 quarter hours. These degree completion program students have full-time status and are provided all rights and privileges as all NLU students.

NLU capstone/accelerated degree completion programs offered include the Bachelor of Science in (a) Management (BSM), (b) Health Care Leadership (HCL), and (c) Management Information Systems (MIS). Students without an A.A., A.S., or A.A.S. degree may enroll but must be 21 years of age, have 3 years of work experience in related field, and have a GPA of at least 2.0. However, students must meet general education requirements prior to graduation. Degrees are awarded upon completion of 180 quarter hours (National Louis University, 2010-2011).

A number of receiving institutions serve as successful capstone providers to community college transfers. Thirteen Bowling Green State University seniors transferred to the university from a community college (Rice, 2008). They chose to begin their educational journey at a community college because of low cost, convenient location, feeling unprepared to attend a university, and having unclear goals. Several themes emerged from Rice’s data that pertained to transfer student experiences. Having a fairly smooth transfer process, experiencing financial difficulties, feeling out of place at both the community college and BGSU, and balancing school and work responsibilities were primary considerations.

**Marketing and recruiting transfer students.** Marketing and recruiting transfer students are major investments for many universities. A significant amount of resources in recruiting, processing, and advising new students is a major marketing endeavor. Universities
lose substantial revenue when students leave the institution prior to graduation (Radney, 2009). Colleges and universities must improve their recruitment and retention strategies to avoid losing revenue.

Goodridge-White (2008) provides evidence that lack of finances was a barrier preventing Black and Latino students from transferring to a four-year institution. To overcome this barrier, community college transfer administrators and four-year institutions agreed that a marketing plan to recruit Black and Latino students by offering financial incentives would overcome this barrier. Additional recruitment improvements would include standardizing the acceptance of community college courses, credits, and grades, involving more students in transfer advising early in their community college experience. The continual maintenance and review of these partnerships by staff at both sending and receiving institutions was found to be necessary to achieve gains in transfer rates.

Onuoha (1991) provided details regarding the marketing and recruiting of transfer students implemented by an area community college as enrollment in several career programs began to decline. The career programs most affected were architecture, nursing, and electronic technology. Although the curriculum had shown significant improvements in recent years, declining enrollment concerned administration which then sought to improve the programs and reduce costs. The marketing efforts initiated included (a) identification of prospective students for the career programs, (b) identification of the factors that influenced the career decisions of prospective students and their counselors, and (c) to actively survey the nontraditional college age students (21 years of age and over) currently enrolled in the career programs. Results of the
initiative revealed that many respondents were generally not aware of the career opportunities available at the community college.

Marketing and recruiting African American students for college programs presents a set of challenges many schools fail to recognize, understand, or both. Pride-McRae (2007) concluded the following: receiving institutions need to (a) implement clear policies for recruiting at-risk African American students, (b) provide flexible course selections and offerings conducive to nontraditional students, (c) provide student support academically and socially, (d) recruit more African American faculty as role models, and (e) provide more cultural awareness within the curriculum.

**Challenges related to enrolling transfer students.** “No matter what it is called, who does it or where in the institution it is being done, universities are engaging in marketing activity” (R. Krachenberg as cited in Kirp & Holman, 2007). In today’s competitive market to recruit top students, senior institutions have drastically transformed their marketing efforts. To recruit and attract top students, senior institutions are hiring image creators to develop a new persona for advertising to the public. Furthermore, colleges and universities are utilizing financial aid as a leverage to attract students from wealthy background.

There is strong competition among institutions of higher education to recruit academically prepared students. Younger (2009) takes a look at factors thirteen African American students described for successfully graduating from a traditionally Caucasian institution. Their success was a direct result of the following: (a) strong support networks, (b) confidence in the ability to learn, (c) intrinsic motivation, and (d) established clear educational
goals. Younger concludes that institutions should embrace these factors during recruitment and retention of African American students.

Both the U.S. population and college enrollments nationally are becoming increasingly diverse racially and ethnically. While students from under-represented groups continue to enroll in institutions of higher education in record numbers, African American and Hispanic students continue to drop out at higher rates than their Caucasian and Asian counterparts. An ongoing challenge for colleges and universities is to adapt to the needs of their changing populations. Given the politically charged atmosphere that surrounds affirmative action programs at institutions of higher education, it is essential for educators who value diversity to implement best practices for recruiting, retaining, and graduating students from under-represented groups (Waddell, 2008).

Additional challenges to enrolling transfer students are noted by Kalogrides (2008) who states that supporters of community colleges are aware that for many disadvantaged students, these institutions represent the first step to higher education. These schools provide programs such as job training, remedial education, and preparation for transfer to four-year schools. Critics, on the other hand, maintain that rather than democratizing access to higher education, community colleges actually divert disadvantaged students away from four-year colleges and attaining bachelor's degrees. Kalogrides’ research also reveals that the community college is an effective route to a baccalaureate degree for students who transfer. Transfer rates remain low, however, and although they vary considerably among different community colleges, it remains unclear which policies or practices distinguish colleges that are relatively more successful in promoting transfer among their students.
Disadvantaged students and those with weak academic backgrounds often make their way to community colleges after struggling in four-year institutions. Although these reverse transfers do not fare as well as students with exclusive four-year college enrollment, they do appear to have more favorable outcomes than otherwise similar students who drop out of postsecondary school altogether after initially enrolling in a four-year school (Kalogrides, 2008).

**Theoretical Framework: Motivation Theory**

Why do students return to college to complete a bachelor’s degree? What is the drive, the motivation to return after being out of the classroom and being in the workforce for so long? This research examines the extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors that influence students with an associate’s degree to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private university.

This study assesses the motivation of students who complete an associate’s degree prior to pursuing a bachelor’s degree at a private university. The foundational theory supporting this research is motivation theory (both extrinsic and intrinsic). Lei (2010) summarizes the research regarding the impact of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on student learning at the college level. Intrinsically motivated individuals, Lei noted, have been able to develop high regard for learning various types of course information without the inclusion of external rewards or reinforcements. In contrast, extrinsically motivated individuals rely solely on rewards and desirable results to act as a catalyst for their motivation. Both types of motivation may not have the same effect on college student learning and performance. Intrinsically motivated individuals have a number of advantages over extrinsically motivated individuals; evidence shows that intrinsic motivation can promote student learning and achievement better than extrinsic motivation.
Moffat (2010) explored motivation theory as related to the lives and experiences of 45 adult undergraduates and the factors they identified as essential for success and persistence toward educational goals. Moffat revealed that adult students, roughly 26-60 years of age, chose to add college to their already full lives because they were experienced in persisting in order to succeed. Among the factors identified as important or essential in Moffat’s study were support, personal motivation and determination, paying for college, and success in learning.

**Extrinsic Motivation**

Extrinsic motivation is typically defined as the incentive to perform for some type of tangible payoff such as grades, money, or recognition. If rewards come from external sources and are unrelated to the value of an action, they are considered to be categorized as extrinsic (Covington, 2007). A desire for career advancement is one of the most common reasons that adults decide to go back to college. When faced with the realization that promotional opportunities may be few and far between unless they earn an academic credential, many working adults choose to return to college.

Engberg (2008) investigated the motivation of 18 individuals who had earned a bachelor's degree between 2001 and 2006. While career advancement is frequently the stated motivator for a return to school, the experience and confidence gained from a return to school goes far beyond achieving the next promotion. They gained something that could not be taken away from them and they recognize they are changed as a result of the school experience.

Adults who want to convey to their children the importance of a college education may choose to return to school themselves as a way of setting a good example. Greig (2007) further confirms that extrinsic motivating factors influenced graduates of the Community College of the
Air Force (CCAF) in their pursuit of a bachelor’s degree. Students considered the availability of 100% tuition assistance, support of middle and senior leadership, availability of on- and off-base and distance learning colleges and universities, Air Force emphasis on education, and availability of support for educational goals.

Loftus (1998) confirms the primary reason for returning remains career-related, acknowledging a shift from being promoted towards job security. Additional evidence of extrinsic motivating factors among students wanting to complete a bachelor’s degree is revealed by Genco (2005). Participants returned to education due job related concerns, typically a layoff or company closing, or an issue of timing—a feeling that it was "time" to return. Participants reported the financial, geographic, and academic accessibility of the college made it a resource in itself.

**Competition in the workplace.** De Long (2010) revealed that significant differences existed for intrinsic and extrinsic motivators among human resources professionals. Some employees need salary opportunities to reduce job hopping while others view job status and supportive supervisors more importantly. Additional significant factors influencing motivation included supervisor behaviors, intrinsic factors such as feedback and competence, and extrinsic factors such as benefits, rewards and promotions.

Eisner (2010) reveals that competition in the workplace is a challenge for today's college graduates. Today, graduates face an uncertain and demanding job market in which they are likely to encounter evolving skill needs, reduced hiring, and heightened competition from experienced laid-off workers and globally available labor. These realities underscore the importance expressed by educators and practitioners of identifying attributes new college
graduates should possess in order to meet the challenges and access opportunities of the 21st century workplace.

Manning and Saidi (2010) reveal that men and women have different attitudes toward and behavioral responses to competition; that is, women are more likely to opt out of jobs for which performance pay is the norm and to underperform in some competitive situations. To check these hypotheses and findings against differences in the field, the authors use performance pay as an indicator of competition in the workplace and analyze the gender gap not only in reference to performance pay but also to earnings and work effort under these contracts. They find that although women are less likely than men to work under performance pay contracts, the gender gap is small. Furthermore, the effect of performance pay on earnings is modest and does not differ markedly by gender. Consequently, the authors argue, the ability of these competition hypotheses to explain the gender pay gap seems very limited.

Promotion potential. To examine factors related to information technology (IT) employees' retention within public higher education, an internet-based study (Holmes, 2006) was sent to IT employees in all four-year public universities throughout Michigan. The survey included questions to address reasons given to stay with their current position. Responses revealed that individuals stay in their current position because of flexibility, respect, supervisor's skills, department communication, training, and the potential to increase their salary.

Promotion potential is highly observed and evaluated within the business arena, and at nearly all levels of business. Stumpf (2009) seeks to advance the understanding of consultant relationship competencies and interpersonal style in promotions to partner. Client assessments of competencies in the areas of building relationships, trust, and collaboration and self-assessed
interpersonal style were used to predict promotion to partner over a five-year period. Interpersonal style preferences for expressing inclusion towards others and wanting openness from others are linked to clients' perceptions of relationship competencies each of which predicts promotion to partner. Professional service firms need to select and develop people who have interpersonal style preferences that support the relationship competencies essential for their advancement and firm success. Consultants can enhance their promotion potential by building relationships with clients, developing mutual trust, and fostering collaboration. The behavioral aspects of consultant-client relationships can be targeted to enhance individual development and promotion potential and to guide professional service firms in apprenticing future partners and obtaining more client work.

Garber (2003) provides insight regarding employees with promotional potential. Retaining these employees is crucial for the long-term survival of an organization. Garber identifies factors impacting decisions to stay with or leave an organization among groups of professional salaried employees identified as being important to the organization's future success. He then compares these factors to other salaried employee groups. The employees deemed important to the organization's future success are identified as those having greater promotion potential. Unique determinants identified through interviews with the higher potential group of employees centered around personal growth opportunities and career opportunities within the organization.

**Increased pay.** Pay-for-performance is a pay system in which employees are compensated based on their individual productivity. Today there are numerous formats of pay-for-performance currently in place in the private sector. Too often, however, pay-for-
performance initiatives do not take into consideration what motivates employees. The variables of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation - including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and goal setting - need to be included in pay-for-performance programs to motivate employees for maximum performance (Campbell, 2007).

Fishbein (1992) observes that students who are not intrinsically motivated are dropping out of school. He describes extrinsic incentives which appear to increase the motivation of students to stay in school, including two monetary incentive programs aimed to increase attendance, reduce tardiness, and improve standardized test scores and grades of at-risk students. Significant positive statistical relationships were found in the area of attendance and a possible lag effect was found in the area of grades and tardy rates. There appeared to be a change in self-esteem, culture, and attitude of both the students and the schools when these programs were implemented.

Respect. De Long (2010) contends that ultimately a collaborative workplace creates the need for the generations to respect one another and value differences. De Long sought to determine if there were differences regarding the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors for Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennial employees. Based on the perception of the human resources professionals who participated in De Long’s study, the findings revealed that Generation X participants need salary opportunities to reduce job hopping, while Millennials value time outside of work, are not concerned with job stability, and viewed job status and supportive supervisors more importantly than Baby Boomers or Generation X. However, significant differences existed for job growth opportunities between Baby Boomers and
Generation X. Ultimately, a collaborative workplace creates the need for the generations to respect one another and value differences.

**Intrinsic Motivation**

Intrinsic motivation factors include the satisfaction of completing a personal challenge or undertaking and learning something new (Covington, 2007). Hegarty (2010) concluded that motivation plays a crucial role in the performance of students, based on the work of Vallerand (1992). Villerand developed the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) which identifies three levels of academic motivation— intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation.

Rowe (2010) sought to evaluate the potential influence of a “mastery learning” environment – an environment which over 90 per cent of students understand what is taught - on changes in students' intrinsic motivation to learn. Past investigations had demonstrated that students who persist and finish a course of study show higher levels of intrinsic motivation towards academic activities than students who drop out. A mastery learning climate instills self-confidence; self-confidence and autonomy create intrinsic motivation in learners. Rowe’s research found there is a relationship between students' learning environment and the development of intrinsic motivation. Therefore, quantifying a mastery learning environment that will encourage the development of intrinsic motivation to learn and persist in college may be critical to community college educators.

**Pride.** Literature (Lee, 1991) indicates that teachers often consider “important, interesting, or quality work” as the most important job factor. Job factors relating to professional growth and service were more important than the factors of salary, promotion, and other extrinsic rewards. McNickle (2009) researched pride as an intrinsic motivating factor among older
workers who were selected to replace the Baby Boomer generation as they exited the workplace. McNickle contends that the retention of older workers surfaces as a strategy to address the impending loss of seasoned and skilled employees. Further, understanding workplace motivation could lead to developing strategies that encourage workers to remain in the workplace. He concludes that organizational pride, employee participation, and supportive employment practices are key factors for maintaining delivery of products and services.

Light (2003) contends that the nation's most motivated workforce can be found in day-care and after school centers, child welfare offices, juvenile courts, and employment and training centers that serve low-income Americans. Human services workers not only take pride in their work, they persevere day after day under some of the toughest working conditions in the country.

**Increased knowledge.** The link between increased knowledge and intrinsic motivation has been established (Bourgeois, 2007; Sachau, 1990). Bourgeois set out to examine whether increased metacognition, emotional control, and intrinsic motivation that result from Error Management Training (EMT) influences transfer performance. Results of Bourgeois’ study suggested that participants in the EMT group had more task knowledge than participants in the error avoidant group.

Bourgeois’s (2007) work was founded on an earlier study by such researchers as Sachau (1990). Sachau attempted to establish knowledge-based pay (KBP) as a form of compensation based on worker skills and knowledge rather than a specific listing of job responsibilities. Embedded in Sachau’s approach was the suggestion that KBP leads to increased intrinsic motivation and, as a result, improved productivity.
Achievement. Achievement is a major factor influenced by intrinsic motivation. Kelly (2009) sought to determine the relationship between motivating factors and degree of motivation. The results of his analysis identified four factors as the most meaningful to participating students: (a) students with high intrinsic motivation are more likely to be in the motivated group, (b) students were less likely to be in the motivated group as extrinsic reward increased, (c) females are more likely to be in the motivated group than males, and (d) if self esteem is higher, a student is less likely to be in the motivated group. Students indicated instructors and career opportunities are also contributors to motivation in the classroom.

In her exploration of the career development and achievements of nursing program graduates, Wicker (1995) identified a key theme which emerged from her sample of nursing program graduates: intrinsic motivation seemed to be the integrating and mediating force in the career development and achievements of these graduates. As a result, Wicker concluded that intrinsic motivational factors played a substantial role in the achievement of nursing program graduates.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on the following broad areas: the personal and professional impact of earning a college degree (both the associate’s degree and the bachelor’s degree), the transfer function (including the challenges inherent in the process of transfer) from the perspective of the sending institution (the community college) and the receiving institution (the four-year college or university), and the theoretical framework (motivation theory) upon which the study was grounded. Students who complete an associate’s degree at a community college often enroll at a four-year institution to complete a bachelor’s program. The literature
revealed several key features for earning a bachelor’s degree: employment, personal goals, higher earning potential, and the impact completing a bachelor’s will have on family members and other relatives.

The following chapter will address the methodology and procedures employed to gather data related to the motivation of community college transfer students leading to enrollment in a bachelor’s degree program. Motivation factors related to the transfer process will be introduced followed by the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. The chapter will conclude with a review of the ethical procedures undertaken to assure informed consent of study participants.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Near the turn of the 20th century, community colleges in the United States were conceived as “junior” colleges and served, primarily, as transfer institutions. As a result, the early mission of the two-year post secondary institution was to accommodate students who sought to transfer to a four-year college or university and, in doing so, relieve area colleges and universities of burgeoning enrollments of first-and second-year students (Townsend & Bragg, 2006). Following World War II, with the establishment of the GI Bill and the U.S. President’s Commission on Higher Education of 1948, there was immense support for the expansion of junior colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The number of community colleges grew rapidly throughout the nation from 330 campuses in 1950, with an enrollment of 2,175 students, to 1,195 community colleges in 2009, boasting a student enrollment of nearly 11.5 million students (AACC, 2009).

The popularity of community colleges has most frequently been linked to the mission which stresses accessibility, affordability, and service to the community wherein the college resides (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). As a result, today’s community colleges have expanded their original transfer function to include (a) career and technical education, (b) developmental education and remedial services, (c) continuing and community education, and (d) customized training for government, business, and industry.

The students served by community colleges represent various economic backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and levels of educational attainment. It is not unusual for students attending
postsecondary institutions to study at their own pace or drop out if needed and return when appropriate. Students who graduate with a postsecondary degree or certificate recognize the benefits of a college degree, the positive impact on their careers, and personal satisfaction (Marcotte, Bailey, Borkoski & Kienzl, 2005).

**Refocusing the Transfer Function in the Community College**

Adults and other nontraditional students enroll in community colleges for a number of reasons: (a) accessibility, (b) low cost, (c) accommodation to lower income and academically challenged students, (c) flexibility of class scheduling and locations, (d) a friendly campus environment, and (d) the focus on occupational and technical skills (AACC, 2009).

The constant world economic fluctuations and challenges have increased the need for a highly educated workforce. The emerging work environment can no longer support an unskilled labor force and needs employees with advanced knowledge in skill areas such as computers and technology, critical thinking and problem-solving, and effective written and verbal communications (Kazis, 2007). More and more graduates holding associate degrees recognize the need for additional higher education (including bachelor’s degree programs) in order to function more effectively in today’s competitive marketplace.

