ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF FIRST-GENERATION, FEMALE STUDENT
EXPERIENCE AND PERSISTENCE IN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRIO PROGRAMS

A doctoral thesis presented
by

Brianna Bates Parsons

to
The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in the field of
Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
December 2012
Copyright

Brianna Bates Parsons

2012
Dedication and Acknowledgements

The doctoral journey is not one an individual can accomplish alone. Support systems are vital, and the realization and culmination of a doctoral degree comes from the guidance, patience and support from many.

I would like to thank Northeastern University for the opportunity to pursue my doctoral degree. The faculty and staff were accommodating, helpful and gracious throughout the process. The College of Professional Studies employs a truly remarkable group of people, least of which is my advisor, Dr. Jane Lohmann. Jane, your guidance, brilliance and humor have made this project so very rewarding, and I am humbled and grateful for your encouragement, support, mentoring and dedication.

To my second reader, Dr. Kim Nolan, I am also grateful for your time, experience and knowledge. You have been a wonderful resource and I am thrilled to have had the opportunity to work with you.

And to Dr. Nicolle Sisia, my external examiner, your constant support and friendship are nothing short of a blessing. I am very lucky to have had your help and insight throughout this process. Thank you.

My family, of course, has endured the trials and tribulations that are inherent to the process; Dad, Sally, Mom, Andrew, and Craig; I owe all of you a debt of gratitude and appreciation for everything you’ve done.

Finally, I’d like to thank the participants of my study. Without your help, this would not have come to fruition. Your honesty, willingness to share and openness were a true gift. I am proud to be able to share your stories.
Abstract

First-generation, female college students often face an uphill battle in their quest for degree attainment. Literature suggests several areas in which first-generation college students struggle, but there are programs designed to help this demographic of student; specifically the TRiO program, a federally-funded operation that specializes in academic assistance, advising and tutoring in math, science and English. The following research investigates how TRiO participants experience higher education in terms of academic and social integration, and how they understand persistence.

The TRiO program has demonstrated immense success ~ taking what is less than a 30% persistence rate within the community colleges and showing an astounding 97% persistence rate for their enrolled students. This study explores the academic and social experience of these students, and how they view their persistence; in effort to help heighten awareness for both faculty and administration, in hopes of better developing interventions to help increase levels of persistence and student success. As community college enrollment is at an all-time high, and enrollment (and demand for graduates) continues to climb, the study is timely and purposeful.

The study was conducted through the lens of motivational theory, specifically the Self-Determined Theory of Motivation in effort to understand how motivation and experience play a role in persistence, especially persistence against great odds. The aim of the study was to answer the research questions of:

- How do first-generation, female students enrolled in a TRiO program describe and understand persistence?
- What is the academic and social experience of these students?
Phenomenological in nature, this study employed personal interviews conducted with a purposeful sampling of female, first-generation, Maine community college students. The method of data dissemination is through textual and structural coding, and development of emergent themes.

Key Words:
Phenomenological Study, First-Generation Student, Student Persistence, Motivational Theory, Academic and Social Integration

Brianna Bates Parsons

Dr. Jane Lohmann
Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND AND NEED 10-34

INTRODUCTION 10-11

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE 11-14

SIGNIFICANCE 14-16

PRACTICAL GOALS 16-17

INTELLECTUAL GOALS 17

INFORMATION 17-19

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 19-20

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS 20-34

INTRODUCTION 20-21

SELF-DETERMINED THEORY OF MOTIVATION 21-22

COGNITIVE EVALUATION THEORY 22-25

ORGANISMIC INTEGRATION THEORY 25-27

CASUALITY ORIENTATIONS THEORY 27-29

BASIC NEEDS THEORY 29

GOAL CONTENTS THEORY 29-30

RELATION TO RESEARCH QUESTION 30-31

RELATION TO RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 31-32

LIMITATIONS 32-33

ORGANIZATION OF STUDY 33-34

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW 35-53
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT 35-36
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES 36-37
THE MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM 37-39
BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES 40-44
THE ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY 44-48
COMMUTER AND PART-TIME STUDENTS 48-51
PART-TIME FACULTY 51-53

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY 54-72
RESEARCH DESIGN & APPROACH 54-55
PHENOMENOLOGY 55-58
SITE AND PARTICIPANTS 58-60
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOL 60-62
DATA COLLECTION 62-65
DATA ANALYSIS 65-68
TIMELINE 68
LIMITATIONS 68-69
VALIDITY AND CREDIBILITY 69-71
RESEARCHER BIAS 71
RIGOR 71-72

CHAPTER 4: DATA 73-112
ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTER 73
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS 113-131

INTRODUCTION 113-114

REVIEW OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 114-115
FINDING #1: CREATING A COMMUNITY OF COMMUNITIES 115-120

“THIS IS MY PLACE” 115-116

“I AM WORTHY” 116-118

“PEOPLE COME HERE FOR HELP” 118-119

“I DID THIS FOR ME” 119-120

FINDING #2: ANY HELP IS GOOD HELP 120-123

“NOT A MAGIC PILL” 120-121

“PULL UP YOUR BOOTSTRAPS” 121-123

FINDING #3: A CULTURAL DISCONNECT 123-127

“They Are Busy…Don’t Bother Them” 123-125

“A Bridge or a Pathway…An Identity” 125-127

FUTURE TOPICS OF STUDY 127-129

CONCLUSION 129-130

REFERENCES 131-141

APPENDIX A 142

APPENDIX B 143

APPENDIX C 144-147

APPENDIX D 148-149

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS 80

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES AND EMERGENT THEMES 100

TABLE 3: AN EXAMINATION OF A THEME 101
Chapter One: The Research Problem

The Maine Community College System (MCCS) is comprised of seven schools throughout the state of Maine - ranging from southernmost York County to Presque Isle, in the North and East to Machias. Each school offers a variety of liberal arts programs, medical programs and a plethora of technical studies. While the programs vary from school to school, the constant is that the MCCS provides a cost effective one-year certificate, two-year diploma or two-year degree to students interested in pursuing the work environment.