Little formal research is available identifying the factors determining who returns to a university to complete a bachelor’s degree, and/or when such a decision is made. The purpose of this study is to identify the influencing factors related to the decision to complete a bachelor’s degree once an associate’s degree has been earned. In addition, this study will attempt to identify (a) strategies and actions provided by the “receiving” university and students’ in
persistence during the bachelor’s degree program and (b) the inhibitors and/or facilitators experienced by transferring students leading to bachelor’s degree completion.

Patterson (1993) researched factors that influenced community college students to pursue further education after obtaining an associate's degree. Using two survey instruments, she examined perceptions of students who graduated from community colleges in Maryland and were qualified to transfer to four-year institutions. She found that the students most likely to continue were single, white females between the ages of 20 and 24. Students who were enrolled full-time and worked only part-time had a higher persistence rate. Further, entry goals and reasons for attending were inconsistent with transferring. Institutional and student barriers for students who did not intend to continue included lack of aspirations and goals, absence of academic planning (before college and during enrollment), and inability to experience the four-year environment.

Motivating Factors

There are two foremost descriptors of motivating factors as described by Covington (2000): extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation refers to tangible rewards such as grades, personal recognition, or money. Incentives which are unrelated to accomplishment are considered to be extrinsic motivation. Improved employment opportunities such as job promotion, salary increase, or a new job title are all examples of extrinsic motivation factors. Intrinsic motivation factors encompass the satisfaction of completing a personal challenge or undertaking and learning something new. This study will investigate how both extrinsic and intrinsic factors affect the decisions of students pursuing the completion of a bachelor’s degree from a private university.
**Extrinsic motivation.** Ruby (2008) determined that extrinsic motivation is defined typically as performance for some type of tangible payoff such as grades, money, or recognition. If rewards are external to the individual and in the form of a tangible product or process, they are considered to be extrinsic (Covington, 2007). The student who seeks tangible rewards is influenced by extrinsic factors.

**Intrinsic motivation.** Vallerand (1992) contends that intrinsic motivation occurs when individuals engage in activity for their own personal satisfaction (unrelated to a tangible product or process). Vallerand states that “an example of IM [intrinsic motivation] is the student who goes to class because he or she finds it interesting and satisfying to learn more about certain subjects” (p. 1004). However, Cameron (2001) concluded that extrinsically motivated students are less likely to engage in a task when the extrinsic rewards are no longer available.

**Inhibiting Factors**

In addition to investigating motivation factors, this research project will examine the inhibiting and facilitating factors students encounter when pursuing a bachelor’s degree. Inhibitors or barriers students encounter can negatively impact the desire to complete the educational journey. Inhibitors are categorized most frequently as (a) increased college costs, (b) weak and uneven student outcomes, (c) inadequate transfer advice, (d) loss of credits during the transfer process, and (e) insufficient financial aid. Without adequate financial support, students may be forced to withdraw before completing a bachelor’s degree program (Kazis, 2007).

**Facilitating Factors**

Although there are inhibitors to overcome for students seeking a bachelor’s degree, there are facilitators available to help students in their pursuit of higher education. Colleges and
universities often provide special programming to assist students returning to and remaining in college, such as the following: (a) schedules are developed to accommodate working students for evening and weekend attendance, (b) faculty members work diligently towards motivating returning adult learners, and (c) universities are skilled in designing personalized financial assistance packages to accommodate adults returning to college (Kazis, 2007).

**Research Design**

The focus of this study is a qualitative inquiry situated in an interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative design (case study research employing semi-structured interviews) has been selected for this project as implementation of the design and will (a) reveal the extrinsic and intrinsic factors the study participants feel influence their decision to continue their education to obtain a bachelor’s degree, (b) allow for a detailed understanding of the influencing factors that resulted in the study participants’ decision to complete the bachelor’s degree, (c) provide an understanding of what study participants perceive as the driving motivations to complete their bachelor’s degree, and (d) identify the useful resources provided by the university to facilitate the continuation of their degree (Creswell, 2007).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to identify the motivating factors that influence students with an associate’s degree to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private university. In addition, this proposed qualitative research study (interpretive design) will: (a) substantiate how and why community college students make the decision to transfer to bachelor’s degree completion programs at a selected private university, (b) reveal how students address and attempt to resolve
the inhibitors they encounter when seeking a bachelor’s degree, and (c) review the processes a select private university employs to retain bachelor’s degree completion transfer students.

**Guiding Questions**

This research is designed to identify the motivating factors that influenced students with an associate’s degree to seek a bachelor’s degree at a private university. The following guiding questions arise from this purpose detailed above and serve as the focus this study:

1. What are the extrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?
2. What are the intrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?
3. What are the influencing factors that resulted in the participants’ decision to complete the bachelor’s degree?
4. What do study participants perceive as the primary motivations to complete their bachelor’s degree?

**Qualitative Research**

This research was conducted by applying a qualitative approach. The case study methodology was employed in this qualitative research. Creswell (2007) defines case study as the research of exploring an issue through one or more cases that are bounded within the same context or situation. The driving questions of this research will afford full exploration, comprehension, and understanding of the issues of students pursuing a bachelor’s degree at a private university. This research will focus on the “how” and “why” of motivating factors.
influencing students to complete a bachelor’s degree. As Yin (1994) states, the case study is the preferred strategy to answer the questions of how and why.

The significance of utilizing a single case study for this research is based on three characteristics: (a) descriptive, yielding information of areas of education will reveal much of what is not known; (b) interpretive, because the researcher gathers as much rich, thick data with the intent of analyzing a phenomenon; and (c) evaluative because the case study provides thick description, is grounded, and clarifies meaning of the research (Merriam, 1998).

The following components of this qualitative research, as described by Creswell (2007), were implemented with participants: (a) explore an issue, (b) understand the complex details of an issue, (c) empower individuals to share their stories and hear their voices, (d) remove intimidation between researcher and participant, (e) invite participants to collaborate during data analysis, and (f) understand context of how participants address problems. Due to the lack of these components, quantitative and statistical measures will not get to the real problems of the research.

Case Study

Merriam (1988) contends that qualitative case study is an appropriate design to understand and interpret observations of education. The driving questions of this research should afford a full exploration, comprehension, and understanding of an educational issue (in this case, the decision-making process employed by students seeking to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a private university) and help to provide insight, discovery, and interpretation relative to successful postsecondary to higher education transfer.
This proposed research study will focus on “how” and “why” motivating factors influence students to transfer and complete a bachelor’s degree program at a select private university. As Yin states, the case study is the preferred strategy to answer the questions of “how” and “why” (1994, p.1). Although little is known of underlying motivating factors leading to the decision to transfer to a private university to complete the bachelor’s degree, a case study methodology should provide for the in-depth solicitation of participant’s perceptions to discover relevant information in addressing the study’s purpose.

The significance of utilizing a single case study for this research is based on Merriam’s (1998) three characteristics of qualitative research: (a) descriptive (yielding information of areas of education will reveal much of what is not known), (b) interpretive (the researcher gathers rich, thick data with the intent of analyzing a phenomenon), and (c) evaluative (the case study provides thick description, is grounded, and clarifies meaning of the research).

**Data Collection Procedures**

Case study data collection involves a wide array of procedures as the researcher builds an in-depth picture of the case (Creswell, 2007, p. 132). Researchers utilizing the case study approach have at their disposal six primary sources for evidence (Yin, 1994). Those sources include documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts.

For this study, the following methods were implemented to collect data: (a) a demographic survey was undertaken, (b) semi-structured interviews were conducted, (c) focus groups were convened, (d) field notes were recorded, and (e) a thorough review of relevant
documents was completed. A brief review of each data gathering process to be utilized in this study is detailed below.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

The detailed semi-structured interview described by Merriam (2009, p. 89) included the following: (a) an interview guide with a mix of more- and less-structured interview questions; (b) flexible questions, (c) specific data required from all respondents, (d) a list of questions and issues to be explored, and (e) unstructured wording and/or order. Semi-structured interviews were preferred to more structured interviews because of the effectiveness of semi-structured interviews in gaining more insight about a particular situation or phenomenon.

Through the use of the semi-structured interview format, one self-identified participant representing “traditional age” (i.e., up to 21 years of age) student and one participant self-identified as “non-traditional” age (i.e., age 22 and over) from each of the four bachelor’s degree completion programs were invited to participate in the study (see Appendix A) and were interviewed using the interview questions identified in Appendix B and the demographic questions identified in Appendix C. The procedure employed to conduct the semi-structured interviews for this study were as follows: (a) selected a setting with the least distraction, (b) explained the purpose of the interview, (c) addressed terms of confidentiality, (d) explained the format of the interview, (e) indicated how long the interview usually takes, (f) provided contact information of the interviewer, (g) allowed interviewee to ask any questions about the interview, and (h) prepared a method for recording data.
**Focus Groups**

Qualitative research concentrates on words and observations to gather rich data detail and describe how people interact in natural situations (Johnson, 2004). An effective tool used to capture additional data on subjects about which very little is known is the use of focus groups.

A focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to gather perception on a defined area of interest in a non-threatening, permissive setting. Participants of focus groups usually provide spontaneous reactions and ideas that provide the observer within sight into group dynamics and/or organizational issues (Zelna, 2003). During the early 1950s, focus groups were used primarily by market researchers to capture the preferences of shoppers and to promote consumer items to a specific populace (Merriam, 2009).

This research utilized focus groups to capture rich, detailed information. This format allowed more flexibility to probe unanticipated issues.

To utilize focus groups for this study, the researcher developed a script consisting of questions focused on the information being sought. The script incorporated follow up and probing questions to gather additional and useful information. Following the development of the script, the following procedures were employed: (a) identified and recruited the participants involved in the study, (b) conducted the focus group sessions, (c) developed the coding scheme, (d) segmented and coded the data, (e) analyzed the data, and finally (f) interpreted and published the results.

**Field Notes**

Effective use of field notes is an essential activity when conducting qualitative research (Patton, 1990). Merriam (2009) states that field notes should include the following information
(p. 131): (a) verbal descriptions of the setting, people, and the activities; (b) direct quotations or at least the substance of what people said; and (c) observers’ comments – put in the margins or in the running narrative and identified by italics, or bold and underlining, bracketing, and the initials “OC.” Field notes - including comprehensive collections of descriptions, direct quotations, and observer comments - were collected and included in the analysis of data as follows: (a) interview questions related to specific driving questions were recorded on color coded 4x6 index cards for ease of retrieval, (b) responses were recorded on appropriate cards, (c) cards were sorted according to emerging and/or a priori themes, and (d) themes were sorted to facilitate analysis.

**Document Review**

Information related to motivating factors that influence students with an associate’s degree to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private university is available through various documents. For this research, the documents identified for review included articulation agreements between community colleges and the selected private university, admission materials, and public information available on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) website.

Articulation agreements among community colleges and universities are developed for the benefit of the student. These agreements state specific policies related to transferring credits and coursework between schools and are supposed to make it easier for students transferring from one college to another. Many private institutions maintain articulation agreements addressing a number of programs with greater Chicago area community colleges. Students with
an associate’s degree transferring from area community colleges can enter the university to complete a bachelor’s degree program.

**Site Selection**

The site selected for this study was a private, not-for-profit, urban university where the study participants were currently enrolled. The researcher interviewed students at three Centers of this multi-Center university - one urban and two suburban sites. The specific locations included (a) a large urban Center, (b) a mid-sized suburban Center; and (c) a small suburban Center. Conducting semi-structured interviews with participants at these selected sites and employing a single case study approach resulted in thick, illuminating data regarding the “how” and “why” selected factors motivate and/or influence students to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private university.

**Participant Selection**

Eight students enrolled in four-degree completion cohorts were selected and interviewed; two students from each cohort, one self-identified as “traditional age” (i.e., up to 21 years of age) and one self-identified as “nontraditional” age (i.e., age 22 and over). The study participants were enrolled in one of the following four bachelor’s degree completion programs at the Centers: (a) Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS), (b) Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM), (c) Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems (BSMIS), and (d) Health Care Leadership (HCL).

**Interview Protocol**

Merriam (1998) reveals that there are basically two forms of interviews, highly structured and semi-structured. The highly structured interview format in qualitative research may limit the
responses the researcher is seeking, whereas semi-structured interviews seek to elicit details of a topic sought by the researcher. The semi-structured interview is most recommended for the qualitative research design and was implemented for this research.

Guiding and Interview Questions (see Appendix B) were provided to research participants prior to the actual interview. This provided participants with the opportunity to develop well-prepared, thoughtful responses during the actual interview. The interviews were conducted using the following format: (a) explained the interview purpose, (b) reinforced confidentiality to participants, (c) explained the interview format; (d) provided an approximate length of time to complete the interview, (e) provided the interviewer’s contact information, (f) allowed participants to ask questions regarding the interview, and (g) prepared the method (audio recording) for recording data.

**Expert Review**

To provide input and recommendations for clarity and appropriateness of items, an expert review panel consisting of one community college administrator, one community college faculty member, and one non-participating student who met the profile for participants reviewed the demographic questionnaire and the proposed interview questions prior to implementation of the research. The community college administrator had served for 25 years in higher education, possessed a doctoral degree in higher education, and was the director of counseling at a medium-sized, suburban community college. The community college faculty member brought experience in workforce development and student affairs through 21 years of service at a medium-size, suburban community college.
Process Pilot

Prior to the official data collection of the study, one student meeting the participant requirements of the study was selected to complete a pilot of the interview process in order to provide the researcher with practical experience related to question flow, timing, and familiarity of the effective interview process. The student selected for the pilot process was not a participant in the semi-structured interview process employed for data collection. The process pilot participant was a self-identified nontraditional age student (i.e., over age 22), who was enrolled in the Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) accelerated degree completion program and participated in the pilot test of the semi-structured interview process only.

Data Analysis Procedures

Effective data analysis should have its beginnings during the process of data collection (Merriam, 2009). Merriam continues that delaying the analysis of the data collected can easily lead to the researcher to feel overwhelmed. The researcher is charged with making sense of the collected data. For this project, the following data analyses procedures were conducted: (a) sorting, coding, and categorizing of both a priori and emergent themes and/or patterns; (b) creating and organizing files for data storage and retrieval; (c) categorizing and establishing themes; and (f) developing naturalistic generalizations of emerging themes from collected data.

Theme Identification and Coding Procedures

The data collected from each of the participants was coded for ease of analysis. Coding is merely a shorthand designation for different aspects of the data for easy retrieval of specific pieces of data (Merriam, 1988). In addition, coding is described as an analysis (Miles &
Huberman, 1994). The collection of the enormous quantities of data requires a systemized procedure for differentiating and combining data into a manageable result.

For this research, the following procedures for coding the qualitative data was employed: (a) sought repeating ideas from two or more interview participants, (b) created stack of repeating ideas and ranking the ideas by significance and relationship to the interview question, (c) searched data for items related to a priori themes and categorized accordingly, (d) searched data for emerging themes and categorized accordingly, and (e) reviewed categories to provide comprehensible narrative transition within and among each category. Finally, to maintain a clear, concise method of coding data, 4x6 index cards were employed to record information from participant interviews and observations for proper categorization.

**Triangulation Process**

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) describe triangulation as implementing multiple sources of data collection to substantiate a specific hypothesis or theory. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) refer to triangulation as combining different ways to look at a situation for obtaining a “true” fix. Merriam (2009) continues by describing triangulation as a procedure implementing multiple sources of information to validate a study. Those sources could be interviews, on-site observation, or utilizing information revealed through document review. Data from multiple sources such as semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes, and review of documents were triangulated to support the stated purpose of this research.

**The Researcher as Instrument**

The researcher has twelve years of experience in enrollment, and continues to work with traditional and nontraditional age students whose goal is to complete a bachelor’s degree. Over
the years, students shared the essential factors of why they were motivated to achieve this goal. By pursuing this research, the researcher seeks to share these motivating factors with other students seeking to attain a similar goal and identify the inhibitors and facilitators in this pursuit.

Because the researcher has been indirectly involved with many of the participants through the approval of the community college grant, the participants were encouraged to consider the researcher’s role as that of a student and a researcher rather than a college staff member, stressing for them to be candid and straightforward with their responses.

**Ethical Considerations: Protection of Human Subjects**

No set of standards can address every ethical circumstance. However, in addition to the specific ethical concerns addressed by the selected institution and its Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB), the research study made every effort to address several standard ethical concerns. Involvement in the study by students, faculty, administrators or other individuals will be based upon written documentation of voluntary participation and informed consent (see Appendices D and E).

Participants in the study were provided with assurances of confidentiality with regard to their personal information, as well as anonymity throughout the course of the study. Further, the transcriptionist who prepared the interview data for analysis was also asked to provide assurance of confidential treatment of data (see Appendix F). Participants were also provided with written documentation pertaining to the purpose, nature, and requirements of the study and affirmed their voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and ability to terminate their participation at any time without consequence.
Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodology used to conduct this study. The methodology implemented was a qualitative approach utilizing multiple data gathering methods such as semi-structured interviews, observations, focus groups, field notes, and document review. Each of these methods was utilized to identify the motivating factors that influence students with an associate’s degree to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a private university. In addition to four guiding questions implemented in this study, additional interview questions were used to probe for deeper and richer responses. These multiple sources of data were triangulated to validate the information shared by the participants of the study. In addition, a questionnaire was implemented to retrieve descriptive demographic information. Finally, this research also sought to discover the inhibiting and facilitating factors encountered by the students as they pursue a bachelor’s degree at a private, not-for-profit university.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Introduction

More than 6.8 million students are enrolled in credit programs at community colleges and 5 million students are enrolled in noncredit courses at 1,173 institutions across the nation (AACC, 2010). Motivation plays a part in students’ desire and determination to enroll and complete credit and noncredit courses in various degree programs (Timarong, Temaungil & Sukrad, 2002). There are two primary descriptors of motivating factors - extrinsic and intrinsic - as described by Covington (2000). Extrinsic motivation refers to tangible rewards, such as grades, personal recognition, or money. Incentives unrelated to the accomplishment are considered to be extrinsic motivation. Improved employment opportunities such as job promotion, salary increase, or a new job title are all examples of extrinsic motivation factors. Intrinsic motivation factors include the satisfaction of completing a personal challenge or undertaking and learning something new.

This research study was conducted in an attempt to identify the effect extrinsic and intrinsic factors have on adult students’ decisions to return to school to complete their bachelor’s degree. The research sought to gain a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a specific private university, National Louis University (NLU), after having completed an associate’s degree at a community college.

National Louis University (NLU) has developed four bachelor’s degree completion programs to serve the growing number of associate degree recipients from area community colleges who wish to transfer to a bachelor’s degree granting institution. Data for this study
were collected by interviewing two currently enrolled students from each of the four accelerated degree completion programs at NLU, followed by two focus group sessions of currently enrolled students not otherwise participating in direct interviews. Demographic surveys were used to collect pertinent information about the participants including (a) personal background, (b) professional background, (c) educational background, and (d) other characteristic variables unique to this study. Finally, observation field notes were used to supplement participant demographic and interview data.

A descriptive review of the data collected for the study is presented in this chapter. To collect data for this study, a total of eight participants, two from each of the four accelerated degree completion programs at NLU, were interviewed at a time and location selected by each participant. The four accelerated degree completion programs from which students were selected to participate were: applied behavioral sciences (ABS), Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM), Health Care Leadership (HCL), and Management Information Systems (MIS). The interviews began in April 2010 and completed in July 2010.

In the following sections, findings from those interviews and the information provided by each participant on a demographic survey (see Appendix C) are discussed. Throughout the individual and focus group interviews, a coding method of constant comparison was employed to identify the responses provided by each participant to each of the interview questions. Following identification, the responses were categorized and emergent and a priori themes were identified.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify the motivating factors that influence students with an associate’s degree to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private university. Universities
can utilize the identification and description of these facilitating and inhibiting factors to improve how programs and courses are developed and delivered to students needing to complete a bachelor’s degree. Findings from this study can assist universities in the prudent allocation of marketing dollars designated for the recruitment of these students.

Little research is available that identifies who decides to return to a university to complete a bachelor’s degree and when the decision is made to return to complete a four-year degree. The intent of this study is to shed light on the reasons and factors influential in the decision for those with two-year degrees to return to complete a bachelor’s degree. In addition, this study identified and described factors leading to student persistence during the program and the inhibitors and facilitators found throughout the program.

**Research Design and Guiding Questions**

The framework chosen for the research was a qualitative case study, the appropriate design to understand and interpret people and their experiences, how they assemble their worlds, and how they give value to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). The guiding questions of this research were intended to afford a comprehensive exploration and understanding of the motivational factors influencing the decision-making process used by nontraditional-aged students seeking to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private, not-for-profit university subsequent to completion of an associate’s degree at a community college.

The following guiding questions were developed to address the purpose of the study and focus this research:

1. What are the extrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?
2. What are the intrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?

3. What are the influencing factors that resulted in the participants’ decision to complete the bachelor’s degree?

4. What do study participants perceive as the primary motivations to complete their bachelor’s degree?

**Findings Related to Demographic Surveys**

A total of eight participants, two from each of the four accelerated degree completion programs offered by the NLU completed demographic surveys (see Appendix C), were interviewed (see Appendix B) beginning in April 2010 and ending in July 2010. Participants were enrolled in the following accelerated degree completion programs at National Louis University: Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS), Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM), Health Care Leadership (HCL), and Management Information Systems (MIS). The findings generated from the demographic survey are presented below and findings from the semi-structured interviews are presented in the Participant Interviews section.

**Participant Profiles**

The following section contains a profile of each of the study’s interview participants. The information was provided by the participants on the demographic survey (see Appendix C) and supplemented through probing questions asked by the investigator. Each participant was, at the time of the interviews, enrolled in one of the four accelerated bachelor’s degree completion programs at NLU.
Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) Participant 1. The semi-structured interview for ABS Participant 1 was conducted in a conference room on the NLU Chicago campus. ABS Participant 1 expressed determination to complete her education as a promise to her mother following the death of the participant’s significant other.

ABS Participant 1 identified herself as a “nontraditional” student (over 23 years of age) and indicated that she was a widow with two teenage daughters. She was not employed when she completed the demographic questionnaire in advance of the one-on-one interview with the researcher. When asked about her educational history, she indicated that she earned an Associate in Arts degree at Harold Washington College, having attended for three years. It has been five years since graduating from the community college. When asked about her employment history relative to her career goals and education history, she reported she had worked as an administrative assistant at law firm before becoming unemployed and was determined to pursue a master’s degree in public policy upon completion of her bachelor’s degree. ABS Participant 1 was excited to be included in the research project and indicated that her family supported her desire to pursue a bachelor’s degree in the ABS program. She was recommended to National Louis University by a close friend who graduated with an ABS bachelor’s degree.

Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) Participant 2. The semi-structured interview was conducted at the NLU Chicago campus. ABS Participant 2 reported that he considers attainment of his bachelor’s degree in ABS to be a personal accomplishment. He believed completion of his degree will be acknowledged favorably by his colleagues at work and was pursuing his bachelor’s degree because he can afford to do so financially.
ABS Participant 2 identified himself as a “nontraditional” student (over 23 years of age) and reported that he was married and, at the time of his interview, employed at a local, world-renowned museum. When asked about his employment goals relative to his career goals and educational history, ABS Participant 2 remarked that he had earned an associate’s degree at an area community college and was interested in developing children’s television programs. In addition, his decision to attend National Louis University was recommended by his wife and a community college advisor. Earning a bachelor’s degree will improve his opportunity for receiving a promotion within his department. Although his parents continue to offer encouragement, ABS Participant 2 stated that they want him to be happy in whatever livelihood he pursues.

Management (BSM) Participant 1. BSM Participant 1 expressed that she was over forty years of age and happy to have completed her dream of receiving her bachelor’s degree in the Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM) program prior to the personal interview. She reported that she was married and had one teenage son. BSM Participant 1 comes from a hard-working family that considered education to be an important goal. However, the family was unable to finance a college education for her. Therefore, BSM Participant 1 sought employment at area colleges that offered tuition waivers for employees. She discovered that National Louis University not only offered tuition waivers for employees, but also offered an accelerated degree completion program ideal for her situation. The program’s schedule allowed her the opportunity to work during the day and take classes one night a week to pursue her bachelor’s degree. She is currently employed in the Student Finance Department, pursuing a master’s degree, and receives a tuition waiver.
Management (BSM) Participant 2. BSM Participant 2 stated she is over forty years of age and enjoyed each day enrolled as a student in the Bachelor of Science (BSM) program. She reported that she was a married mother of one grown daughter. She earned her associate’s degree at Harper College, and was a strong supporter of that college’s women’s program. Working as a part-time employee in the industrial interviewing division for a worldwide package delivery company in Palatine, IL, BSM Participant 2 quit her job after 2 ½ years to pursue her educational dream. Once enrolled in her first class at Harper College, she was intimidated because she was the oldest person in class. But, as the younger students approached her with personal problems and sought her advice on various life issues, she no longer suffered apprehension but felt accepted by the very students that caused her anxiety. She gladly accepted her new role as “unofficial counselor” to the young students. When asked about her educational and work history relative to her career goals at the time of the one-on-one interview, BSM Participant 2 reported she was currently unemployed but, in a pairing of her educational history and career goals, was planning to begin working at Harper Community College in a few months.

Health Care Leadership (HCL) Participant 1. HCL Participant 1 was enrolled in the Health Care Leadership (HCL) program. She reported that she was married and had a teenage son and a teenage daughter. She was not employed at the time of her semi-structured interview. When asked about her educational history, HCL Participant 1 indicated she had earned an Associate of Applied Science degree in mortuary science at a local community college. The influential person in her life was the instructor of her mortuary sciences classes. She was impressed that the instructor grew up in the area housing projects and graduated from the high school located in the same neighborhood. The housing projects and high school are walking
distance from the community college. HCL Participant 1 believed that if her instructor could be successful growing up in the same neighborhood and attending the same high school, she could also be successful.

Following the completion of her mortuary science degree, HCL Participant 1 pursued employment at local funeral homes. She constantly met the discrimination of being a woman in a male-dominated field or the perception that she was too small to do the heavy lifting required in this business. When asked about her employment history relative to her career goals and education history, she reported that she was currently employed as a pharmacy technician and her goal was to become a funeral home director upon completion of her bachelor’s degree.

**Health Care Leadership (HCL) Participant 2.** HCL Participant 2 reported she was a married mother of one grown son. Prior to enrolling in the HCL program at NLU, she earned her associate’s degree in liberal arts. When asked about her educational and work history relative to her career goals, HCL Participant 2 indicated that she had arrived in the United States 14 years earlier with a high school diploma, but that diploma was not recognized by the local community college where she planned to enroll. Recognizing the need for documentation of her academic skills, she first completed a GED at Oakton Community College and then completed an associate’s degree at Harper Community College. Eventually, she enrolled in the HCL bachelor’s program at NLU. She was, at the time of the interview, working in medical billing and had no specific career objectives within the health care industry but was keenly interested in volunteering and giving back to the community.

**Management Information Systems (MIS) Participant 1.** MIS Participant 1 was enrolled in the Management Information Systems (MIS) program. She reported she was a single
parent, almost 22 years of age, and the mother to a 4-year-old son. MIS Participant 1 expressed that her family was scattered in various states, therefore there was little to no contact with her parents or siblings. She received little or no encouragement or support in her pursuit of her bachelor’s degree from her family.

At the time of her personal interview, MIS Participant 1 was employed in the Admission Services department at NLU. According to her demographic questionnaire, she had considered attending other colleges in the area but selected NLU because of its convenience in completing her bachelor’s degree online. She did visit several area colleges and universities to determine which to attend, but did not feel accepted in their environments. She decided to pursue National Louis University because of the persistence of the enrollment representative and the ability to complete the bachelor’s degree completely online. When asked about her education and work history relative to her career goals and future academic plans, MIS Participant 1 indicated that she sought to complete Cisco Systems certification following completion of her bachelor’s degree. At the time of the interview, her plans were to remain at NLU because of the opportunities available within her department. There are several positions she is qualified to fill and has submitted her applications for approval.

Management Information Systems (MIS) Participant 2. MIS Participant 2 was enrolled in the Management Information Systems (MIS) program. She reported that she was married and had two teenage sons and a teenage daughter. Prior to enrolling in the accelerated bachelor’s program at NLU, she had earned an Associate of Applied Science degree at an area community college. MIS Participant 2 continues to receive the support of her father and older brother and encouragement from her younger brother. She has witnessed the success of her older
brother’s real estate business, which has stimulated her to pursue her dream of starting a not-for-profit business. In addition, the people she encountered when employed as the office manager for a local city alderwoman encouraged her to pursue her bachelor’s degree. When asked about her employment history relative to her career goals and educational history at the time of the semi-structured interview, she noted that she was employed in course scheduling at NLU and was interested in beginning a not-for-profit business.

**Findings Related to Participant Interviews**

The data collected for this study were obtained from three key sources: (a) demographic survey; (b) interviews of two students enrolled in each of the following four accelerated degree programs at National Louis University: Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS), Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM), Health Care Leadership (HCL), and Management Information Systems (MIS); and c) data resulting from two focus group interviews of ABS students. The participants in the semi-structured interviews ranged in age from 21-59 years and included seven females and one male. Participants in the focus group sessions included 21 females and three males. This ratio of female to male students (7:1) is reflected across the university (National Louis University, 2008).

The responses of the participants to the interview questions (see Appendix B for a list of the Interview Questions) were grouped according to the degree completion program in which each participant is enrolled and purpose embedded in each interview question as follows: (a) importance/significance of degree completion, (b) educational and career goals, (c) influencing factors, (d) motivation, (e) support sources, (f) plans beyond degree completion, (g) changes in
self-concept, and (h) selecting NLU. This format was repeated for each of the eight participant interviews representing the four degree completion programs.

**Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) Majors**

The Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) program prepares adult learners to work and interact with people from a variety of disciplines such as communications, economics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Concepts and themes utilized from these disciplines prepare students to learn to understand, recognize, predict, and deal with the behavior of individuals and groups.

The two Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) participants in this research responded to semi-structured interviews conducted at the Chicago campus of National Louis University and an NLU off-site location at Triton College. The responses were grouped according to the following foci of the interview questions: importance/significance of degree completion, educational and career goals, influencing factors, motivation, support sources, plans beyond degree completion, changes in self-concept, and selecting NLU.

**Importance/significance of degree completion.** In response to the interview question related to the importance and/or significance of completing the bachelor’s degree, the ABS participants were divided. While ABS Participant 1 indicated that the primary purpose in completing the degree was for a better job (“I’m determined to complete my bachelor’s degree for a better job…I had to take some years off…in order to get back into school.”), ABS Participant 2 focused more on respect (respect of others as well as self-respect):

Certain opportunities have passed me by because of not having my degree…it’s the respect of my peers, the respect of my colleagues, and I feel I have that but it’s also satisfaction in self and pride in completing something I started so long ago.
Educational and career goals. Both ABS participants indicated that they were determined to attend a major university upon completion of their associate’s degree. ABS Participant 1 hopes to graduate in 2011 and plans to continue her educational goal in pursuing a degree in elementary education. ABS Participant 2, after volunteering at his daughter’s school, was inspired to pursue a master’s degree in early childhood education. ABS Participant 2 stated, “It is my dream to complete my bachelor’s degree in this program.” In addition, ABS Participant 2 noted, “I would still be focused on early childhood but not necessarily towards formal education. I’m not interested in getting certified, although I might do that, as I understand I can do that while I’m getting my master’s at a nationally accredited institution. I’m more interested in informal education. I like working with museums.”

Influencing factors. The influencing factors for pursuing a bachelor’s degree varied for both ABS participants. The primary influencing factors for ABS participant 1 included her mother (who was a nurse) and her own economic situation. She stated, “Economically, it was tough. I was on my own…to raise my daughter…I had to take some years off and…get myself together, mentally, and physically in order to get back into school.”

ABS Participant 2 indicated that it was his personal desire to complete his bachelor’s degree that brought him to re-enroll. He reminisced, “Well, I would like to just having [sic] the completion. I started when I was 19 and I just didn’t finish. I don’t regret the decisions that I made, but I just want to finish.”
Motivation. ABS Participant 1 revealed that her motivation to continue her bachelor’s degree was influenced through conversations with her mother and to provide support for her young daughter. After she lost her significant other, she lacked the desire to continue with her education. However, she could not fight the encouragement she was receiving from them. Her response was, “My daughter really pushed me to back to school. My daughter and mother, those two were responsible for me to continue for my bachelor’s degree.”

Unlike ABS Participant 1, the motivation for ABS Participant 2 was a result of an extrinsic motivating factor - an improved financial situation: “I was working while I was going to school. I was paying for school on my own. My parents were able to help me at first, but they had a hard time with that. Now I am able to come back. The financial [sic] was a big part of that.”

Support sources. The source of support for completing her bachelor’s degree, ABS Participant 1 noted, was encouragement by her mother, and in particular her grandmother. The grandmother raised eight kids who all attended college. She stated, “It was mandatory for me to go back to school.” The source of support for completing her bachelor’s degree, ABS Participant 1 noted, was encouragement by her mother, and in particular her grandmother. The grandmother raised eight kids who all attended college. She stated, “It was mandatory for me to go back to school.”

ABS Participant 2 and his wife, a professional cinematographer, developed children’s programs which encouraged children to go outside and learn through play and use technology in a healthy way and get them outside. It was the work with his wife in developing children’s programs, and her encouragement on these projects that provided him with support to pursue a bachelor’s
degree. He stated, “My family, my wife, my friends are very supportive of me in the work that I do. It’s just something that has been hanging there for a long time.”

In addition to support from family and friends, both ABS Participants received significant support from their community college advisors and faculty members. As ABS Participant 1 recalled, the following advice from her history instructor at Harold Washington College: “Don’t you stop there, continue on to get a master’s. Your whole life will change; you will feel better about yourself.” ABS Participant 2 also received constructive advice from his community college instructor. “My early childhood instructor at Triton College was so encouraging. It was my second class in early childhood. One of the first jobs I took out of the theater to make more money was as an art instructor at a preschool. So yeah, she was really encouraging and said I should stick with this.” National Louis University extended support to both participants towards their decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree. In the words of ABS Participant 1, “There was one lady, I don’t see her any more there, from financial aid. She helped me tremendously. Also, academic advising, that whole office there was very helpful. Everyone is really supportive. Good support, especially when I started the ABS program.”

The support ABS Participant 2 received was equally positive. He stated, “NLU was very supportive. I set up an appointment to meet with an advisor and talked about what my goals were. I talked to advisor that pointed out that ABS would be a good way to reach my goals without going over financially.”

**Plans beyond degree completion.** ABS Participant 1 was not really sure whether her life would be better once she graduates, but did believe there would be little change from her current situation. ABS Participant 2, however, expressed that the education and self-
improvement he gained would be applied towards his work at the museum and his work “with my children’s show.” Further, ABS Participant 1 concluded, “the recognition from colleagues, and hopefully a little more respect from my supervisors, will be a significant change from my current situation.”

When asked what they regarded as more important for their future, the knowledge they gained from the bachelor’s degree program or the degree they would receive, the ABS participants were divided. ABS Participant 1 stated, “The degree would come first. It will help me in the long run, and it will open a lot of doors for me.” However, ABS Participant 2 was much more meticulous:

I think it is the knowledge. I know that the degree will possibly open more doors. I’m sure it will. But I think when I have the chance to connect with someone and talk about the experiences that I’ve had and share [sic], my resume that stands on its own. For me, it’s the process of getting the knowledge and learning how to think, not what to think.

**Changes in self-concept.** Both ABS participants were clear in expressing the changes to their self-concept once they graduate. ABS Participant 1 responded that “this is going to help me, it’s going to boost me and raise me up...I will have more pride in what I have accomplished.”

ABS Participant 2 stated he’s happy to have followed through to complete his bachelor’s degree:

The pride in self and that sense of completion increases my self-esteem. Just being here this year so far at NLU, it has enhanced the way that I approach things at work and just in my personal life. It’s just great to have stimulation outside of work and family. They’re both wonderful things, but it great to feel my brain growing.

**Selecting NLU.** Several factors were responsible for the ABS Participants selecting National Louis University as their college of choice. “A close friend recommended that I attend NLU because of the small class sizes,” noted ABS Participant 1, “and the cost was comparable to
other schools in the area.” ABS Participant 2 concluded that “the experience of participating in a cohort is equal to being in a family. We’re going to have our differences, but this cohort group is like family.” ABS Participant 2 noted:

The convenience of processing my paperwork, filling out the forms and doing it online went just fine. There’s a good system in place to connect with advisors but I think at the beginning I was so excited to get started.

Other factors mentioned by ABS Participant 2 included:

…affordability and the convenience of the location in the Loop area. As I began meeting with the advisors and meeting some of the students that were already attending, it was obvious that people were comfortable here and it was just a very supportive environment.

**Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM) Majors**

The Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM) program is a nontraditional management degree program designed for business professionals who are ready for that next step in a managerial career. The BSM program is an experience-based program that enhances an individual’s skills to become more effective in the management of human, fiscal, and information resources.

The two Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM) participants provided data for this research study by responding to semi-structured interviews conducted at the Chicago campus of National Louis University. The interview responses were grouped as follows: importance/significance of degree completion, educational and career goals, influencing factors, motivation, support sources, plans beyond degree completion, changes in self-concept, and selecting NLU.