Enrollment has increased dramatically since the advent of "becoming" community colleges in 2003 – a 76% increase and the Maine Community College System is now home to almost 18,000 students (MCCS, 2011).

Of the 18,000 students, 50% attend part-time. The average age of the student body is 27 years old, and it is an even 50/50 split between male and female students. 76% of Maine Community College students receive some form of financial aid (MCCS, 2011). This is important to note as 37% of students in Maine (under age 18) live in low-income families, of which 25% live below the poverty level (Maine, 2010).

While growth and change are generally considered positive in terms of education, too much growth, too quickly can have detrimental effects to a school, a system and its students. In the midterm year of 2009 alone, the Maine Community College System enrollment saw a 20% rise across the system, with the highest increase an astounding 38% increase one school alone (Pelletier, 2009). As a result, the Maine Community College System turned away over 4,000 applicants in 2009 (Claffey, 2010). Classroom sizes increase, waitlists for not only programs but individual classes increased, and in
some cases, four students were fighting for one seat in a classroom. For a demographic of student who struggle to remain in school, individual attention is vital to their persistence; and competition and/or waiting is not an option.

With the change from "technical college" to "community college" came a new demographic of student. No longer are the schools primarily focused on the trades, but instead offer a wide range of programs and now accommodate an even wider student body demographic, including first-generation college students. Pineda and Bowes (1995) state, "older, part time students; full time workers; evening students; commuter students; and women represent a significant population in today's community colleges" (Pineda and Bowes, 1995, p.151 as cited in Ryan, 2003).

The school used for the purpose of this research has a higher than average, part-time attendance rate of 73.7% and a commuter rate of 100% (Petersons, 2010, p. 186).

**Problem of Practice**

The first-generation, commuter student, can be defined as "at risk," as determined by abysmal persistence and graduation rates. To make matters worse, the state of Maine is a traditionally poor, rural state, one in which many jobs are governed by local economy and subject to frequent change. As such, displaced workers often become students, and are forced to not only attend school, but continue their traditional role in life; be it parents, caretaker, part-time employee or some combination thereof. For students who are not only attending school, but with outside demands and pressures, these issues are amplified.
The incidence of first generation college students is on the rise, with an estimated fifty percent of community college students falling into the category (McMurray & Sorrels, 2009, p. 211). Community colleges are not known for their outstanding persistence and graduation rates, with only one in four students graduating five years from their given date of entry (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006) and less than half earning a degree or certificate within eight years of initial enrollment (Bailey & Morest, 2006). It should also be noted that of those that fail to persist, seventy-five percent are female (Eitel & Martin, 2009). This research aims to determine what the academic and social experience of first-generation, female students in the TRiO program; and understand how and why this experience lends itself to their exceptional retention and success rates.

Programs exist to help this demographic of student, and they have very good success rates. For example, a program known as TRiO is a national, federally funded student support service, which caters to first-generation students, low-income students, as well as students with disabilities. TRiO itself developed during the late 1960’s and continued into the 1970’s with the creation of Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, Student Support Services Program and Educational Opportunity Centers; together the four programs form TRiO, which is not an acronym in of itself (Association for the Equality and Excellence in Education, Inc., 2010). At the institutional level, the TRiO Project “works with 180 students each year, helping them to:

- Remain in college from semester to semester,
- Maintain good academic standing,
- Graduate and/or transfer to a 4-year college within three years" (MCCS, 2011).

The results are well worth the effort, as the TRiO program boasts:

- "93% of the students receiving learning assistance from TRiO in the last academic year earned a grade of C or better.
- 96% of students enrolled in the TRiO program were in good academic standing at the end of the project year (students had a GPA of 2.0 or higher).
- 97% of first year TRiO students returned for the next academic year (MCCS, 2011).

While these statistics are impressive when standing alone, they are even more so when compared to the requirements placed upon TRiO programs. Those numbers include the following:

- 75% of all cohort participants must return for the next academic year.
- 80% of all cohort participants must remain in good academic standing.
- 33% of all cohort participants must graduate each academic year.
- 5% of all cohort participants (included in the 33%) must transfer to another school (Jones, 2012).

It is important to note that only 180 students were part of this program. What was the experience of these students? Why did they apply and enroll in the TRiO program? Were they more engaged academically and socially as a result? The number of 180 is not arbitrary; it is the number set forth by the grant that TRiO receives. C. Jones, the TRiO coordinator notes that "Female students are more likely than males to seek out our
services” and that "Older students (25+) are more likely than the 18-24 year old population to seek services” (Jones, 2011).

A secondary source area in which to measure motivation is through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The areas of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, supportive campus environments and enriching educational experiences (LaNasa, Cabrera, & Trangsrud, 2007, p. 316) are all part of the overall academic and social integration of a student; knowing that students who are academically and socially integrated are more likely to succeed, these areas are key. Behaviors and motivation of an individual to seek support and interaction in these areas is but another step in determining a profile of student success.

With such programs and already determined instruments available, why are drop-out rates still higher for first-generation students? What is the motivational profile of a student who seeks out engagement, academic and social support? What are their stories of struggle, commitment and ultimately, triumph?

**Significance**

There are several layers of significance to problem of best understanding the social and academic issues that first-generation students face, and how best to serve them. First-generation students are known to lag behind their non-first generation student counterparts in many academic areas, including individual-level cognitive development, degree plans, academic motivation, secondary school grades, parental income (Pascarella, 2004). The term “first generation” it of itself has varying definitions, but for the purposes of this study, the definition provided by the U.S. Department of Education’s TRIO
programs will be followed. It states, “first-generation” students are defined as students whose parents have never earned a bachelor’s degree but may have some postsecondary experience” (as cited in Trombley & Youhanna, 2004).

Within these broad categorizations lie many areas that contribute to the likelihood of failing to persist. Coley (2000) identified seven demographic factors that affect persistence and degree attainment for community college students: (a) delayed entry, (b) part-time enrollment, (c) full-time work, (d) financial independence, (e) dependents, (f) single parenthood, and (g) community college attendance without a high school diploma”. Additionally, Achieving the Dream (2006) states that “approximately 70% of community college students face at least one of the aforementioned challenges and 50% face two or more” (as cited in Burns, 2010, p. 35).

There is more at stake than just an individual failing out of school. By 2018, the state of Maine will need nearly 140,000 additional workers with a two year degree (Georgetown as cited in Leary, 2010). Studies suggest 96% of all community college graduates will find work within the state of Maine (Sun Journal, 2006). Nonetheless, if we cannot graduate the students, the jobs will not be filled. This is not only a concern for the state of Maine, but is a wide reaching problem throughout the country. As our population ages, the number of persons retiring often exceeds the number of persons filling vacant jobs. This trend spans many fields, but is often prevalent in medical and technical fields; areas to which community colleges often cater. Boone (1997) suggests four major reasons why community colleges play a vital role in society; 1). Community colleges are affordable and accessible. As a result, over 50% of the nation's students enroll at a community college. 2.) Employers look to the community colleges to provide
technically sound workers, and utilize them to retrain employees as needed. Because of this, the community colleges, on the whole, play a pivotal role in state and federal economics and related policies. 3.) Community colleges provide not-only for credit, academic courses, but professional development courses, cultural enrichment and continuing education courses for the people they serve and 4.) Community colleges have become the "nexus and the beacon for rallying and pulling people and the public and private sectors together in the pursuit of special interests and projects."

**Practical Goals**

In terms of practical goals, this study aimed to:

- Understand and acknowledge the academic and social culture of first-generation, female community college students.
- Identify academic and social integration needs this of demographic.
- Identify engagement desires that indicate a willingness to seek out services leading to academic traits that dictate success in for this demographic of student.

The researcher hoped to developed an understanding of the motivation and engagement needs that help predict when and if a student will seek assistance allows faculty and administration to understand how students behavior, academic and social integration ultimately affect their persistence. If areas of both strength and weakness are acknowledged, a systemic or organizational program can be created in effort to best foster and grow school programs that help and aid these students.
It should be noted that the problem does not occur only within the Maine Community College System, but rather any system of higher education may and will have issues that arise surrounding this topic. It can be postulated that community college systems are more at risk for such issues (with higher incidences of first-generation students), but any system looking to retain students as well as aid in student success should be concerned about the interaction of cultural variables, and how they affect student integration and persistence.

**Intellectual Goals**

The intellectual goals of this study included:

- To acknowledge and understand the experience of first-generation, female community college students.
- To understand how academic and social experience plays a role within this demographic, and to what degree inclusion is vital to success.

**Information**

As stated previously, there are unique demands on Maine college students. With an upswing in both applications and attending students, the demographics of the community college system have changed. The rise in first-generation students indicates the need for higher education, but students often arrive unprepared. The culture of these students is paramount to understanding what they need, both academically and holistically, in order to persist and ultimately succeed.

The TRiO program does not actively single out students in its recruitment process; rather those involved with TRiO give blanket presentations to the entire first
year community, detailing who they are, and what services they provide. From there, it is up to the student to approach them. Most students that enter TRiO do so during the fall semester (over 60% are accepted during this term). Generally, these students first heard of TRiO during the Student Orientation and Registration (SOAR) activities held by the college, generally the week before classes commence (Jones, 2012).

TRiO, of course, does have the right to refuse a student entry; and a student can be dismissed from the program. Students admitted to TRiO must meet a criterion of risk factors; they must present either low income status, be a first-generation student, or have a documented disability. Those that are admitted experience a community-based setting in which they receive immediate attention, tutoring in math, science and writing by professional who hold at least a baccalaureate degree (if not a master’s), and academic advising (Jones, 2012).

To this end, the student application for the TRiO program (please see Appendix D) clearly demonstrates the dedication entering students must have. Once accepted, students must sign an agreement with TRiO, a few expectations include:

- “I will participate in TRiO sponsored activities such as tutoring, academic advising, financial literacy and/or planning for transfer to a 4-year institution after graduation.”
- “I will contact a member of the TRiO Team if I receive an academic warning in any of my courses.”
- “I will contact a member of the TRiO Team before I add or drop any course(s).”
• “I will meet with a TRiO Team member to create a successful exit strategy if I need to withdraw from [the school].”

• “I understand that lack of participation may result in my removal from the TRiO Project” (TRiO Project Application, 2011-2012).