**Importance/significance of degree completion.** In response to the importance of completing a bachelor’s degree, BSM Participant 1 noted that her family stressed the importance
of education but was unable to support a college education financially. BSM Participant 1 interviewed schools that offered tuition waivers and was fortunate to obtain a job at NLU which offered tuition waivers to the employees. She stressed that education was always a goal: “I knew that I would achieve it at some point, it’s just I became strategic in terms of funding to be able to find a source to help me pay for it. I’m the first person in my family that graduated with my bachelor’s degree.”

BSM Participant 2 expressed that achieving a bachelor’s degree was a lifelong dream that she wanted to accomplish from an early age. The opportunity was made available to her when she enrolled in the Women’s Program at a local community college. Following her community college success, her educational goal was to complete her bachelor’s degree at NLU in the ABS program. She selected NLU because of its convenience and affordability, as well as the improved confidence and academic success she gained during her performance at the area community college.

**Educational and career goals.** Upon completing her associate’s degree, BSM Participant 1 was focused on completing her bachelor’s degree, but with minimal financial stress. This was realized when she was employed at NLU in the student finance department, and began receiving tuition waivers for her education. BSM Participant 2 worked 2 ½ years with a worldwide package delivery company in the industrial interviewing division. When she discovered that her immediate supervisor did not possess a college degree, it was the motivation she needed to pursue her childhood dream of attaining a bachelor’s degree. She commented, “Returning to school and being a student again was intimidating, because of my age. In the classroom setting with fresh, newly graduated high school students, I sort of felt out of place and
there was the temptation to leave, but I guess there is something that’s rooted in me, saying, well, ‘why not me? Why can’t I?’ Her concern was not about gaining new friends with her degree as she reflected, “It’s a matter of me accomplishing a goal that I wanted to achieve. That’s the bottom line. I have plenty of friends. More than I need.”

**Influencing factors.** One influencing factor for BSM Participant 1’s decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree was her becoming the first member of her family to receive a college degree. This was especially significant as her family stressed the need for an education, but could not afford to send her to college. In addition, being able to acquire a tuition waiver afforded BSM Participant 1 the opportunity to work and attend school to pursue her bachelor’s degree. BSM Participant 2 was influenced by the support she received as a student at a local community college. Because of her academic success, she took advantage of the opportunity to continue her education to pursue a bachelor’s degree.

**Motivation.** For returning adult students, motivation to pursue a bachelor’s degree comes from many sources. For BSM Participant 1, that motivation came from her husband who worked full-time and attended school at night. Seeing the sacrifices he endured provided motivation for BSM Participant 1 to pursue the bachelor’s degree. In addition, her parents’ desire for her to go beyond high school was another motivating factor for this participant. Finally, BSM Participant 1 stated, “I needed to get a job. That was the outstanding motivating factor for me to pursue a bachelor’s degree.”

At the industrial interviewing division of her workplace, BSM Participant 2 was responsible for in scheduling and interviewing potential workers, submitting reports, and maintaining files on past interviews. BSM Participant 2 was thorough and efficient with her
responsibilities; however, during her performance review she was never credited with her positive work. The failure to acknowledge her job accomplishments provided the motivation to pursue an associate’s degree, which eventually led to her pursuing a bachelor’s degree.

**Support sources.** Both participants were recipients of positive support from family members and friends. The father of BSM Participant 1 provided for an excellent private high school education, but encouraged her to continue her education at the community college level and beyond. Her husband also provided the necessary support during her community college days and encouraged her to pursue a bachelor’s degree after receiving her associate’s degree. Support was also directed to BSM Participant 2 through colleagues at the area community college during the pursuit of her associate’s degree. Instructors, advisors, and classmates encouraged her to pursue the bachelor’s degree upon completion of her associate’s degree.

**Plans beyond degree completion.** Each of the participants expressed satisfaction with their progress toward completion of the bachelor’s degree. BSM Participant 1 will pursue a master’s degree in psychology utilizing the employee tuition waiver available through her employer. BSM Participant 2 will pursue employment at the local community college where she completed her associate’s degree. She wants to assist other women who experienced similar hurdles she overcame in pursuing her bachelor’s degree.

**Changes in self-concept.** BSM Participant 1 remarked, “I’ve always wanted to continue my education, it was always a goal. I knew I would achieve it at some point.” She also considered the knowledge she gained to be more important for her future, rather than the degree: “I have a piece of paper… but if I can’t apply it or if I don’t understand it, or if I’m not able to articulate it or use it, then it’s just a piece of paper.”
Experiencing change in self-concept was not an issue with BSM Participant 2. She stated: “Once I became acclimated to college work along with the support of friends and tutors, all distractions were removed. I focused on assignments and became determined to succeed in each class”.

Selecting NLU. The decision to select NLU as her institution of choice was determined early for BSM Participant 1. Her husband completed his master’s degree at NLU and she committed to finishing her bachelor’s degree at NLU as well. The employee tuition waiver was the determining factor for both to complete their degrees at NLU. For BSM Participant 1, it was a matter of convenience. NLU was located in her neighborhood and she had heard positive comments about the BSM accelerated degree completion program.

Health Care Leadership (HCL) Majors

NLU's Health Care Leadership (HCL) bachelor’s degree program is suited to health care professionals with technical and clinical skills who want to expand their career opportunities by developing management, supervision, and leadership skills. The two Health Care Leadership (HCL) participants provided data for this research study by responding to semi-structured interviews conducted at an area city college and at a nationwide bookstore chain in the northern suburbs near the Wheeling campus of National Louis University. Their responses were categorized as follows: importance/significance of degree completion, educational and career goals, influencing factors, motivation, support sources, plans beyond degree completion, changes in self-concept, and selecting NLU.

Importance/significance of degree completion. HCL Participant 1 stated that the significance of completing the bachelor’s degree was to help her career move beyond an
associate’s degree in mortuary science. In addition, she would receive a pay increase at her current job as a pharmacy technician. She stated that her ultimate goal is to own a funeral home within her neighborhood once she completes her bachelor’s degree.

When asked to address the significance of completing her bachelor’s degree, HCL Participant 2 stated, “In today’s economy and the world of today, the job market is very competitive.” She further stated, “the higher one reaches their educational level, the greater opportunities for getting a better job and a promotion.”

HCL Participant 2 also provided insight regarding her economic situation and how that influenced her to pursue a bachelor’s degree. “Well, of course there would always be a need for more money. I knew I wanted to get my bachelor’s degree to be more competitive in my workplace, and I wanted to have more. That was my personal goal to get my bachelor’s. I also wanted to prove to my family that I can do it because I needed to prove to them that I if can do it, then they too, or anyone else could accomplish it also.” HCL Participant 2 stated her interest of creating a not-for-profit business designed to give back because of her success.

**Influencing factors.** HCL Participant 1 quickly stated that she was influenced by her community college mortuary science instructor to continue her education and pursue a bachelor’s degree. Her instructor grew up in the same neighborhood and graduated from the same academically challenged city high school. Seeing the success of her instructor had a profound effect on HCL Participant 1. She responded, “Wow, I would never have thought a person of her character came from a school like that. I came to the conclusion that no matter what your background is, that shouldn’t affect what you can accomplish.” Following her arrival in the United States over 25 years ago, HCL Participant 2 was denied admission to an area community
college because she did not have a U.S. issued high school diploma. After successfully completing the requirements to receive her General Education Diploma, HCL Participant 2 was admitted to the area community college to which she had been denied admission initially.

**Educational and career goals.** Neither of the HCL Participants expressed an interest in pursuing another degree after receiving their bachelor’s degree. HCL Participant 1 stated she will be happy to complete her bachelor’s degree in Health Care Leadership and to pursue a career goal of owning her funeral home. HCL Participant 2 repeated her interest in establishing a not-for-profit organization to aid persons who face situations similar to what she experienced.

**Motivation.** Community college advisors, instructors, and family members motivated both HCL Participants to pursue the bachelor’s degree. HCL Participant 1 was motivated by the success of her community college instructor. Growing up in the same neighborhood and attending the same academically challenged high school, HCL Participant 1 faced the same negative odds and was determined to overcome them successfully by pursuing a bachelor’s degree. The success she displayed in her mortuary science classes also provided her with the confidence and motivation required to achieve her goals. During her community college experiences, HCL Participant 2 also received her motivation from her classroom successes. Although she was intimidated by younger classmates, her classroom participation increased her confidence for her performance. Advisors and instructors provided her with the encouragement she needed to maintain her educational success.

**Support sources.** The family members and community college instructor of HCL Participant 1 were equally supportive of her educational journey of completing her bachelor’s degree. Her husband and mother provided the assistance she needed when she attended class.
Her teenage daughter and son also provided needed encouragement and support during her pursuit of the bachelor’s degree. The instructor witnessed first-hand the classroom successes, determination, and confidence HCL Participant 1 displayed on a daily basis. The student’s classroom success was encouragement for her to pursue the bachelor’s degree at NLU.

Family members and community college instructors also provided critical support for HCL Participant 2 as she pursued her bachelor’s degree. During a crucial conversation following a required class, the participant threatened to quit the course. Her husband asked, “Do you need the course?” To which she responded, “Yes.” Her husband replied, “Then you stay and complete it if it’s required.” It was this support that encouraged HCL Participant 2 to remain focused. Instructors at the community college recommended NLU for her to continue her education goal and pursue her bachelor’s degree.

**Plans beyond degree completion.** HCL Participant 1 was clear regarding her plans beyond degree completion. Her goal is to own and operate a funeral home within her neighborhood. Just as her community college instructor was an inspiration to her to complete her bachelor’s degree, HCL Participant 1 wants to encourage and motivate kids from her neighborhood by operating a successful funeral home. HCL Participant 2 is determined to create a not-for-profit organization to provide aid to students seeking an associate and bachelor’s degree.

**Changes in self-concept.** HCL Participant 1 expressed confidence throughout the interview. She gained confidence through the support of her community college instructor and her instructor in the HCL program. HCL Participant 1 faced negative odds in her neighborhood, her high school, and her community college yet she overcame these odds to pursue her
bachelor’s degree at NLU. This accomplishment to pursue her bachelor’s degree came with the support of her community college instructor, family, and NLU community.

In response to how she thought her self-perception had changed since enrolling in NLU’s bachelor’s program, HCL Participant 2 responded, “Well, I must say I have a lot more confidence now in myself. Yeah, I have more confidence. And I am more... I think I have more information to be able to deal with certain situations.”

**Selecting NLU.** The decision to select NLU as the university to pursue a bachelor’s degree was not difficult for either participant. HCL Participant 1 was encouraged by her mortuary science instructor at the local community college. Further, the HCL program provided advantages other programs did not: (a) the convenience of classes being held one night a week, four hours a night at a convenient location was a positive attraction; (b) the support of the NLU enrollment staff provided the necessary information needed to make a seamless transfer from the community college to the four year university; (c) the Student Finance Service Department provided the required paperwork needed to secure student financing; and (d) the undergraduate academic advising office worked closely with HCL Participant 1 to review transcripts and provided necessary advice about the courses required to graduate with a bachelor’s degree.

These services were also provided to HCL Participant 2 for a seamless transfer from an area community college to NLU. She stated that convenience of schedule was significant in her decision to attend NLU. HCL Participant 2 was encouraged by the attention extended to her by the enrollment department when she submitted her application. The convenience of the schedule and the amount of useful information supplied by the enrollment department were key in the decision by HCL Participant 2 to pursue her bachelor’s degree at NLU.
Management Information Systems (MIS) Majors

The Management Information Systems (MIS) program at NLU is designed to give a competitive advantage in the fast-paced industry of information systems. Employers need systems professionals who can bridge the gap between management and technology specialists. This program was designed to prepare graduates with the skills needed to manage information systems in various business settings.

Both Management Information Systems (MIS) participants provided data for this research study by responding to semi-structured interviews conducted at the Wheeling campus of National Louis University. Their interview responses were categorized as follows: importance/significance of degree completion, educational and career goals, influencing factors, motivation, support sources, plans beyond degree completion, changes in self-concept, and selecting NLU.

**Importance /significance of degree completion.** MIS Participant 1 stated she wanted to be a positive example for her four-year-old son:

It was hard before, not having certain experience and especially not having a degree when it came to finding employment. I was doing a lot of serving positions. Following the birth of my son, I wanted to complete my education with a bachelor’s degree. The economic situation for MIS Participant 1 was not good. Her family members were all in West Virginia and financial support was not available. Her dad did not finish high school and her mom could barely support herself.

The significance for completing a bachelor’s degree for MIS Participant 2 was equally notable. Her older brother earned a bachelor’s degree at a local university and owned a successful real estate business, which was a significant influence on her educational goal. In
addition, her desire was to be a positive role model to her younger brother and influence him to succeed in high school: “Also, when I was in the community college, my initial goal was to basically get my general education courses out of the way. I knew that I wanted to be in college, and that I didn’t want to waste any time and I knew I wanted to get a higher education.”

**Educational and career goals.** MIS Participant 1 expressed the following when asked about her educational goals:

You know, while I was at an area community college, I actually kind of started getting into what I would possibly want to do, which would be in the area of technology, just because I’m so drawn to it that. At first, when I started at Oakton, I started with architecture. But then I started taking electives in Java and C++ programming, and thinking I might actually want to go towards something like this. Yet, there’s also part of me wanting to somehow be involved with management.

In addition to completing her bachelor’s degree, MIS Participant 1 will advance her career through additional courses in advanced program certifications. The certifications would enhance her career at NLU through promotions and a possible pay increase.

MIS Participant 2 served as an administrative aid with a local alderman and is interested in pursuing a master’s degree in public policy. Her goal is to develop a not-for-profit agency to aid residents of her community.

**Influencing factors.** MIS Participant 1 stated:

I was actually really, really worried because I didn’t have insurance, health insurance, for a long time. So I’ve been getting sick a lot since I was younger, and so I had so many medical bills and a lot of stuff on my credit report, which I didn’t know they could put them there, but apparently they can. I was so worried about getting loans because, even though I qualified for financial aid, that doesn’t necessarily cover all of what you need to go to school. I don’t know if anyone’s going to actually be willing to give me a loan. I don’t have family members that are able to cosign.
It was obvious that having health insurance was an influencing factor for MIS Participant 1 to complete her bachelor’s degree after becoming an employee at NLU. When the researcher asked who had influenced her to pursue her education, MIS Participant 1 responded, “I didn’t have a lot of influence from family or friends because most are in West Virginia, or scattered all over. Much of the influence came from a relative with whom I lived in a nearby suburb.” When asked to identify the influencing factor for her completing a bachelor’s degree, MIS Participant 2 responded:

Probably my Dad’s voice. He has always said, from as far back as I can remember, how important school is, and the fact that we needed to get an education. Also, I have little children at home. So it’s really difficult to have to leave them to spend the time in school, but I had to do it. But I do it because I know it’s better for them and it’s better for all of us in the long run. I also wanted to set the example for them to see that Mom went to college and they’ll go to college.

**Motivation.** When asked to identify motivating factors, MIS Participant 1 responded, “There are some [vacancies] that [require] experience [plus] an associate’s degree. But, as I looked at job search engines and newspaper advertisements, it was always saying 4-year degree.” She expressed that her motivation also came from having a four-year-old son and an aunt who also had a child and attended school full-time.

MIS Participant 2 was motivated by economic situations and family influences. She and her husband lived in the basement of her parent’s home. This was not an arrangement they preferred but because she was in school and her mother served as an unpaid babysitter, MIS Participant 2 considered this the best arrangement for her situation.

**Support sources.** Both participants genuinely expressed that the support they received from family and friends was a motivating factor to complete their bachelor’s degrees. MIS
Participant 1 stated, “I think it’s very important. I think that if I didn’t have the support . . . when you have other people that are there to kind of back you, and be a foundation, you know it’s kind of nice because especially having a child, where you obviously feel some sort of responsibility.” Also, MIS Participant 1 was encouraged and had the support of an aunt who lived in a suburban community. The aunt had also attended school full-time while raising a child. She not only believed in her, but understood the how encouraging her support would be for MIS Participant 1.

“My Dad was truly in my corner to complete my education,” stated MIS Participant 2. In addition, MIS Participant 2 had the support of her older brother who was a college graduate:

It’s very important for them to believe in me. It’s almost gives me like that push to just keep on. So I’m getting not just moral support but lots of financial support from my parents as well. For example, having my dad and brother believing in me is very important. I think that if there was ever a point where they thought that I couldn’t do it, then it was almost like giving up on me.

MIS Participant 2 attended one of the Chicago City Colleges and when asked if she received support from the advisors or faculty, she responded, “there were a couple of instructors who provided support. A Latino English teacher, whose name I don’t recall, but I remember reading Shakespeare in his class. He saw my potential to succeed, took me under his wing, and encouraged me to keep going.”

**Plans beyond degree completion.** Both MIS participants will continue seeking additional educational goals upon completing their bachelor’s degree. MIS Participant 1 will seek Java and C++ programming certifications to improve her credential portfolio. The certifications will also augment her eligibility for a job promotion with her current employer and potential employers in the technology arena.
MIS Participant 2 not only plans to pursue a degree in public policy, she eluded to her plans to use her degree: “I used to work in an alderman’s office in the city of Chicago. And it was at age 19 that I started working there. And I think that working there opened up my eyes to a lot of things that are happening out in the world. It is through public policy that I can initiate change and improvement for others.”

**Changes in self-concept.** When asked how she thought her self-perception would change once she graduates, MIS Participant 1 commented:

For the most part, I did this on my own. That I can do more than sometimes I think I can. I’m an extremely stubborn person, and I’m not going to quit, and I just keep pushing myself, no matter [what].

Completing a bachelor’s degree reaffirmed MIS Participant 2’s self-esteem and confidence. She commented, “The pressure was on me to complete my bachelor’s degree following my older brother’s success. My parents instilled in us the importance of an education, and completing a bachelor’s degree. I had no doubt I would fulfill my goal.”

**Selecting NLU.** When asked what had influenced her to choose NLU to complete her bachelor’s degree, MIS Participant 1 responded as follows:

The convenience of completing [an] MIS degree online allowed me to spend more time with my four-year old son. I selected NLU because I worked here part-time and people influenced me and provided helpful information for enrolling in the degree completion program. Everyone helped me out, even the people who helped me with my transcripts, and the academic plan for taking classes. The convenience of taking classes one night a week for four hours a night allowed me to spend more time with my family.

“I was influenced to attend NLU by a Latino English instructor,” stated MIS Participant 2. “He was an instructor who constantly provided me encouragement to do my best not only in
his class, but in other classes, and in life. I trusted his opinions and sought his advice often regarding my educational goals.”