What the brochure and application for the TRiO program cannot promote is the sense of community, and connection to staff, faculty and students that occurs when one is in the program. C. Jones offered the following statements from present and past TRiO students that she uses in her marketing and promotion of the program: “I’m proud as hell to be a TRiO student,” “TRiO gives me a sense of empowerment,” and “I’m doing this to make myself better” (Jones, 2012). Indeed, each year, the cohorts independently raise funds for a celebration/graduation dinner, enjoy cultural events outside of the academic arena, and apply this experience to both their education and personal lives.

There is always room for improvement however, no matter how successful a program. One of the drawbacks that TRiO program has is that it will not re-enroll a student transferring from a two year to a four year school. Additionally, not all Maine Community College campuses have a TRiO program, nor do all University of Maine system schools. Two of the Maine Community Colleges and one University of Maine System school do not operate with this program (Jones, 2012).

**Research Questions**

The problem of practice indicates that the largest demographic to fail out of school is the first-generation, female student, yet the TRiO program has incredible
success rates with the same demographic. What about this experience so drastically changes the outcome? This research hopes to answer the following questions:

- How do first-generation, female students enrolled in a TRiO program describe and understand persistence?
- What is the academic and social experience of these students?

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical framework used in this study is that of motivational theory; with heavy emphasis on the Self-Determined Theory of Motivation (and subsequent sub theories). The point and purpose of motivational theory, on the whole, is to study not only what motivates students to continue forward, to achieve and to battle against odds to get the skills, classes and ultimately, the degree they seek, but how they are motivated, and how (if any) difference, the type of motivation makes in their chances for success.

Motivational theory helps investigate why behavior is a penultimate factor in deciding who succeeds and who fails, as well as understanding why past behavior often dictates future behavior, and how planned behavior is something that, if recognized, can be used to benefit of students, faculty and administration alike (Skår, Sniehotta, Araújo-Soares & Molloy 2008, p. 609-627). Within motivational theory lie several Meta theories; including the Self-Determined Theory of Motivation. Within the Self-Determined Theory of Motivation are five sub-theories including:

- Cognitive Evaluation Theory
- Organismic Integration Theory
- Causality Orientations Theory
• Basic Psychological Needs Theory and
• Goal Contents Theory.

Each will be discussed in turn. Overall, the use of motivational theory is supplemented with an understanding and exploration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, along with how self-efficacy affects student persistence and success.

There are many definitions in which to broadly define motivation itself. For the purpose of this study, motivation can and will be defined as the "internal factors that impel action and to external factors that can act as inducements to action. The three aspects of action motivation affects are direction (choice), intensity (effort), and duration (persistence)" (Locke & Latham, 2004, p. 388). Please note that direction and intensity may be interchanged with choice and effort, respectively.

**Self-Determined Theory of Motivation**

Self-Determined Theory of Motivation (SDT) is an overarching, meta-theory; one that encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic schedules of thought but also the concepts of autonomous and controlled motivation. It also assumes the fact that human beings are inherently influenced by social context, that their intrinsic functioning is either facilitated, or hampered by society (Deci et al, 1994, p. 120). Additionally, people are equipped with the ability to determine what activities are important and thus need attention [external to internal regulation], and the theory also recognizes that social context plays prominently into this regulation and decisions/actions that are resultant (p. 119). To achieve a true status of self-determination, individuals must possess “persistence, flexibility, and vitality” (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 18).
To further facilitate this discussion, we must first define several terms within this theory. To be brief, two definitions of intrinsic motivation are as follows: as defined by Gagne & Deci (2005), intrinsic motivation "involves people doing an activity because they find it interesting and derive spontaneous satisfaction from the activity itself" (p. 331); or, “the desire to engage in behaviors for no reason other than sheer enjoyment, challenge, pleasure, or interest” (e.g., Berlyne, 1960; Hunt, 1965; White, 1959 as cited in Lepper, Corpus & Iyengar, 2005, p. 185). For the purposes of this study, both definitions will be allowed.

In deference, Deci & Ryan (2005) state that extrinsic motivation "requires an instrumentality between the activity and some separable consequences such as tangible or verbal rewards, so satisfaction comes not from the activity itself but rather from the extrinsic consequences to which the activity leads" (p. 331).

Self-efficacy can and will be defined as “… perceived capability. The items should be phrased in terms of can do rather than will do. Can is a judgment of capability; will is a statement of intention” (Bandura, 2005, p. 307). Thus, for the purposes of this study, self-efficacy is defined as “a judgment of capability to execute given types of performances” (Bandura, 1986 as cited in Bandura, 2005, p. 308).

With the definitions provided, we must now discuss the individual theories that make up the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation:

**Cognitive Evaluation Theory**

Originating in 1964 by Stanley Schachter, Cognitive Evaluation Theory states that “when individuals participate in an activity in which they feel they have some control
over how they achieve personal goals, their intrinsic motivation will be enhanced”.

Conversely, when individuals “participate in an activity in which they feel controlled by external factors, intrinsic motivation is likely to decrease” (Frederick & Ryan, 1985 as cited in Mandingo & Holt, 1999, p. 6). As such, an overarching statement about Cognitive Evaluation Theory would be that it focuses on social constructs that influence intrinsic motivation and related behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 13).

Next it is stated that the intrinsic motivation of this perceived scenario is enhanced when the individual finds both their competence in relation to the scenario, but also that the scenario is optimally challenging (neither too easy nor too hard).