Findings Related to Focus Group Interviews

Focus group (FG) interviews were conducted on two of the NLU campuses in the greater Chicago area. The first focus group session was conducted on the NLU Chicago campus and consisted of 19 students enrolled in the Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) bachelor’s degree program. The second focus group session was conducted at Triton Community College, which serves as a National Louis University off-site location for the ABS cohort. All ABS program students (16) enrolled in degree-completion classes at Triton participated in the focus group session on that campus.

Focus group participants were asked to respond to the following four questions related to the research questions supporting this study:

1. Why is it important for you to earn a bachelor’s degree?
2. What were the significant factors in your decision to complete a bachelor’s degree?
3. What assistance, if any, did you receive from other sources?
4. Why did you select NLU?

Importance of Earning a Bachelor’s Degree

Employment. One of the focus group participants stated that her employer indicated that all promotions and pay increases for employees would be based on educational achievement. She wanted to improve her job status by completing her bachelor’s degree. Another participant responded that advertisements in her field of employment are requiring a college degree, a requirement not needed when she began with the company four years ago.
**Personal goals.** One frequently mentioned focus group response was that the family valued a college degree. They want the best for family members and believe a bachelor’s degree provides the best opportunity to achieve success. One respondent wanted to complete a bachelor’s degree to inspire her teenage son. Her goal was to encourage him to do his best in high school and to attend college.

**Higher earning potential.** One participant wanted to become an elementary school teacher. He was currently employed as a chef in a local restaurant, but wanted to achieve his dream of teaching. In addition, he would greatly improve his earning potential by becoming an elementary school teacher. The goal for another participant was to earn more money to support her family. By completing her bachelor’s degree, she was preparing to pursue her goal in the field of criminal justice.

**Impact on others.** One respondent was encouraged by her coworkers who volunteered to provide childcare for her on the nights she attended class. She was a long-time and popular employee with a state agency and had befriended many coworkers. Therefore, they wanted to show their appreciation to her as she pursued her bachelor’s degree. Another participant was the mother of a grown son who had dropped out of college. Fortunately, her pursuit of a bachelor’s degree motivated her son to re-enroll in college to complete his bachelor’s degree.

Table 1 summarizes focus group key responses to the question, “Why is it important for you to earn a bachelor’s degree? The categories included in the Table reflect the major emergent themes embedded in the focus group responses: employment, personal goals, higher earning potential, and impact on others.

Table 1
Focus Group Responses: Why is it Important for You to Earn a Bachelor’s Degree?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>• Promotions and pay increases will be based on educational achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Desire to improve job status by obtaining a bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advertisements in my occupation now require a bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal goals</td>
<td>• Family values a college degree, and believes it provides the best opportunity to achieve success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Completing a bachelor’s degree will be an inspiration to my teenage son to complete high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Colleagues will value my contributions at my job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher earning potential</td>
<td>• Becoming an elementary school teacher will improve my earning potential from my current chef’s position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I will be able to better support my family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Completing my bachelor’s degree will prepare me to advance at my current job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on others</td>
<td>• My co-workers encouraged me and provided childcare for the nights I attended class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Completing my bachelor’s degree inspired my son to re-enroll in college to complete his bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• My teenage son and daughter are performing better in school after observing how I applied extra effort to complete assignments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant Decision-making Factors

Supplemental income. Participants agreed that higher or supplemental income was a primary factor in pursuing the bachelor’s degree. One participant was preparing to retire within
the next three years. She wanted to complete her bachelor’s degree to pursue a teaching degree to supplement her income following retirement.

**Improved confidence and self-esteem.** “I want to be able to complete what I began,” remarked a respondent. “I’ve had difficulty finishing major projects for the most part of my life. I look forward to completing my bachelor’s degree, and regain my self-confidence.”

**Impact on others (role-model).** One respondent (a single mother of two elementary school-age kids) revealed that she wants to instill in her children the importance of an education - specifically, a college education. She recognizes that her children can’t fully comprehend why she is in school, but she impresses on them the importance of completing their assignments on time. She describes how she sits at the kitchen table involved in her homework, and hoping she has a positive impact on her children.

**Family pressure/expectations.** Many of the extended family members of participants had attended college, and completed bachelor’s degrees. When one participant dropped out of college her junior year, she disappointed many of her relatives. There was one relative, however, who encouraged her to return to school to complete her bachelor’s degree. She is happy she made the decision to return.

Table 2 summarizes key responses participants disclosed to the second focus group question, “What were the significant factors in your decision to complete a bachelor’s degree?” Thematic categories of supplemental income, improved confidence and self-esteem, impact on others (role-model), and family pressure/expectations are reflected.

Table 2
Focus Group Responses: What were the Significant Factors in your Decision to Complete a Bachelor’s Degree?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Factors</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental Income</td>
<td>• I was preparing for retirement and wanted to pursue a teaching degree for additional income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved confidence and self-esteem</td>
<td>• I never finished major projects in my life. Completing a bachelor’s degree provided me with the confidence I was previously lacking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I didn’t think I would be successful at a four-year college because I’m an older student. But, my success at the community college provided me with the confidence needed to complete a bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Following the death of my significant other, I was determined to complete my bachelor’s degree. My success in the classroom helped me to regain my self-esteem and confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on others (role-model)</td>
<td>• I wanted to instill in my children the importance of a college education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I have a son who dropped out of college that I hope will be inspired by my success to return to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family pressure/expectations</td>
<td>• When I dropped out of college, my family was disappointed. One aunt berated my decision, but encouraged me to return to complete my bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• My father only completed the eighth grade. He was extremely proud when I completed my bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I immigrated to the United States to improve my life. It was my personal goal to complete my bachelor’s degree to gain my family’s satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assistance Provided
Community college advisors/faculty. Many students were encouraged to continue their education from a number of sources. One student possessed strong academic skills and was eventually persuaded by her community college instructor to pursue her bachelor’s degree.

Another respondent received assistance to access the online financial aid application. The student had previously completed the paper format to enter a community college and needed assistance from NLU in accessing and completing the online format. Ordering books online for his first class was a challenge for the participant. The enrollment representative who recruited this student assisted him in ordering his textbooks online and provided instructions for future classes.

NLU advisors/faculty. Several National Louis University employees provided much needed assistance to students preparing to transfer to NLU. Several participants expressed the appreciation to academic advisors, faculty, and financial aid advisors for the assistance they were provided for a seamless transfer to NLU. Academic advisors provided information regarding general education credits that were needed prior to enrolling. There were faculty members who encouraged participants regarding the course work to expect within a class. The financial aid office provided vital information regarding scholarships, grants, and other funding resources.

Family/Friends. Many participants had relatives and friends who attended NLU and were aware of its positive reputation in working with transferring students. In several cases, participants had relatives enrolled in an NLU programs prior to their enrollment.

Table 3 summarizes key responses participants provided to the question, “What assistance, if any, did you receive from other sources?” Response categories include community college advisors/faculty, NLU advisors/faculty, and family/friends.
Table 3

*Focus Group Responses: What Assistance, if any, did you Receive from Other Sources?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Community College advisors/faculty | • My community college elementary education instructor recommended that I apply to NLU because of my success in her classes.  
• The conversations I shared with my mortuary science instructor encouraged me to pursue a bachelor’s degree.  
• The support I received from department chairs and faculty members provided me with the inspiration to complete my bachelor’s degree.  
• My biology instructor was my greatest inspiration to complete my bachelor’s degree.  
• The transfer coordinator worked with me when I first entered community college, and provided me with strong support and encouragement to complete my bachelor’s degree.  
• My high school math instructor is now a faculty member at my community college. He helped me to decide to continue my education to complete my bachelor’s degree.  
• The advisor to the Honors program of which I was a member recommended that I pursue a bachelor’s degree.  
• Because of my financial needs, I spent much of my time in the financial aid office at my community college. The financial aid advisor encouraged me to maintain a high GPA, which qualified me for scholarship monies. It was her encouragement and my grades that inspired me to seek and complete a bachelor’s degree.  
• I worked in the Student Affairs office at my community college. The coordinator stated my leadership strengths would be an asset if I attended a four-year college. It was her encouragement that led me to complete my bachelor’s degree. |
| NLU advisors/faculty | • The academic advising office at NLU provided me with useful information that encouraged me to |
enroll and complete my bachelor’s degree.
- My decision to complete my bachelor’s degree was inspired by the enrollment representative who remained in contact with me.
- An instructor in the MIS program of NLU offered a classroom presentation at my community college. Our conversation following the presentation inspired me to complete my bachelor’s degree at NLU.
- The financial aid advisor provided valuable assistance in completing my aid application.
- I received a community college grant because of my GPA and additional scholarships for maintaining good grades throughout my time at NLU.

Family/Friends

- My aunt was a big supporter in my quest to complete a bachelor’s degree.
- The coworkers at my job provided support in childcare as I pursued completion of my bachelor’s degree.
- My father was highly supported of my educational journey through high school, community college, and in pursuing my bachelor’s degree.
- My best friend is my wife who has supported me as I pursued my bachelor’s degree.

**National Louis University (NLU)**

**Convenience/location.** One of the key reasons NLU was selected by community college students was because of its accessibility via public and private transportation. One respondent attended her program at a community college where the NLU program was offered. This location was located close to her job and her home, which was convenient for her to complete her bachelor’s degree. Another participant works in the downtown area of Chicago and is able to walk to the Chicago campus for her classes. Convenience was the main reason she selected NLU to complete her bachelor’s degree.
**Flexible schedule.** One of the participants is employed at a local museum and considers the flexible course offerings and location as his main reason for selecting NL to complete his bachelor’s degree. The availability of enrolling in a program that was offered completely online was the deciding factor for another participant. She was able to remain close to her four-year-old son and maintain a full-time job while completing her bachelor’s degree.

**Time to completion.** The enrollment representative at NLU explained to a respondent that, with the community college associate’s degree, she would be able to complete her bachelor’s degree in 13 months. This was a deciding factor for her to complete her bachelor’s degree at NLU. Another participant would be hired at a new job contingent on completing a bachelor’s degree within two years. He enrolled at NLU and will be completing his bachelor’s degree within the time frame of 13 months, as explained by the enrollment representative.

**NLU Faculty and Reputation.** Over the years, National Louis University has developed a strong and positive reputation in encouraging and working with older and experienced students. The cohort delivery module consisting of small class sizes is well received by students. In addition, the flexible scheduling of classes allows working students to attend classes convenient to their schedule. NLU faculty members are experienced in working with returning and older students. The National Louis University reputation is a major attraction for most of the participants in this research. Many of the participants were encouraged by their high school teachers, community college instructors, and family and friends to attend NLU.

Table 4 summarizes key responses participants disclosed in response to the question: “Why did you select to attend NLU?” Responses are arranged by categories of convenience/location, flexible schedule, time to completion, and NLU faculty/reputation.
Table 4

*Focus Group Responses: Why did you Select NLU?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Convenience/location                 | • The campus is accessible by public transportation.  
• Classes for my program are offered at the community college where I completed my associate’s degree.  
• I could conveniently drive to the campus located near my job.  
• I could walk to the downtown campus from my home, which was extremely convenient. |
| Flexible schedule                    | • My program was offered completely online which allowed me to spend more time with my four-year-old son.  
• I work full-time at a nationally recognized museum, so with classes offered one night a week, four hours a night I was able to successfully complete my bachelor’s degree.  
• I work nights; however, my employer allows me to attend my classes one night a week to complete my bachelor’s degree. |
| Time to completion                   | • After completing my associate’s degree, the NLU enrollment representative provided an academic plan for my completion of a bachelor’s degree.  
• NLU accepted all of my community college credits, which allowed me to complete my bachelor’s degree in the stated time.  
• A new job awaited me upon completion of my bachelor’s degree thanks to the academic plan provided by the academic advisor. |
| NLU Faculty and Reputation           | • My community college instructor recommended NLU because of the strength the faculty.  
• NLU faculty works successfully with students of all ages.  
• NLU faculty members bring a wealth of experience to the classroom and successfully involve the students in class discussions.  
• I selected NLU because of the strong reputation in elementary education. |
Findings Related to the Guiding Questions

The following four guiding questions served as the basis for this research:

1. What are the extrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?
2. What are the intrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?
3. What are the influencing factors that resulted in the participants’ decision to complete a bachelor’s degree?
4. What do participants perceive as the primary motivation to complete a bachelor’s degree?

Findings specifically related to the guiding questions are presented below.

Extrinsic Factors

Extrinsic motivation factors include components expressed by the study participants such as (a) job promotion, (b) a pay increase, (c) a better job with another company, (d) respect from fellow employees, and (e) being more competitive in the workplace. Participants in this research supported these extrinsic factors that led them to complete a bachelor’s degree.

Factor 1. One respondent expressed her motivation to complete a bachelor’s degree in her assertion that employees were more likely to be considered for a job promotion based on
their educational achievements. Likewise, another participant was aware that completing her bachelor’s degree would result in increased authority and a pay increase at her current job.

**Factor 2.** Although one participant was not pleased with her current job, her motivation was the desire to find a better paying job that would allow her to afford health insurance.

**Factor 3.** The following participant works in a highly competitive environment with a local museum. He expressed that his motivation for completing a bachelor’s degree is an improved relationship with his colleagues and improved competitiveness with an increase of job responsibilities within his department.

Table 5 summarizes key responses participants disclosed to the extrinsic motivation factors in completing a bachelor’s degree. The primary extrinsic factors include job promotion, a pay increase, a better job with another company, respect from fellow employees, and being more competitive in the workplace.

Table 5

*Response Categories and Key Responses for Guiding Question #1: What are the Extrinsic Factors that Influence Participants’ Decision to Obtain a Bachelor’s Degree?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Promotion</td>
<td>• A job promotion was more likely to be based on educational achievements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Completing a bachelor’s degree would result in increased responsibilities and a pay increase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay increase</td>
<td>• Completing a bachelor’s degree would put her in line to receive additional compensation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better job with another company</td>
<td>• Her motivation was to find a better job that would allow her to afford health insurance. Completing her bachelor’s degree would</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect from fellow employees</td>
<td>• He works in a highly competitive environment and completing a bachelor’s degree would improve his relationship with his coworkers and lead to increased job responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More competitive in the workplace</td>
<td>• In my work environment, the ideas and recommendations I initiate in team meetings will receive more attention and validity from management upon the completion of a bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intrinsic Factors**

Intrinsic motivation factors included such components expressed by participants as experiencing pride in completing a bachelor’s degree, being the first family member to complete a bachelor’s degree, gaining more knowledge by completing a bachelor’s degree, and realizing a lifelong ambition. Participants in this research supported these intrinsic factors that led them to complete a bachelor’s degree.

**Factor 1.** The intrinsic factor, as expressed by one respondent, was to realize the pride in completing a bachelor’s degree and being the first family member to achieve this accomplishment. She received support from her parents through high school and community college, but they were unable to financially support her to complete a bachelor’s degree.

**Factor 2.** Another respondent expressed the satisfaction of having gained more knowledge which was considered be more valuable even than the degree. This respondent did not minimize receiving the bachelor’s degree; however, he gained a sense of satisfaction knowing he expanded his knowledge base.
Factor 3. One participant offered that her lifelong ambition was to complete a bachelor’s degree. Her mother constantly lectured her and her sister about the importance of an education. After enrolling in a local community college and achieving academic success, she was motivated to continue to complete her journey by completing a bachelor’s degree.

Table 6 summarizes key responses of participants to the intrinsic motivation factors of (a) experiencing pride in completing a bachelor’s degree, (b) being the first family member to complete a bachelor’s degree, (c) gaining more knowledge by completing a bachelor’s degree, and d) realizing a lifelong ambition.

Table 6
Response Categories and Key Responses for Guiding Question #2: What are the intrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing pride in completing a bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>• Participant expressed pride when discussing that she was able to complete a bachelor’s degree without the financial support of her parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the first family member to complete a bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>• Respondent was excited to be the first family member to complete a bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining more knowledge by completing a bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>• Participant expressed satisfaction of having gained more knowledge which he considered to be more valuable than the degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realizing a lifelong achievement</td>
<td>• This respondent’s lifelong ambition was to complete a bachelor’s degree to satisfy her mother’s wishes. Her success at the community college level motivated her to pursue this ambition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing factors</td>
<td>• Family members, coworkers, and friends provided the motivating factors for many of the participants to complete a bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived motivating factors</td>
<td>• Many participants expressed the following perceived motivating factors for completing a bachelor’s degree: owning a funeral home; better job opportunities; being able to afford health insurance; improved status among coworkers; self-satisfaction; and, improved self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Influencing Factors**

Influencing factors included such components as encouragement from family members, coworkers, and encouraging activities at their jobs. Participants in this research supported these components as influencing factors that led them to complete a bachelor’s degree.

**Factor 1.** This participant received encouragement from family members such as her mother, father, spouse, and siblings to complete the bachelor’s degree. Each family member had an impact on her decision. Her mother was unable to complete eighth grade because the family moved to another state for work. Her father didn’t complete fourth grade because of the same
situation; however, he was determined to have his daughter complete high school like her brother before her. She indicated her brother’s success in graduating from college was an influencing factor to complete a bachelor’s degree.

**Factor 2.** The influencing factor for another participant to complete a bachelor’s degree was the support she received from her coworkers. She and seven other employees had worked more than twenty years together in the same office for the county. Once it was apparent she was attending college at night their support was encouraging and welcomed.

**Factor 3.** This participant shared her experiences of receiving encouragement to attend college to complete a bachelor’s degree. Relatives and friends celebrated by giving a big party in her honor to express their support of her achievement of completing a bachelor’s degree.

Table 7 summarizes key responses of participants to the question: “What are the influencing factors that resulted in the participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?” The influencing factors are: (a) encouragement from family members, (b) support from coworkers, and (c) encouraging activities at their jobs.

**Response Categories and Key Responses for Guiding Question #3: What are the influencing factors that resulted in the participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement from family members</td>
<td>• Mother, father, spouse and siblings encouraged completion of bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mother was unable to complete eighth grade because of family relocating to another state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Father didn’t complete fourth grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Primary Motivation

Perceived motivating factors include such components expressed by participants as better job opportunities, pay increase, and improved recognition from coworkers. Participants in this research supported these components as perceived primary motivating factors that led them to complete their bachelor’s degree.

**Factor 1.** This participant expressed determination to own a funeral home. This was the perceived motivating factor for her to complete a bachelor’s degree. In addition, this participant thought she would be offered better job opportunities in the funeral home business by completing a bachelor’s degree. However, she quickly experienced rejection as she applied to local funeral homes for employment.

**Factor 2.** The primary motivating factor responsible for encouraging another respondent to complete a bachelor’s degree was the need to afford medical insurance. As a single parent with a four year-old son, completing a bachelor’s degree would lead to a better job and a pay increase allowing her to afford much needed health insurance.

**Factor 3.** Employed at a nationally known museum, this participant is confronted with departmental competition among his colleagues. He stated that completing a bachelor’s degree
would improve his status among coworkers and would personally provide him with self-satisfaction and pride of completing a bachelor’s degree.

Table 8 summarizes key responses to the question: “What do participants’ perceive as the primary motivation to complete their bachelor’s degree?” The perceived factors are: (a) better job opportunities, (b) pay increase, and (c) improved recognition from coworkers.

Table 8
Response Categories and Key Responses for Guiding Question #4: What do participants’ perceive as the primary motivation to complete their bachelor’s degree?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better job opportunities</td>
<td>• Expressed determination to own funeral home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wanted to complete bachelor’s degree to seek a better job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay increase</td>
<td>• Needed a pay increase to afford medical insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wanted to complete bachelor’s degree for health insurance for 4 year old son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved recognition from coworkers</td>
<td>• Academic achievement results in better job assignments in competitive work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Status among coworkers would improve by completing a bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Regain satisfaction and pride by completing bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings Related to Emergent and a Priori Themes**

Data analysis revealed three emergent themes to which the three a priori themes emanating from the literature and research were applied. The three emergent themes from the data analysis were (a) the promise of a better job or promotion, (b) the task of completing a
bachelor’s degree while employed, and (c) personal goal of attaining a bachelor’s degree. The three *a priori* themes included (a) the commitment to continue to learn (Timarong, Temaungil & Sukrad, 2002), (b) the satisfaction of achieving personal educational goals (Greig, 2007), and (c) the need for convenient and flexible class scheduling (Feldman, 2004). Findings were garnered from interviewing individuals enrolled in four accelerated degree completion programs and participants of two focus groups.

**Emergent Themes**

The following emergent themes surfaced during interviews with participants representing Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS), Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM), Management Information Systems (MIS), and Health Care Leadership (HCL): (a) better job and promotional opportunities, (b) the task of completing a bachelor’s degree while employed, and (c) the personal goal of attaining a bachelor’s degree. Participants in this research supported these components and identified several other emergent themes that led them to complete their bachelor’s degree program.

**Better job/ Promotional opportunities.** One ABS participant responded that her employer indicated that all promotions and pay increases for employees would be based on their educational achievement. Completing her bachelor’s degree would increase her opportunity to receive both a promotion and a pay increase.

Another ABS Participant related that advertisements in her field of employment require a college degree, a requirement not needed when she began with the company four years ago. This ABS Respondent wanted to become an elementary school teacher. He was currently employed as
a chef and not making very much money. He believed teaching would provide him with a better job and that he could increase his earnings by completing a bachelor’s degree.

The goal for another ABS Respondent was to earn more money by completing her bachelor’s degree. She would then pursue her goal of finding employment in the field of criminal justice, which would be a better job than she currently held that would provide additional promotional opportunities.

One of the HCL Participants had been employed as a pharmacy technician, but was determined to own a funeral home. She completed her associate’s degree in mortuary science at a local community college and was impressed with the success of her community college mortuary science instructor. She also wanted to complete her bachelor’s degree to pursue ownership of a funeral home. It would be a better job than what she had as a pharmacy technician.

Another HCL Respondent expressed the desire to volunteer her services to persons like her who immigrated to the United States. She had worked in the medical billing department of a local hospital, but was interested in giving back to her community through volunteer work. She witnessed many immigrants who needed the services of completing documentations for employment, completing applications to enroll in area community colleges, and assisting those wanting to be employed in the healthcare industry.

**Convenience of attending class while employed full-time.** The first ABS Participant was a widow with two teenage daughters. The convenience of the ABS program being offered one night a week, four hours a night, allowed her to spend time with her daughters. In addition to the responsibilities of raising teenage daughters, this ABS Participant cared for her ailing mother.
Another ABS Participant stated that the convenience of his class schedule allowed him to work full-time at the nationally known museum, and complete the work for a bachelor’s degree. Classes were held one night a week, for four hours a night. He worked full-time, was in class one night a week, and still had time to spend with his family.

The first BSM Participant sought the convenience of attending class one night a week for four hours a night. She was employed full-time in student finance office of the university while she pursued completing a bachelor’s degree. She and her husband are parents of a teenage boy and the flexibility of attending class one night per week as a full-time student allowed them time to attend to the needs of their son. The MIS Participant also took advantage of the convenience of the class schedule. The MIS Management program is offered completely online. As a single mother with a four year-old son, the convenience of this schedule allows her to work full-time in the graduate course scheduling department of the university and complete her bachelor’s degree simultaneously.

The second MIS Participant is employed full-time at the university and is also a wife and mother of three teenagers. She completed MIS Management bachelor’s degree program because of the convenience of the program being offered completely online.

HCL Participant 1 was employed fulltime in the medical billing department of a local health care provider. Although she had a grown son, she was able to work during the day and enroll in the HCL program attending classes one night a week, four hours a night. The convenience of this schedule allowed her to complete a bachelor’s degree.

**Satisfaction of completing a bachelor’s degree.** Following the death of her significant other, one of the ABS Participants stated that she experienced depression and loneliness but
realized the need to continue with her life. She prepared to enter an area community college to pursue an associate’s degree. Although she did not complete the associate’s degree, a friend encouraged her to enroll in the bachelor’s degree completion program at NLU. She expressed her satisfaction of successfully overcoming her depression and loneliness to successfully graduate with a bachelor’s degree.

The second ABS Participant expressed satisfaction knowing he would complete a bachelor’s degree. He related in the interview how in the past he never really completed major projects. Completing a bachelor’s degree was a major accomplishment, which provided him with personal satisfaction and accomplishment and proof to his family of his success.

For one BSM Participant completion of a bachelor’s degree brought satisfaction not only to her, but also to her parents who were unable to support her college education financially. She also expressed satisfaction that completing a bachelor’s degree was proof to family members that they could also accomplish this goal. She pursued her bachelor’s degree at a later stage in her life. The determination to complete a bachelor’s degree was her lifelong dream. By accomplishing this dream, she expressed satisfaction because of the support of family members encouraging her to complete the bachelor’s degree.

One MIS Participant stated she wanted to be a positive example for her 4-year-old son. It was difficult for her to find meaningful employment, but after completing a bachelor’s degree she experienced much satisfaction for her accomplishment. Another MIS Participant wanted to match her older brother’s accomplishment of owning a successful real estate business. To her satisfaction, she completed her bachelor’s degree, which resulted in her being a role model to her younger brother.
By completing a bachelor’s degree, an HCL Participant had the satisfaction of knowing she would come closer to being prepared to own a funeral home. She completed her associate’s degree in mortuary science and her next goal was complete a bachelor’s degree. She attained the needed business foundation by completing the bachelor’s degree, and now her goal is to work in funeral home industry with the vision of owning her own funeral home business.

Still another HCL Participant immigrated to the United States with the intention of making a better life for her family. She exemplified a strong determination to pursue education in the United States following the rejection of her high school diploma at a local community college. She returned to school to complete a General Education Diploma (GED), worked a few years, then entered an area community college to obtain an associate’s degree. Following her successful completion of an associate’s degree, she entered the bachelor’s degree program at NLU. She successfully completed her bachelor’s degree not only to her satisfaction, but also to the satisfaction of her family members.

Table 9 summarizes the emergent theme response categories and key responses of participants enrolled in the Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) bachelor’s degree program related to (a) better job and promotional opportunities, (b) the task of completing a bachelor’s degree while employed, and (c) the personal goal of attaining a bachelor’s degree.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better job and promotional opportunities</td>
<td>• Employer would base all promotions and pay increases on educational achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advertisements in her field of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 summarizes key responses for participants enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM) degree program related to the emergent theme categories of (a) better job and promotional opportunities, (b) the task of completing a bachelor’s degree while employed, and (c) the personal goal of attaining a bachelor’s degree.

Table 10

*Emergent Themes Response Categories and Key Responses: Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better job and promotional opportunities</td>
<td>• Performance review from a past employer never acknowledged her positive contributions; therefore, she</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was motivated to seek better employment.
- Education didn’t significantly impact income, until a revised company policy rewarded employees based on educational achievement and caused her to seek to complete a bachelor’s degree.

| Task of completing a bachelor’s degree while employed full-time | • Actively pursued employment that offered tuition waivers and the flexibility to work full-time towards a bachelor’s degree.
• My program was offered completely online allowing me to maintain full-time employment and spend time with husband and teen-age son |

| Personal goal of obtaining a bachelor’s degree | • My success at the community college sustained my confidence to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a four-year university
• After dropping out of college, the support of my family encouraged me to return to continue the pursuit of a bachelor’s degree. |

Table 11 summarizes emergent theme key responses by participants enrolled in the Health Care Leadership (HCL) related to (a) better job and promotional opportunities, (b) the task of completing a bachelor’s degree while employed, and (c) the personal goal of attaining a bachelor’s degree.

Table 11

_Emergent Theme Response Categories and Key Responses: Health Care Leadership (HCL)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better job and promotional opportunities</td>
<td>• Completing a bachelor’s degree would help her career as a funeral home director and provide her with a pay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
increase at her current job

- A bachelor’s degree would allow her to establish a not-for-profit business to assist other immigrants to the U.S.A.

- As a pharmacy technician, the flexible schedule of her classes permitted her to work full-time and spend time with her family.
- As a full-time employee at a local hospital, the classes for the HCL program were offered one night a week for four hours. This schedule allowed me to complete the bachelor’s degree program with little disruption to my family life.

- My goal is to become a funeral director and own a funeral home after obtaining my bachelor’s degree.
- By completing a bachelor’s degree, I will prove to my family my accomplishment and be an inspiration to my older son to return to college.

Table 12 summarizes emergent theme key responses participants enrolled in Management Information Systems (MIS) related to (a) better job and promotional opportunities, (b) the task of completing a bachelor’s degree while employed, and (c) the personal goal of attaining a bachelor’s degree.

Table 12

*Emergent Theme Response Categories and Key Responses: Management Information Systems (MIS)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better job and promotional opportunities</td>
<td>- Participant will seek additional programming certifications to improve credential portfolio and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Task of completing a bachelor’s degree while employed full-time | • Participant worked in local alderman’s office plans to pursue public policy after completing bachelor’s degree to assist neighborhood residents.
• Respondent shared that the flexibility of the class schedule allowed her to work full-time, stay home with four-year old son, and complete the bachelor’s degree online.
• As a full-time employee at the university, participant’s schedule permitted her to spend time with family and complete the bachelor’s degree.

| Personal goal of obtaining a bachelor’s degree | • As a member of a large family, respondent was the first in her family to complete a bachelor’s degree, an accomplishment that brought pride to her and her family members.
• Respondent is married, mother of two teenage children, rents living space in her parent’s home, works full-time, and expressed joy in attaining her personal goal of completing a bachelor’s degree.

**A Priori Themes**

_A Priori_ themes (i.e., anticipated themes based on previously published research and literature) include (a) the commitment to continue to learn, (b) the satisfaction of achieving educational goals, and (c) the need for flexible class scheduling. Participants in this research supported these components and confirmed several other _a priori_ themes that led them to complete their bachelor’s degree program.
**Commitment to continue to learn.** The first *a priori* theme to emerge from the analysis of primary research and literature was the participants’ commitment to continuing learning (Timarong, Temaungil & Sukrad, 2002). Interview participants agreed that they were committed to learn to improve recognition from coworkers and as a promise to ill family members. Whereas focus group participants indicated pay increases and promotional consideration would result from increased education, interview participants indicated that future new employees would be required to possess a college degree.

*Semi-structured interview participants.* ABS Participant 1 promised her ill mother that she was committed to completing her bachelor’s degree for her and her daughters. ABS Participant 2 was employed in a competitive work environment where his colleagues possessed a college degree. It was his commitment to complete his bachelor’s degree in the hopes of gaining the recognition from his coworkers for this positive accomplishment.

BSM Participant 1 possessed a strong commitment to continue to learn because of her family encouragement. Her family provided support through high school and community college. However, she demonstrated her determination to continue to learn by seeking employment at a university that offered free tuition for the employees. BSM Participant 1 took advantage of this benefit offered by the university.

BSM Participant 2 was equally committed to learn because of the success she enjoyed at the community college. MIS Participant 1 was knowledgeable in the field of computer programming. She was focused on receiving certification in different areas information technology. This commitment to obtaining certification in various areas of computer technology represented her commitment to continue to learn and improve in her field of interest. MIS
Participant 2 was inspired by the success of her older brother in the field of real estate. She was committed to progress beyond a bachelor’s degree as a personal goal.

One participant was committed to learn because of her goal of owning a funeral home. Her commitment was to complete an associate’s degree in mortuary science and learn as much as she could about owning a funeral home. This goal was the reason for her commitment to continue to learn and complete her bachelor’s degree. One participant was committed to completing her bachelor’s degree as an encouragement to her grown son and being regarded as a role model to him and her husband.

**Focus group participants.** Focus group participants were also committed to continuing their learning. One participant indicated that her employer was basing pay increases and promotions for employees on educational achievement. This respondent felt she had no other choice than to commit to returning to complete her bachelor’s degree because her employer was requiring new hires to possess a college degree. This new policy provided the impetus for respondent to return to school to complete her bachelor’s degree. In addition, her family valued a college education and she was determined to fulfill her promise to family members of completing a bachelor’s degree.

**The satisfaction of achieving educational goals.** The second *a priori* theme centered on personal satisfaction as a reason for returning to college (Greig, 2007; Feldman, 2004). Study participants supported this theme in a variety of statements (see Table 8).

**Semi-structured interview participants.** ABS Participant 1 expressed a great deal of satisfaction in achieving her educational goal of completing a bachelor’s degree. She endured the loss of her significant other, was raising two daughters, and was caring for her ill mother.
Despite what she stated as “tough times”, she achieved her educational goals. Likewise, ABS Participant 2 articulated his satisfaction of achieving a bachelor’s degree as an educational goal that made his family proud, especially his wife. It was also an accomplishment recognized by his colleagues at his job. Many of them completed college and this was a major goal for this participant to achieve.

BSM Participant 1 received the praises of her father upon completing her bachelor’s degree. Because her parents were not able financially to support her through college, she was proud to achieve this goal through her own efforts - working for a university that offered employees the benefit of tuition free classes. It was because of this benefit that this participant was able to achieve her educational goal of completing a bachelor’s degree.

BSM Participant 2 knew she had improved her chances of finding better employment by achieving her goal of completing her bachelor’s degree. She worked for a nationally recognized company with significant responsibilities, yet because she did not have a bachelor’s degree, she would not be promoted or receive a higher pay. She eventually enrolled in a bachelor’s program with the goal of completing her degree.

MIS Participant 1 did not have family support. She was the mother of a four-year-old son and had enrolled in an online bachelor’s degree program to complete her educational goal. Encouraged by an aunt who was also a single mother, this participant was able to spend more time with her young son and achieve her educational goal of obtaining a bachelor’s degree through the convenience of an online program. MIS Participant 2, her husband, and their two teenage children were living in the basement of her parent’s home as she pursued her bachelor’s degree in an online bachelor’s degree program and working full-time. She expressed her
satisfaction of completing her educational goal and was grateful to the support she received from her parents, her spouse, and her older brother during her full-time enrollment in school.

**Focus group participants.** One of the focus group participants wanted to be an inspiration to her teenage son. Upon completion of her bachelor’s degree, she hopes her accomplishment will encourage him to do his best in school and to attend college. Another focus group respondent indicated that her greatest satisfaction in completing her education goal would be to earn more money to support her family. She will realize that goal upon completion of her bachelor’s degree.

Still another focus group participant was encouraged by her coworkers at a state agency where she is employed. The encouragement of her coworkers represents one of the motivating factors and sources of personal satisfaction as she seeks to achieve her educational goal. Further, several focus group participants who were nearing retirement wanted to complete their bachelor’s degrees because they believed that the degree would help them supplement their income following retirement.

**The need for flexible class scheduling.** The literature and research (Radney, 2009; Rice, 2008; Schneider, 2008) related to returning adult students indicates that rigid class scheduling can be seen as a deterrent to enrollment. The participants in this research supported this theme in their comments below.

**Semi-structured interview participants.** ABS Participant 1 expressed the convenience of the classes offered one night a week for four hours a night. This scheduling of classes provided her with time to spend with her daughters and her ill mother. ABS Participant 2 was satisfied
with the convenience of the class scheduling. It allowed him to work full-time and to spend time with his wife producing children’s programming for cable television.

BSM Participant 1 worked full-time at the university, and took advantage of the free tuition and flexible class scheduling available to complete the bachelor’s degree. The location of the NLU campus was in close proximity to the home of BSM Participant 2. She also took advantage of the ability to work part-time and attend classes at night because of the flexible class scheduling. MIS Participant 2 took full advantage of the flexible scheduling of the online program to complete the bachelor’s degree. The flexible scheduling allowed her to spend more time with her four-year-old son. Participant worked full-time, was enrolled in the online program, and was able to spend time with her parents and immediate family.

HCL Participant 1 worked as a pharmacy technician full-time and was enrolled in the bachelor’s degree program. It was convenient for her to work, spend time with family, and attend classes. Participants who work full-time, travel for their jobs, or have small kids to care for approve of the flexible course scheduling offered by the university. Courses are offered one night a week for four hours, on weekends, and totally online for the convenience of the participants. Parents and business people who frequently travel responded that online courses allow them to care for children and conduct business, respectively. Participants who work full-time expressed satisfaction that they are able maintain a normal life schedule with the convenient and flexible course scheduling.

Three key a priori themes were featured during the semi-structured and focus group interviews of participants enrolled in the ABS, BSM, HCL, and MIS degree completion programs. The a priori themes and key responses are reflected in Table 13.
Table 13

Summary of a Priori Theme Response Categories and Key Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Priori Themes</th>
<th>Key Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Continuing Commitment to Learn   | • Worked in competitive environment where coworkers possessed college degrees. Commitment to complete a bachelor’s degree would gain improved recognition from coworkers  
• Wanted to encourage and be a role model to son  
• Shunned by family members because initially dropped out of college; gaining their support was critical  
• Expressed satisfaction in educational achievement after enduring the loss of significant other, raising two daughters and caring for her ill mother  
• Made his parents and wife proud of his accomplishment  
• Committed to completing a bachelor’s degree because of family encouragement and because of tuition reimbursement from employer |
| Satisfaction to Achieving Educational Goals | • Respondent stated her success at the community college level was encouragement to complete bachelor’s degree.  
• To own and operate a funeral home would be the result of completing the bachelor’s degree  
• To become certified in computer programming was the primary goal of continuing education  
• Would improve her chances of a job promotion and receiving higher pay at her place of employment  
• To achieve self and family satisfaction in completing a bachelor’s degree after immigrating to the US  
• To serve as an inspiration to other |
Flexible Class Scheduling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexible Class Scheduling</th>
<th>community college students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To share in the satisfaction of success with coworkers who had offered support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Convenience of class scheduling allowed her to spend time with her daughters and ill mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Permitted him to work full-time and spend time with wife producing children’s programming for cable television</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Took advantage of tuition waiver, because of flexible class scheduling was able to complete bachelor’s degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible class scheduling permitted her to work part-time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Worked as a pharmacy technician full-time, attended classes at night, and spent valuable time with family because of flexible class scheduling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pleased with the flexible class scheduling because her job required some out-of-town, overnight traveling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Satisfied with flexible class scheduling because it allowed her to complete a bachelor’s degree completely online, and spend more time with her four-year-old son</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enjoyed the flexible class scheduling because she worked full-time and was able to have a family life with husband and children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter Summary**

The findings presented in Chapter 4 identify the two descriptors of motivating factors, extrinsic and intrinsic, and how these factors influence the decision adult students with an associate’s degree pursue a bachelor’s degree at an urban, private Midwestern university. Participants selected for this research were enrolled in the following programs: (a) Applied
Behavioral Sciences (ABS), (b) Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM), (c) Health Care Leadership (HCL), and Management Information Systems (MIS).