Frederick and Ryan (1985) then postulate that “extrinsic factors which are perceived as being informational with respect to one’s perceived competence (i.e., provides positive and constructive feedback in the context of choice) (as cited in Mandingo & Holt, 1999, p.7)” positively impact intrinsic motivation. In short, these rewards, if supplied as a means of reward instead of constraint or control, (including information about strengths and talent) result in a strengthening of intrinsic motivation. So too, it was found, that mere praise without supplemental information about an individuals’ performance or aptitude did not reinforce their intrinsic motivation (as cited in Mandingo & Holt, 1999, p.7).

The fourth proposition of Cognitive Evaluation Theory states that “individuals’ motivational states towards the activity influence their intrinsic motivation. Individuals who are task-involved will likely be more intrinsically motivated because they take part in an activity for the enjoyment of the activity while those who are ego-involved will likely not be intrinsically motivated because they feel controlled by an internal pressure
to appease their self-esteem” (Mandingo & Holt, 1999, p.8). In essence, individuals who are “task-oriented” may participate in an activity or undertaking for the enjoyment of completion, while those who are “ego-oriented” may do so in effort to prove themselves (or their self-worth) to those around them.

**Relation to Student Success**

Cognitive Evaluation Theory allows an educator to glimpse into the many reasons for student success (or failure). From creating a baseline understanding of ego and task-orientation, as well as understanding what pedagogical frameworks in the classroom will best help students, Cognitive Evaluation Theory highlights intrinsic motivation, and its affectations. “Teaching styles which provide more learner-centered decision making (Mosston & Ashworth, 1986) are more likely to produce positive motivational climates (Goudas et al., 1995 as cited in Mandingo & Holt, 1999, p. 10). Additionally, control through extrinsic motivation (such as feedback for students) can and be optimized. Accordingly, students who receive not only positive feedback but details about their performance and/or abilities are more likely to have a higher level of intrinsic motivation.

As a faculty member, understanding such a concept allows for not only a greater understanding of students’ needs, but the ability to more accurately and positively interact; thus helping a students’ academic transition. Strategies such as “defining success as personal progress and improvement, valuing effort, evaluating participants on the basis of their progress and effort, [and] viewing mistakes as learning opportunities” (Mandingo & Holt, 1999, p. 11) all can be integrated into the classroom environment (no
matter what level of education) and can be used to further student progress and academic success.

**Organismic Integration Theory**

According to Ryan (1999), Organismic Integration Theory “addresses the process of internalization of various extrinsic motives…the focus is on the continuum of internalization, extending from external regulation, to introjection (for example, engaging in behaviors to avoid guilt or feel approval), to identification, to integration”. In other words, individuals naturally integrate the experiences they endure, providing they have the “nutriments to do so” (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 14).

As shown by Appendix A, there is a continuum of both motivation types, but also a comparison as to whether or not the motivation is self-determined or not. Along the continuum are a number of constructs. Focusing on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (disregard amotivation for the purposes of this discussion as it is defined as either a lack of action, or action completed without recognition/desire to do so), we should note the classifications of behavior. These are important in the overall organismic theory because they are all independent reasons for behavior, and are all possible experiential norms. Deci and Ryan (2002) describe external regulation as the “least autonomous form” (p. 17) as it is the motivation circumstance of reward or punishment, but not necessarily success or failure. As such, it generally serves an outside pressure (such as familial influence/demand) but is neither necessarily meaningful nor purposeful to the individual.

Introjected regulation, defined, is action based on guilt, shame or fear of not meeting expectations (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 17). It is also an extrinsic form of
regulation, though it is internalized by the individual. However, the external regulation is a very low level of awareness, according to Deci & Ryan (2002) and is not “part of the integrated self” (p. 17). Additionally, it works within the ego-driven individual, in effort to find worth and/or value (p. 17).

Regulation through identification falls next on the continuum. This is a deeper form of self-determined motivation (extrinsic), as it involves a “conscious valuing of a behavioral goal or regulation, an acceptance of the behavior as personally important” (p. 17). Thus, it begins to differ slightly from its predecessors and becomes more internalized and meaningful. However, Deci and Ryan (2002) are quick to note that not all identifications that are internalized are meaningful; in that “some identifications can be relatively compartmentalized or separated from one’s other beliefs and values, in which case they may not reflect the persons’ overarching values in a given situation” (p. 17).

Finally, integrated regulation remains. Integrated regulation occurs only when identifications are fully associated with and congruent with a personal value and/or belief system, or individual needs. As such, this is the form of regulation most associated with positive experiences, likely because the identification is something that is both external, and internal. Often, it is noted that this behavior has intrinsic qualities, but remains within the overall extrinsic motivation umbrella for the fact that the external goals are the driving instruments (p. 18).

Deci and Ryan (2002) are quick to note that this continuum (as noted in Appendix A) is not one in which people progress through, nor is there any type of constraint upon which experiences one has; rather an individual can be involved with any experience along the continuum, provided the individual has the correct climate in which to do so,
and the experience (p. 18). The process of internalization is the only method in which to achieve a true self-determination theory of motivation status; and to do so, the individual must have a sense of “choice, volition, and freedom from external demands” (p. 18).

**Relation to Student Success**

As college or university is a conglomerate of experience, the notion that integration or assimilation is longitudinal and based along a continuum is heartening. Both academic and social integration are made up of multiple experiences, not a singular occurrence. Because of this, it is logical that students will gather a collective representation of experiences along the continuum, some better, some worse, but all part of their educational career.

The idea of integrated regulation should allow both faculty and administration to recognize what is defined as “important” to the school must also be important to the student. If we reconsider a few of the facets of Bean’s attrition model, such as “(1) routinization – the idea that student life becomes routine; (2) instrumental communication – how well an institution distributes information about student life; (3) participation in classroom decisions” (Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002, p. 6-7) as areas that students must not only identify, but be intrinsically invested in (and extrinsically, as is the common goal of student success), we can begin to see how this theory is both purposeful and important.

**Causality Orientations Theory**

Causality Orientations Theory is yet another aspect of the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation of Deci & Ryan (2005). This sub-theory presents itself as the next
step in developing in combining the known social contexts and internal resource development; that is it is a descriptive account of “individual differences in one’s motivational orientations towards the outside world” (p. 19). Deci and Ryan (2002) describe three orientations that an individual may have that represent their self-determination; autonomous, controlled and personal causality (p. 19). The point and purpose of this theory was to act as a reference point to their General Causality Orientations Scale, a measurement used throughout their research (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The autonomous orientation examines individual behavior and cues towards interests and values; as well as examines tendencies towards intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; specifically integrated extrinsic motivation. Control orientation examines individual behavior and cues that trend towards expected behavior, “external and introjected regulation” (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 19). Impersonal orientation concerns itself with not only amotivation, but ineffective behavior or action.

Accordingly, each of the orientations aligns with parts of the overall motivational construct. Autonomy scores (on the General Causality Orientations Scale) correlate positively with indicators such as self-esteem and self-actualization, as well as ego development (all known as indicators of overall well-being). Control orientation, however, correlated negatively with such attributes, but positively with “public self-consciousness” (p. 19). Finally, impersonal orientations correlated (positively) with negative attributes, including low self-esteem, and depression (p. 19).
Basic Needs Theory

The Basic Needs Theory (at times, referenced as the Basic Psychological Needs Theory) is the culmination of several research teams and theorists; to this end we could illustrate the individual key components of the research, but instead will focus on the cumulative total. If basic, psychological needs include competency, autonomy (for intrinsic motivation); and relatedness (for internalization), then the needs themselves (often used in organizational theory) can also be applied to the academic environment. Gagne and Deci (2005), state that “satisfaction of the needs to be connected to others and to be effective in the social world support people's tendency to internalize the values and regulatory processes that are ambient in their world” (p.337).

Further research by Gagne and Deci (2005) supports the fulfillment of needs, but again within the organizational theory context. Individuals who have their needs met exhibit: (1) persistence and maintained behavior change; (2) effective performance, particularly on tasks requiring creativity, cognitive flexibility, and conceptual understanding; (3) job satisfaction; (4) positive work-related attitudes; (5) organizational citizenship behaviors; and (6) psychological adjustment and well-being” (p. 338). Clearly, if the accommodation of needs is met, many of these outcomes would seem fortuitous in the academic environment in terms of motivation, academic achievement/integration, social integration and persistence.

Goal Contents Theory

The Goals Content Theory is the final meta-theory in the umbrella of the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation. Like Locke and Latham’s 1990 Goal Setting
Theory which stipulates “that people’s goal representations are the efficient causes of behavior and that people's performance will be maximized when (1) they set specific, difficult goals that have high valence and (2) they understand what behaviors will lead to the goals and feel competent to do those behaviors” (as cited in Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 341), Goal Contents Theory postulates that there are both intrinsic and extrinsic goals; “intrinsic goals, [include] community contribution, health, personal growth, and affiliation, are differentiated from extrinsic goals, [including] fame, financial success, and physical appearance” (Ryan & Deci, 2000 as cited in Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006, p. 22).

Yet, the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation states “the content [what] of goals or outcomes and the regulatory processes [why] through which the outcomes are pursued, making predictions for different contents and for different processes” (Deci & Ryan, 2000a, p. 227) are imperative when considering and learning about an individuals’ well-being, and state of mental health, as well as predicting behavioral quality [ies] (p. 239).

Relation to Research Questions

The relation of Self-Determined Theory of Motivation (and its sub-theories) to the research questions is multi-faceted and complex, as are the individual theories that comprise the overall umbrella theory. To review, the research questions are:

- How do first-generation, female students enrolled in a TRiO program describe and understand persistence?
- What is the academic and social experience of these students?
Because motivational theory accounts for internal and external factors, examination of academic and social experience is necessary in order to ascertain the underlying themes and governance. The study is imitated to “first-generation” students for more than one reason. The first, because it is a qualifying factor for TRiO enrollment, but also because it is an effort to understand the needs of students who theoretically have less knowledge, insight and experience with the world of academia, and thus are more prone the failure as evidenced by the seven variables that Coley (2000) states: "a) delayed entry, (b) part-time enrollment, (c) full-time work, (d) financial independence, (e) dependents, (f) single parenthood, and (g) community college attendance without a high school diploma".

It should also be noted that while first-generation students are the target demographic of this study, it is important to note that this research could be used for all community college students, as only one in four community college students will graduate five years from their given date of entry (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006) and less than half will earn a degree or certificate within eight years of initial enrollment (Bailey & Morest, 2006). The experience of students not enrolled in the TRiO program may or may not be very different than those who are, as could their motivating influences. Gaining an understanding of community college students’ motivation as a demographic whole is not remiss.