To collect data for this qualitative research study, the following procedures were implemented: (a) the use of a demographic survey, (b) development of four guiding questions, (c) semi-structured individual interview, (d) focus group interview of students located at the Chicago location, (e) focus group interview of students located at a suburban community college location, and (f) review of enrollment and registration documents.

The demographic survey (see Appendix A) was instrumental in determining the range of ages of participants, educational and employment background, what influenced them to attend NLU, and the impact that obtaining a bachelor’s degree would have on their family situation. Data for each participant in the ABS, BSM, HCL, and MIS programs is further verified through the participant’s profile included in the demographic survey.

Four guiding questions/interview questions (Appendix B) were developed to address the purpose and focuses the study of the research regarding the participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree are. The questions:

1. What are the extrinsic factors?
2. What are the intrinsic factors?
3. What are the influencing factors?
4. What do participants perceive as the primary motivations?

The semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) for individual participants were directed to students enrolled in the ABS, BSM, HCL, and MIS programs. Participants responded to the following categories: (a) importance/significance of degree completion, (b) educational and
career goals, (c) influencing factors, (d) motivation, (e) support sources, (f) plans beyond degree completion, (g) changes in self-concept, and (h) selecting NLU.

Participants in the ABS focus group interviews were located at two separate locations, Chicago and an area community college. The four interview questions and response categories were: (a)

1. Why is it important for you to earn a bachelor’s degree?
2. What are the significant factors in the decision to complete a bachelor’s degree?
3. What was the assistance from other sources?
4. Why NLU?

The findings to the four guiding questions, which served as a basis for this research, are available in Tables 5 and 6. The response categories for extrinsic motivation factors (Table 5) include job promotion, pay increase, better job with another company, respect from employees, and more competitive workplace. The response categories for intrinsic motivation factors (Table 6) include experiencing pride in completing a bachelor’s degree, being the first family member to complete a bachelor’s degree, ability to gain more knowledge by completing a bachelor’s degree, realizing a lifelong achievement, influencing others, and perceived motivating factors.

The dominant emergent themes resulting from the individual and focus group interviews of participants in ABS, BSM, HCL, and MIS programs were categorized into three areas. Those response categories were (a) better job/promotional opportunities, (b) convenience of attending class while employed full-time, and (c) satisfaction of completing a bachelor’s degree (Tables 7-10).
Finally, the *a priori* themes revealed as a result of the individual and focus group interviews were consistent (Feldman, 2004; Greig, 2007; & Timarong et al., 2002) in three major categories. Semi-structured interviews and focus group participants alike agreed that (a) the commitment to learn, (b) satisfaction of achieving personal educational goals, and (c) the need for convenient and flexible class scheduling are especially strong motivators for returning to school to complete a bachelor’s degree program.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The results of this research clearly indicate the influence of extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors that influence students with an associate’s degree to complete a bachelor’s degree at a private university. Extrinsic motivation is defined typically as performance for some type of tangible payoff such as grades, money, or recognition. If rewards are unrelated to tangible payoffs, they are categorized as intrinsic (Covington, 2007). The research also addressed influencing factors that resulted in the study participants’ decision to complete the bachelor’s degree, the participants’ perceptions as to the driving motivation to complete their bachelor’s degree, and other mitigating factors related to emergent and a priori themes.

This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a specific private university, National Louis University (NLU), after completing an associate’s degree at a community college. Those facilitating factors include (a) the support community colleges offered to students wanting to attend NLU, (b) the support community college advisors and faculty members provided in the decision to attend NLU, (c) the support NLU advisors and faculty offered to students enrolling at NLU, and (d) the support and encouragement received from families and friends.

What follows is a discussion of the findings and how these findings support or differ from previous research related to transfer students. The discussion is followed by a presentation of the conclusions drawn from the discussion as well as implications derived from the findings.
Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for the improvement of practice, dissemination of the results and for further research.

**Discussion**

NLU developed four bachelor’s degree completion programs to serve the growing number of associate degree recipients from area community colleges who wished to transfer to a bachelor’s degree granting institution. The researcher interviewed two students enrolled in each of the four accelerated degree completion programs: Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS), Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM), Health Care Leadership (HCL), and Management Information Systems (MIS). Each participant responded to semi-structured interview questions designed to capture the rigor of their involvement in the programs. In addition to the individual interviews, two focus group interviews were conducted with students enrolled in one of the degree completion programs (the Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) program).

Data compiled from documentation, demographic surveys, and individual and focus group interviews were triangulated to confirm emergent and *a priori* themes. Participants provided rich and useful data to the following interview questions:

A. What is the importance/significance of completing a bachelor’s degree?

B. What are your educational and/or career goals for completing a bachelor’s degree?

C. What were the influencing factors in your decision to complete a bachelor’s degree?
D. What support services were made available from your community college and National Louis University that were influencing factors for completing a bachelor’s degree?

Respondents also provided insight regarding the changes in the self-concept they experienced in completing a bachelor’s degree and shared the positive support received from family, friends, and coworkers in their pursuit of completing a bachelor’s degree at NLU. Finally, respondents provided insights as to why they selected National Louis University to complete a bachelor’s degree following the completion of an associate’s degree.

Study participants believed they were successful in the transfer process leading to their baccalaureate degree in large part due to a combination of both internal and external factors to the student. They identified four primary factors which they believed contributed to their degree completion at National Louis University. These factors included the following: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, clearly identified educational and career goals, and institutional support (both from the sending college and the receiving university). These findings are consistent with previous studies (Bradley, 2010; Feldman, 2004) which have examined the experiences of community college transfer students and suggest that multiple factors influence student persistence and degree completion.

**Discussion by Guiding Question**

**Extrinsic factors.** The first guiding question was “What are the extrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?” A participant shared:

Certain opportunities have passed me by because of not having my degree…it’s the respect of my peers, the respect of my colleagues, and I feel I have that but it’s also satisfaction in self and pride in completing something I started so long ago.
Clearly, a bachelor’s degree is a significant goal. If rewards are unrelated to action, they are considered to be categorized as extrinsic (Covington, 2007). Significant differences existed for extrinsic factors among human resources professionals. Where some employees appear to need salary opportunities to reduce job-hopping, others view job status and supportive supervisors more importantly (De Long, 2010). Another participant shared, “I’m determined to complete my bachelor’s degree for a better job. I had to take some years off in order to get back into school.” Each participant was motivated by having to get a job, and taking advantage of certain opportunities to complete a bachelor’s degree.

**Intrinsic factors.** The second guiding question was “What are the intrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree?” Several participants were motivated to complete a bachelor’s degree strictly by intrinsic factors. Rowe (2010) sought to evaluate the potential influence of a mastery learning environment on changes in students’ intrinsic motivation to learn. One participant stated, “I knew that I would achieve it at some point; it’s just I became strategic in funding to be able to find a source to help me pay for it. I’m the first person in my family that graduated with my bachelor’s degree.” This participant was proud of the fact that she was the first family member to accomplish this goal. Another participant stated, “In today’s economy and the world of today the job market is very competitive.” The participant elaborates, “The higher one reaches their educational level, the greater opportunities for getting a better job and a promotion.”

Another participant continues on the question regarding her economic situation and how that influenced her to pursue a bachelor’s degree:
Well, of course there would always be a need for more money. I knew I wanted to get my bachelor’s degree to be more competitive in my workplace, and I wanted to have more. That was my personal goal to get my bachelor’s. I also wanted to prove to my family that I can do it because I needed to prove to them that if I can do it, then they too, or anyone else could accomplish it, also.

This participant’s intrinsic motivation is confirmed by McNickle (2009) as evidence that pride is an intrinsic motivating factor among older workers selected to replace Baby Boomer workers.

Influencing factors. The third guiding question was “What are the influencing factors that resulted in the participants’ decision to complete a bachelor’s degree?” Participants provided candid responses as evidenced by one participant who stated, “Well, I would like to just have the completion. I started when I was 19 and I just didn’t finish. I don’t regret the decisions that I made, but I just want to finish.” Kelly (2009) notes that achievement is a major factor influenced by intrinsic motivation. Still, another participant was influenced by her community college instructor. Her instructor grew up in the same neighborhood and graduated from the same academically challenged city high school. Seeing the success of her instructor had a profound effect on her. She commented, “Wow, I would never have thought a person of her character came from a school like that. I came to the conclusion that no matter what your background is, that shouldn’t affect what you can accomplish.”

Also, the encouragement of family members was viewed as an influencing factor for many participants. Family members and community college instructors provided critical support for one participant as she pursued her bachelor’s degree. During a crucial conversation following a required class, this participant threatened to quit the course. Her husband asked, “Do you need the course?” To which she responded, “Yes.” Her husband replied, “Then you stay and complete it if it’s required.” It was this support that encouraged her to remain focused.
**Primary motivation.** The fourth guiding question was “What do study participants’ perceive as the primary motivation to complete their bachelor’s degree?” One participant recalls her primary motivating factor as follows:

> It was hard before, not having certain experience and especially not having a degree when it came to finding employment. I was doing a lot of serving positions. Following the birth of my son, I wanted to complete my education with a bachelor’s degree.

The economic situation for her was not good. Her family members were all in West Virginia and financial support was not available. Her father did not finish high school and her mother could barely support herself. Completing a bachelor’s degree was her number one priority.

Another participant’s older brother earned a bachelor’s degree at a local university and owned a successful real estate business. Her brother’s success was a significant influence on her achieving her educational goal. In addition, she desired to be a positive role model to her younger brother and influence him to succeed in high school:

> Also, when I was in the community college, my initial goal was to basically get my general education courses out of the way. I knew that I wanted to be in college, and that I didn’t want to waste any time and I knew I wanted to get a higher education.

**Discussion by Interview Question**

**Degree completion.** The first interview question was “What is the importance/significance of completing a bachelor’s degree?” Participants enrolled in the degree completion programs were motivated to complete a bachelor’s degree by many supportive sources. As noted in previous research related to motivation theory (Bolton, 2010; Campbell, 2007), participants enrolled in the NLU bachelor’s degree completion programs were motivated to enroll primarily from family, friends, current employers, and job market opportunities.
Although the participants in this study identified certain extrinsic factors that they believe contributed to their success (job promotion, pay increase, better job with another company, respect from fellow employees, more competitive in the workplace), they were also aware of the power of intrinsic motivators (pride, first family member to complete a bachelor’s degree, gaining more knowledge, realizing a lifelong dream). Many described their ability to encourage and motivate themselves during a particularly difficult time. The nature of these kinds of motivations was primarily intrinsic. Consistent with previous research results (Coy-Ogan, 2009; De Long, 2010), participants often described moments where they paused to reassess their current situation and after much reflection, they used that situation to motivate themselves and ultimately persisted.

Sources of motivation (both extrinsic and intrinsic) was a primary theme emerging from this study. The source of motivation mentioned most often was participants’ memories of their challenging moments. Specifically, participants remembered incidents where other individuals indicated that the participants might fail and the participants then used that as inspiration to motivate themselves to work even harder to achieve their goals.

**Educational and career goals.** The second interview question was “What are your educational and/or career goals for completing a bachelor’s degree?” Semi-structured interview participants indicated that the primary motivation for transferring to a bachelor’s degree program was twofold: educational goals and/or career goals. For many participants, the impetus for continuing to the bachelor’s degree was extrinsic: a better job and/or increased pay. For others, however, it was clear that their purpose in completing the bachelor’s degree was based on more intrinsic values such as pride, family status, and/or self-image. It was not uncommon that
participants expressed that achieving both goals was the intention of enrolling in a bachelor’s degree program.

Contrary to earlier studies which suggest attendance at community colleges can diminish the educational aspirations of students (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Pascarella et al., 1998), many of the participants in this study had high aspirations and set clear educational goals which they also believed ultimately contributed to their degree completion. Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model identified future plans that included the opportunity to transfer to another institution as one of the variables that influenced students’ decisions and perceptions about the college experience. Several studies also found that transfer students who were successful in earning the baccalaureate degree had clear goals even before they had enrolled at the community college (Rice, 2008).

Many of the participants in this study appeared to be highly motivated students from the beginning. They knew what they hoped to achieve and established clear educational goals. Most believed that it was imperative to set clear educational goals and to gather specific program information before enrolling in order to prevent loss of both time and money. They emphasized continuously the importance of creating a degree completion plan prior to or at the time of transfer. The participants believed that setting clear educational goals provided a substantial advantage over students who did not establish similar goals or develop an educational plan.

Influencing factors. The third interview question was “What were the influencing factors in your decision to complete a bachelor’s degree?” A focus group participant indicated that the support she received from her coworkers was a major influence in completing her degree. She and seven other employees had worked more than twenty years together in the same
office for the county. Once it was apparent that she was attending college at night, their support was encouraging and welcomed. Another respondent shared that her friends and relatives were a key influence in her degree completion. They celebrated her achievement by giving a big party in her honor to express their support. Younger (2009) confirms as well that transfer students identified strong support networks as a contributing factor to their degree success.

**The role of support.** The fourth interview question was “What support services were made available from your community college and National Louis University that were influencing factors for completing a bachelor’s degree?” Most of the participants in this research indicated that support was critical in their decision to return to school to complete a bachelor’s degree. For some, the support came in the form of family and friends; for others, the support was provided by professionals from the sending institution and/or from the receiving institution.

A major theme throughout this study was that students’ relied heavily on various support networks which they believe greatly contributed to their degree completion. As evidenced by the responses of the participants and as noted in previous research (Burdette, 2009; Geisler, 2007), transfer students considered the pathway to the baccalaureate to be a “collective” (not an individual) journey. All interview participants indicated that they had received some sort of support from their parents, peers, or advisors both at the community college and at NLU. The participants believed these relationships and interactions had a significant impact on their successful enrollment into a bachelor’s degree completion program.

When participants were asked to describe their overall experience at the private university (NLU), many responded with a similar answer which was often, “it’s a good school, with excellent faculty and a strong reputation.” When asked to clarify, however, the respondents
pointed specifically to the support they had received initially from the enrollment and advising personnel. Unlike more recent studies which have examined transfer students (Burdette, 2009; Coy-Ogan, 2009; Geisler, 2007) to traditional, residential schools, the participating transfer students in this study felt a strong commitment and connection to NLU.

All of the participants were gratified and proud that they had made the decision to attend a university with a strong reputation. Though there was variance in individual experiences, they were pleased with their overall transfer experience at NLU.

Conclusions

Several conclusions were reached based on a review of the detailed responses to the interview questions as framed by the guiding questions and as reflected in the emergent themes presented in the findings chapter. The dominant area of the investigation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors influencing the transfer decision, are reflected in these conclusions as indicated.

Workforce Competition

For many participants in this research, competition within the work environment for greater pay and/or responsibility was dominant. This competition can be the result of employees not having a bachelor’s degree. Data collected from the workforce development leaders, the literature (Eisner, 2010; Hammond-McDavid, 1996), and many research centers, such as the National Center for Career and Technical Education, highlighted the need for further research to study best practices that strengthen partnerships currently in place and build extensive networks that include: college and university researchers, business and industry leaders, and frontline subject matter and skill experts. Further study on professional development opportunities is
necessary to fill the gap between reflection on the emerging trends and issues and the actions needed to add real-world, specific, innovative resources to present training and development services that strategically build a skilled workforce that contributes to economic progress.

**Promotional Opportunities**

Participants agreed that an advanced degree (i.e., advanced beyond the associate’s degree) resulted in increased opportunities for promotion in the workplace. One participant in particular agreed that completing a bachelor’s degree would improve his status for promotion within his current jobs:

You know, while I was at an area community college, I actually kind of started getting into what I would possibly want to do, which would be in the area of technology, just because I’m so drawn to it that, at first, when I started at Oakton, I started with architecture. But then I started taking electives in Java and C++ programming, and thinking I might actually want to go towards something like this. Yet, there’s also part of me wanting to somehow be involved with management.

In addition to completing her bachelor’s degree, another participant noted that in order to advance her career, she would pursue additional courses in advanced program certifications. The certifications would enhance her career through potential promotions and pay increases.

**Professional Respect**

A third conclusion emerged which was related to the professional respect one receives that comes with the achievement of a bachelor’s degree. All participants expressed the need for professional respect in the workplace, no matter their responsibilities or education. One participant worked in the industrial interviewing division of her workplace, which involved scheduling and interviewing potential workers, submitting reports, and maintaining files on past interviews. However, during her performance review, she was never credited with her positive work and the failure of her supervisor to acknowledge her job accomplishments provided the
motivation to pursue an associate’s degree which eventually led to her pursuing a bachelor’s degree. After quitting her job and enrolling in the local community college, she stated, “Once I became acclimated to college work along with the support of friends and tutors, all distractions were removed, I focused on assignments, and became determined to succeed in each class.” De Long (2010) contends that ultimately a collaborative workplace creates the need for generations to respect one another and value differences.

**Role Modeling**

Participants recognized that how they were viewed, especially by their children, provided an opportunity to become a stronger role-models. Enrolling in college to complete a bachelor’s degree was a major accomplishment for them and their family members, which resulted in respect gained by friends.

Current research (Eisner, 2010; Kea, 2008) highlights the significance of role modeling as it relates to higher education achievement. By completing a bachelor’s degree, participants in this study were impacting positively the lives of their family members (younger and older children), friends, and other relatives. One respondent (a single mother of two elementary school-age kids) revealed that she wants to instill in her children the importance of an education, specifically, a college education. She recognizes that her children can’t fully comprehend why she is in school but she impresses on them the importance of completing their assignments on time. She describes how she sits at the kitchen table involved in her homework, and hoping she has a positive impact on her children.
Career Aspirations and Goals

All participants in this study expressed career aspirations and specific goals related to future employment throughout the data gathering process. The educational/career goals participants held revealed that completing a bachelor’s degree represented (a) an increase in their financial earning power, (b) more respect from coworkers and colleagues, (c) enhanced marketability for a better job, and (d) help in attaining their career goals. When she discovered that her immediate supervisor did not possess a college degree, it was the motivation she needed to pursue her childhood dream of pursuing a bachelor’s degree. She commented:

Returning to school and being a student again was intimidating, because of my age. In the classroom setting with fresh, newly graduated high school students, I sort of felt out of place and there was the temptation to leave, but I guess there is something that’s rooted in me, saying, well, ‘Why not me? Why can’t I?’

Fishbein (1992) observes that students who are not intrinsically motivated frequently drop out of school.

Institutional and Family Support

Participants took advantage of support services offered by both the sending institution (community college) and the receiving institution (NLU). Advisors, faculty, family members, and coworkers provided support in the journey to transfer to a bachelor’s degree completion program. Studies related to the transfer function (Tremble, 2010; West, 1994) have emphasized that external support for the student in the transfer process is critical.

Further, participants expressed gratitude for the support they received from both the community college and NLU advisors and faculty. Advisors provided them with significant
information regarding transfer process and details related to the importance of maintaining strong study habits, despite the responsibilities of raising a family and working fulltime.

**Implications**

The findings of this research suggest the following six implications for the transfer process:

1. Transfer advisors and counselors at the community colleges and NLU need to collaborate more closely.
2. User friendly resources, including online transfer guides, need to be available to transfer students at both the community college and the university prior to and after enrollment at the university.
3. Individual colleges within NLU should consider employing transfer advisors even virtually as a help-line service if possible.
4. Transfer students benefit from one-on-one connections to transfer advisors.
5. NLU needs to consider establishing peer learning communities for incoming transfer students.

**Collaboration**

The first implication relates to the need for NLU and the community colleges to collaborate to help smooth the transfer process. Participants in this research engaged in discussions with advisors and instructors about continuing their educational goals for completing a bachelor’s degree. One participant regarding constructive advice from his community college instructor noted:
My early childhood instructor at Triton College was so encouraging. It was my second class in early childhood. One of the first jobs I took out of the theater to make more money was as an art instructor at a preschool. So yeah, she was really encouraging and said I should stick with this.

Barrio-Sotillo (2007) indicates in research that students who have a support system are more academically focused when transferring to a four-year university.

**Transfer Advisors**

The second implication of the findings is that both sending and receiving institutions would benefit from creating specific positions such as “transfer advisors.” The use of online, virtual advisors for “real-time” access (or a transfer student 24-hour “help line”) was mentioned as a possible method of providing this service. Students transferring from community colleges to NLU received positive support from advisors located at both institutions. One participant stated, “There was one lady from financial aid. She helped me tremendously. Also, academic advising, that whole office there was very helpful. Everyone is really supportive.”

Similar praise was extended by another respondent:

NLU was very supportive. I set up an appointment to meet with an advisor and talked about what my goals were. I talked to advisor that pointed out that ABS would be a good way to reach my goals without going over financially.

Sinwell (2008) indicates that students stated improved transfer information from counselors and faculty was key in preparing them for the rigors of university coursework.

**Transfer Linkages**

The third implication of the findings is that transfer students benefit from establishing on-going contact with advisors who will help prepare them for the transfer function (at the community college) and to help see them through to graduation (at NLU). Participants
expressed their appreciation for the support extended by community colleges and NLU for providing thorough transfer information and instructions. National Louis University employees provided much needed assistance to students preparing to transfer to NLU from community colleges. Several participants expressed the appreciation to academic advisors, faculty, and financial aid advisors for the assistance they were provided for a seamless transfer to NLU. Academic advisors provided information regarding general education credits that were needed prior to enrolling. There were faculty members who encouraged participants regarding the rigor of coursework to expect at the university level. Financial aid advisors provided vital information regarding scholarships, grants, and other funding resources.

NLU representatives explained that with the community college associate’s degree, a participant could complete a bachelor’s degree in 13 months. This was a deciding factor for one participant to complete her bachelor’s degree at NLU. Another participant indicated that he would be hired at a new job contingent upon completing a bachelor’s degree within two years. He enrolled at NLU and will be completing his bachelor’s degree well within the time frame outlined by the enrollment representative. Rice (2008) concluded that success was a result of a smooth transfer process from the community college.

**Online Resources**

Students today are exposed to more user-friendly online resources at both the sending and receiving institutions, including interactive resource guides, virtual advisors, availability of financial resources, and an unending wealth of information needed to make an intelligent decision prior to transferring. Two participants reflected about the convenience of completing the bachelor’s degree completely online. One participant was a single mother of a four-year-old son.
The convenience of being able to stay home to care for him and at the same time complete the degree from the convenience of home or work was a motivating factor that influenced her to complete a bachelor’s degree. Another participant also who also worked full-time and cared for a family member expressed satisfaction of being able to complete her degree completely onlin and meet her family responsibilities. NLU, as a receiving institution, makes available the completion of a bachelor’s degree completely online as indicated in the 2010-2011 catalog (National-Louis University, 2010-2011 Undergraduate & Graduate Catalog).

**Learning Communities**

Whether at the community college or at the university, transfer students could benefit from preparing for the eventual transfer at the community college and having access to peers at the university who have shared the transfer experience. Participants in this research were either recommended by a graduate of NLU or told of its academic strength by a faculty member of a community college prior to transferring which supported their decision to transfer. As one participant shares, “A close friend recommended that I attend NLU because of the small class sizes, and because the cost was comparable to other schools in the area.” Taylor-Mendoza’s research (2010) indicates that the establishment of learning communities at the California Community Colleges aided students who prefer to study or work in groups during or outside of class, prefer to meet with teachers or tutors one-to-one outside of class, and prefer to communicate with instructors and classmates online.

**Transfer Orientation**

The university should consider the implementation of a pre-enrollment orientation workshop and/or co-requisite course for transfer students to help provide a positive transition
from one environment to the next. Nearly all of the participants in this research were successful in transferring seamlessly to NLU. A major activity provided to students transferring to NLU was “First Tuesday.” It was advertised well in advance at all community colleges to capture the student population of potential transferees. Academic and financial aid advisors, enrollment and student affairs representatives, and faculty members were available to offer their services on the first Tuesday of each month to potential students. Many participants in this research had participated previously in a First Tuesday activity prior to enrolling at NLU. Enrollment representatives reviewed transcripts and discussed admission requirements. Student Affairs discussed policies of the school and policies governing students. Financial aid advisors provided information regarding financial resources (i.e. scholarships and grants). Faculty members would share course content and student expectations. A respondent shared, “Everyone provided helpful information for enrolling in the degree completion program. Everyone helped me out, even the people who helped me with my transcripts and the academic plan for taking classes.” Similar services were provided for students transferring to the teacher education program at Towson University (McDonough, 2000).

**Recommendations**

The findings from this study can be beneficial to the administration, faculty, and staff of sending institutions (community colleges) and to the administration, faculty, and staff of receiving institutions (four-year colleges or universities). Institutions would do well to identify the extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors that influence students to complete a bachelor’s degree and then provide interventions (personnel and programs) to help facilitate a positive transfer experience.
Recommendations for the Improvement of Practice

The following recommendations for the improvement of practice are offered:

1. **Students preparing to transfer NLU should schedule an appointment with the various service providers at the university (e.g., academic advisors, enrollment representatives, and Center for Academic Advising) to review details involved in planning for a successful transfer to NLU.**

2. **NLU should consider the establishment of an Information Center for Transfer Students. Trained counselors would staff this center to discuss with transfer students their educational goals and determine their motivation for wanting to complete a bachelor’s degree. In addition, extensive counseling would be offered to place students on the most productive educational path to complete a bachelor’s degree.**

3. **NLU should invest in a virtual presence for transfer student assistance. The “Ask Here” service would provide rapid-response access to transfer students to accommodate the unique needs and requirements of transfer students.**

4. **NLU should establish a volunteer peer support learning community consisting of graduate and current transfer students to provide encouragement and support for new and continuing transfer students to the university.**

Recommendations for the Dissemination of Findings

The findings of this research are especially significant to student services personnel serving both the sending and receiving institutions, as well as to academic support personnel at the receiving institution, for consideration in program planning to help assure a positive transition experience for the transfer students served by the institution. Recommendations for
the dissemination of this research include (a) publishing the results in relevant higher education journals and newspapers and (b) sharing the findings through presentations and workshops with professional organizations.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Several recommendations for further research are offered based on the findings of this study as follows:

1. To assist students who may suffer “transfer shock,” area sending and receiving institutions should sponsor joint research to determine strategies for identifying barriers and facilitators to transfer student success in the region.

2. To address the unique characteristics of many nontraditional age transfer students (i.e., students who are working full-time or part-time, raising families, and attempting to complete a full-time course schedule), alternative class scheduling and delivery methods should be investigated to provide for flexible course delivery to meet the needs of the students.

3. Compare the outcomes of virtual interventions with face-to-face interventions to measure outcomes effectiveness related to transfer student success.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rudolph D. Smith has served as Manager of Community College Partnerships at National Louis University (NLU) for the past eight years. His entry into higher education began at Kendall College in 1996 and he has been at NLU since 1998. Smith began as an enrollment representative working high school fairs and, as a former public school teacher and principal, has experience working with students, faculty, and administrators. In addition to his current role at NLU, he has also served as the associate director of recruitment. Prior to settling in higher education, Smith owned and operated Apex Office Products, Inc.; was a territory sales representative for Black & Decker Mfg. Co.; and was the customer service supervisor for Inland Steel.
Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

This survey is designed to better understand the motivating factors for completing a bachelor’s degree at a private university. Your response will enable institutions to accommodate your needs more fully.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND ACADEMIC STATUS

Age range: 22 to 29_______; 30 and above__________

Summarize Educational Background

1. How many years did you attend community college? __________
2. Were you a full time student in community college? __________
3. Were you a part time student in community college? __________
4. How many years since you graduated from community college? __________
   With which degree?
      (a) Associate of Arts (AA)____ (b) Associate of Science (AS)____ (c) Associate of Applied Science (AAS)____
5. What was your program/major in community college? ______________________
6. Why did you select this university? ______________________________________
7. Were you recommended by: (a) friend ____ (b) relative____ (c) community college advisor _____
8. Academic major in NLU? ________________________________
9. Why did you select this major?___________________________________________
10. Where are you currently employed? _______________________________________
11. Will obtaining a bachelor’s degree improve your employment opportunities?
    ________
    (a) Will you get a promotion? _______ (b) Will you receive a pay increase? _________
    (c) Will you receive a new job title? _______ (d) What? __________________

12. Has your family status changed, recently, as a result of you returning to college?
    _______________Yes - Please circle all that apply:
    a. Job change
    b. Relocation of household
# Appendix B

## Guiding Questions/Interview Questions

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<tr>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
<th>Original Interview Questions</th>
<th>Revised Interview Questions</th>
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| 1. What are the extrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree? | A. Why are you now pursuing a bachelor’s degree?  
B. Will you receive a job promotion for acquiring a bachelor’s degree?  
C. Will there be a pay increase?  
D. Will you gain more friends with a bachelor’s degree? | A. Why is it important for you to earn a bachelor’s degree?  
B. After completing your associate’s degree, what educational goals had you planned to pursue?  
• Have these goals changed since enrolling at NLU?  
C. Upon receiving your bachelor’s degree, will you seek more education or begin a career?  
• If more education, what degree?  
• What field?  
• If a career, which?  
D. What factors influenced your decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree?  
• Were economic considerations involved in your decision to pursue a bachelor’s? If so, which were most important to you?  
• Were personal and/or professional goals involved in your decision to pursue a bachelor’s? If so, which? |
| 2. What are the intrinsic factors that influence participants’ decision to obtain a bachelor’s degree? | A. Factors that influenced your decision most?  
B. Factors that helped you to decide to return to complete a bachelor’s degree? | A. My motivation to continue with a bachelor’s degree comes primarily from myself or from others?  
• If “myself,” please explain.  
• If “others,” who (e.g., parents, family, friends, spouse or significant other or employer)?  
• Why are they an important part of this decision?  
B. How important is it to you that “someone” believes in you?  
• If important, why is it important?  
• If important, whose |
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| 3. What are the influencing factors that resulted in the participants’ decision to complete a bachelor’s degree? | A. Did any of your community college teachers influence or support your efforts to complete a bachelor’s degree? | A. Did you receive support from your family in your decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree?  
   - What was the nature of that support? |
|   | B. How did the community college help you in your decision to attend a private university? | B. What assistance did you receive from your community college (faculty or advisors) to help you in your decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree?  
   - What was the nature of that support?  
   - If not, what support would have been helpful? |
|   | C. How did the private university assist you? | C. What assistance did you receive from NLU to help you in your decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree?  
   - What was the nature of that support?  
   - If not, what support would have been helpful? |
| C. Can you describe what it’s like to be a student again? | C. Do you believe that your life will be better once you graduate?  
   - What will change? |
<p>| D. What personal goals do you hope to accomplish? | D. How do you think your perception of yourself will change once you graduate? |
|   | E. How do you think your perception of yourself has changed since enrolling at NLU to complete your bachelor’s degree? |   |</p>
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<th><strong>D.</strong> Did you receive support from your family in your decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree?</th>
<th><strong>D.</strong> What about your NLU experience to this point leads you to believe that you will finish your bachelor’s degree?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> What do participants perceive as the primary motivations to complete the bachelor’s degree?</td>
<td><strong>A.</strong> What are your goals in completing your education and career?</td>
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</table>
| | **B.** Why did you select National Louis University to complete your bachelor’s degree? | **A.** After completing your associate’s degree, what educational goals had you planned to pursue?  
- Have these goals changed since enrolling at NLU?  
| | | **B.** Upon receiving your bachelor’s degree, will you seek more education or begin a career?  
- If more education, what degree? What field?  
- If a career, which?  
| | | **C.** Why did you select NLU to complete your bachelor’s degree?  
- What did NLU do or provide that was most helpful?  
- What could NLU do to make the initial decision easier or smoother?  
- What could NLU do now to help sustain your commitment to NLU?  
| | | **D.** What do you think is more important for your future, the knowledge you have gained in your bachelor’s degree program or the degree that you will leave with? Why do you think that the knowledge/degree is more important?
Appendix C

Letter of Invitation

Date
First Name Last Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Accelerated Degree Completion Student:

I am inviting you to participate in a study that will help to determine how and why students with associate’s degrees select one university over another to complete their bachelor’s degree. Specifically, this study will focus on the underlying motivation students rely on to make the decision to pursue additional higher education.

I am currently a student in the Community College Leadership doctoral program at National-Louis University (http://www.nl.edu). My dissertation research, “Identifying the Motivating Factors that Influence Students with an Associate’s Degree to Enter a private Four-Year Institution to Complete a Bachelor’s Degree,” is intended to shed new light on factors which might help transfer students succeed in completing a bachelor’s degree programs.

Your identity will be protected (your anonymity is assured) and will remain confidential. Further, your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during the study that you feel have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact me or my primary advisor as follows: Dr. Martin Parks, National-Louis University (Chicago Campus), 122 South Michigan, Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603, at 312.261.3019 or email at Martin.Parks@nl.edu. Thank you for your willingness to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Rudolph D. Smith
Ed. D. Candidate
National-Louis University
rsmith@nl.edu
Appendix D

Informed Consent - Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that will take place from December 2009 to January 2011. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Rudolph D. Smith, a doctoral student at National-Louis University, located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand the study is entitled Identifying the Motivating Factors That Influence Students with an Associate’s Degree to Complete a Bachelor’s Degree at a Private University. The purpose of this study is to identify what motivates students with an associate’s degree to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a private university.

I understand that my participation will consist of audio-recorded interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes with a possible second, follow-up interview lasting 60 to 90 minutes. I understand that I will receive a copy of my transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation.

I understand that my anonymity will be maintained and the information I provide will remain confidential. I understand that only the researcher, Rudolph D. Smith, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, audio recordings, and field notes from the interview(s) in which I participated.

I understand there are no anticipated risks or benefits to me, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be used to assist community colleges to become more effective in their strategic planning process.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Rudolph D. Smith, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603. Phone: 312/261-3037; Email address: rsmith@nl.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my Primary Advisor and Dissertation Chair: Dr. Martin Parks, National-Louis University (Chicago Campus), 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60603, 312/261-3019 or E-mail Martin.Parks@nl.edu.

Participant’s Signature _____________________________ Date________________

Researcher’s Signature _____________________________ Date____________
Appendix E

Informed Consent – Focus Group

I consent to participate in a research project conducted Rudolph D. Smith, a doctoral student at National-Louis University located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand that this study is entitled *Identifying the Motivating Factors That Influence Students with an Associate’s Degree to Complete a Bachelor’s Degree at a Private University*. The purpose of this study is to identify the extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors, identify the influencing factors, and identify the perceived motivating factors students with an associate’s degree to pursue a bachelor’s degree.

I understand my participation will consist of a focus group session lasting 1-2 hours. I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation. I understand my exposure is minimal to risks, no greater than that encountered in daily life.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential by the researcher coding the data and that my identity will never be attached to the data I contribute, nor stored with other project data. Tape, transcriptions and disk will be kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher’s domicile.

I understand that the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, but my identity will in no way be revealed.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher:

Rudolph D. Smith  
122 S. Michigan Ave.  
Chicago, Illinois 60603 USA  
(312) 261-3037 Email address: rsmith@nl.edu

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by me, you may contact my Primary Advisor/Dissertation Chair:

Dr. Martin Parks  
Community College Leadership  
National-Louis University  
122 S. Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60603 USA  
(312) 261-3037 / Email address: Martin.Parks@nl.edu

Participant’s Signature________________________________________ Date ________________

Researcher’s Signature________________________________________ Date ________________
Appendix F

Confidentiality Agreement - Data Transcriptionist

This confidentiality form articulates the agreement made between Rudolph D. Smith, the researcher, and [NAME OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMPANY OF A PROFESSIONAL TRANSCRIPTIONIST].

I understand and acknowledge that by transcribing the audiotapes provided to me by Rudolph D. Smith, that I will be exposed to confidential information about the research study and the research participants. In providing transcription services, at no time will I reveal or discuss any of the information of which I have been exposed.

In addition, at no time will I maintain copies of the electronic or paper documents generated. Further, upon completing each transcription, I agree to provide the electronic and paper documents to the researcher as follows:

Rudolph D. Smith  
122 South Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60603 USA  
(312) 261-3037  
Email address: rsmith@nl.edu

I understand that a breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Transcriptionist’s Name (please print): ________________________________

Transcriptionist’s Signature ________________________________ Date __________

Researcher’s Signature ________________________________ Date __________