**Relation to Research Methodology**

The use of phenomenological research for this study allowed the researcher to not only examine the phenomena that is first-generation, female student success and
persistence in the TRiO program, but also how motivational theory played an active role in their individual academic and social experience. It was a holistic study, choosing to examine nuance and essence of a group traditionally seen as under-prepared and often over-burdened by mitigating factors discussed previously.

Having a well-defined theoretical framework which not only includes historical and current research and meta-theories concerning individual aspects of the framework (e.g. that Organismic Integration Theory works within the realm of extrinsic motivation but Cognitive Evaluation Theory works primarily within intrinsic motivation) allowed for greater dissemination of information and a stronger, rooted lens in which to explore the essence and phenomena as a whole.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study included the following:

- A single school was used to populate the sample.
- A mix of non-commuter students and commuter-students was not possible as the campus was entirely comprised of commuter-students. Having both types of students complete the interviews would have allowed for dissemination of whether or not commuter students responded differently concerning their experience with both academic and social engagement.
- The sample size was no less than three, but no more than ten participants. While this number fell within the range of what is deemed "acceptable" for a phenomenological study, it still represents a small number of first-generation students.
• Men and women can be first-generation students; yet women fail to persist at a higher rate than men, and as such, only women are included in this study. A future course of research could involve first-generation students of both genders, and motivational differences/similarities.

• Five of the six participants were above the age of fifty, giving an uneven range of ages to the participants.

Additionally, all research has its particular nuances; some of which can be seen as strengths, limitations or simply part of the research. Clearly, those who volunteer for a study are already more motivated than those who do not and this should be considered a limitation of this study.

**Organization of Study**

This study began with an introduction to the topic and problem of practice. The need and purpose of the study are discussed, and the research questions, practical and intellectual goals are listed, and the theoretical framework of motivational theory was introduced and discussed, as were the limitations to the study. This chapter (Chapter 2), queried the literature, and provided both a historical and current look at what is known about first-generation community college students, commuter students, and part time students in terms of academic persistence, but also academic and social integration. The literature also included information concerning adjunct and part-time faculty on campus, and how their presence relates to student persistence. Chapter 3 will discuss qualitative research, in particular the method of phenomenology used in this research. The site, as well as the participants will be examined, as will data collection procedures, and the
instruments used. A discussion of credibility and validity will follow. Chapter 4 is told mostly in the words of the participants; it is the raw data of this study. Chapter 5 relates the findings of this study, the research discussion and reflection. Bibliographic references and appendices will follow.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

There are numerous subtopics within the generalized "First Generation College Students in Higher Education" category. To give purpose to the topic, we will first cover who first-generation students are, in terms of definition. We will then cover what the development and progression of students looks like, in terms of academic and social integration. A discussion about the literature concerning first-generation students at community colleges, including literature discussing individual and cultural barriers/obstacles to their success, and factors that help aid in success will follow. Literature concerning commuter students and part-time students with respect to academic and social integration/success will follow. Fourth, a review of self-efficacy with respect to the college environment will be examined, in relation to the specific demographics of this group. This is presented as a progressive model of student dropout is used to highlight the interaction and relation of academic and social culture, transition and persistence. A discussion of literature used to create the dependent and independent variables will follow. Culminating the literature review will be an inquiry into the purpose of this research will be presented.

First-Generation Student

The term “first-generation student” refers to students who are the first in their immediate family to attend an institute of higher education. First-generation students, on the whole, often have unique life situations, and thus create demands on the schools that they attend; demands which often differ than those presented by traditional students.
Because of this “institutions that impart transferable skills and relevant knowledge, bolster confidence and creativity, and engender social responsibility and self-directed learning are needed more than ever” (Chickering & Reiser, 1993, p. 44).

To establish themselves as students, in both the academic and social sense of the word, various stages of development and motivation are needed. Chickering and Reiser (1993) developed what is now known as the seven vectors: 1. Developing confidence, 2. Managing emotion, 3. Moving through autonomy toward independence, 4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships, 5. Establishing identity, 6. Developing purpose, and 7. Developing integrity (p. 45-50). These stages are purposeful as they develop not only the pre-requisites to succeed within higher education, but in the workforce as well. For the first-generation student, establishing themselves both as individuals and students is often done without a guide, or example to follow, as they are quite simply the first in their family to undertake this task.

The Community Colleges

The community colleges serve a distinct purpose within the world of higher education. According to Boone (1997), the community colleges are the "people's college." Access and affordability have kept the community colleges viable and growing. Over 50% of the nations’ higher education students attend a community college, for purposes of basic education, technical education, cultural and personal growth.

While individual schools and systems developed at different points in history and for different reasons, today's community college has formed a strong link with the economic and industrial forces at work within their local and state communities. It is
these links provide the community colleges with not only future demand, but the opportunity to teach and integrate students into a highly diversified and technical workforce (Vaughan, 1995).

Community colleges are often seen as an intermediary -- a stepping stone for those either out of high school and still unsure about a collegiate path, or a place for those who are looking to re-integrate into the workforce at large. Numerous studies speak to the effective of community colleges (Kalogrides and Grodsky, 2011) even in terms of student debt and positive cognitive skill development (gain) (Pascarella, Bohr, Nora and Terenzini, 1995).

Yet the demographics of the student body of the community colleges must be examined in reference to provide a clear understanding of the unique demands the schools encounter. Studies that speak to known issues, such as a low socio-economic status (Bailey, Jenkins and Leinbach, 2005), under-achievement in high school and/or lack of academic preparedness (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005; Conley, 2005) to student motivation (Kuh, et. al., 2005) all suggest the inter-relatedness of these issues and how they affect persistence.

**The Maine Community College System**

The Maine Community College System has evolved dramatically over the last sixty years. Originally Vocational Technical Institutes, then Technical Colleges, the Maine Community College System came to be in 2003. The history is long and storied, but provides a pivotal backdrop to understanding what strengths the colleges maintain today, but also what issues they face.
The Maine Vocational Technical Institute came to fruition in 1946 in Augusta, Maine. It was the direct result of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act (also known as the G.I. Bill) and was established at the behest of the Maine Legislature. The first campus enrolled 80 students in four programs, Automotive, Electrical, Machine Tool and Radio. By 1952, the demand had grown substantially, and a second campus was added in Portland, Maine. By 1969, all seven campuses that are known today were operational (Maine Community College System History, 2012).

The abrupt growth for the Vocational Technical Institutes followed similar trends in higher education throughout the country. The post-World War II era saw a spike in technically-driven jobs for not only defense purposes but also trade and manufacturing. Maine has long been a manufacturing state, from the timber, ice and woolen mills of the 1800’s through today’s still operating paper mills, textiles and more. The addition of these institutes provided the formal education that industry demanded, and this alliance continues today with the creation (and sometimes discontinuation) of given programs.

This growth and support continued through the 1970’s and into the 1980’s, at which time the Vocational Technical Institute System was established apart from the Maine State Government. At this time, a Board of Trustees was also created to oversee governance of the system and schools. A few short years later, the nomenclature of Vocational Technical Institute was replaced with Technical College. This was done to help further separate the system from the high-school based Vocational Schools, and increase visibility, amongst other goals (Maine Community College System History, 2012). This decade also saw the creation of campus master plans, construction of new facilities and acquisition of funding.
The 1990’s also brought considerable growth and change to the Maine Community College System, some of which is still contested, critiqued and argued in many circles. As enrollment continued to climb, the colleges began talks with the state level four year university system in effort to gain articulation agreements, transfer student pathways and an overhaul of not only the programs, but of curricula; in effort to provide “soft skills” as needed by the growing and changing industry of Maine, culminating in the creation of an associate of arts degree program, started in 1999. Until then, “Maine was one of a few states in the nation, and the only New England state, to not offer the associate in arts option at a low-cost two-year college” (Maine Community College System, 2012). No longer were industrial studies the focal point of the school, instead replaced by technical and liberal arts programs. The 1990’s also brought the creation of York County Community College; Maine’s southernmost campus.

The creation of the liberal arts program(s) and their growth throughout the early 2000’s has been both boon and burden to the system, as argued by many. While no one can disagree that the role of the community colleges has changed, and that a greater diversity of students can now attend schools for a variety of reasons, concern remains that the schools have lost their original focus, and are not promoting the trades/technical/industrial sector of the Maine economy as needed.

Regardless, enrollment continues to increase and the demand for (certain) graduates remains high (most notably in the medical and technical fields). Care and attention of students, and their success is needed, and understanding their experience is but one method of recognizing their needs and demands.
Barriers and Obstacles Common to First-Generation Students in Higher Education

Much literature and query already exists within the broad topic of first-generation students in higher education, and for the purpose of this study, we must first state and generalize known information about the barriers, obstacles and success factors common to the demographic of first-generation students in higher education. We must acknowledge that first-generation students come to college with a different "skill set" than their non-first-generation college students, not all of which are detrimental to persistence. These skills include those commonly learned in the workforce such as time management, goal focus, and self-advocacy (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005). At the same time, the fact remains that for students attending a two-year college (of which half are first-time students), only a quarter will eventually complete a degree within five years (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006)

Studies show that not only are “First-generation students are less likely to complete any degree, even when controlling for age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status” (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007, p. 964) but also that first generation students are known to trail their non-first-generational counterparts in areas such as individual-level cognitive development, degree plans, academic motivation, secondary school grades, parental income (Pascarella, 2004). Within these broad categorizations lie many areas that contribute to the likelihood of failing to persist. Coley (2000) identified seven demographic factors that affect persistence and degree attainment for community college students: “(a) delayed entry, (b) part-time enrollment, (c) full-time work, (d) financial independence, (e) dependents, (f) single parenthood, and (g) community college attendance without a high school diploma”.
According to Byrd & McDonald (2005), “College readiness involves understanding student characteristics and skills within the context of college” (p. 25). Studies show that first-generation students work more hours but study fewer hours, and take less credits than their non-first-generational student counterparts (Ramoz-Sanchez & Nichols, 2002), especially in the areas of social sciences, humanities, arts and technical courses (Pascarella, et al., 2004) perhaps due to their lower academic performance as a result of "weaker cognitive skills in math, reading and critical thinking" (Terenzini, et al., 1996, p. 16).

Additionally, first generation students come to college with lessened intrinsic, extrinsic and amotivational factors, as defined by Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory of Motivation as “being engaged in an activity for its own sake and for the satisfaction derived from participation”, “motivation which originates outside the individual and extends beyond the activity itself” and the “[perception that] their behaviors as being caused by forces out of their control” respectively, (as cited in Prospero, Vohra-Gupta, 2007, p. 966). It should be noted that Deci and Ryan are not the only source of information concerning Self-Determined Theory, but they are the creators.

Several other studies allow for the theory to be explored in terms of association/interaction with parents and teachers and its relation to understanding behavioral norms and institutional values (Ryan, Stiller & Lynch, 2004), rates of persistence (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992), and motivation and achievement (Guay & Vallerand, 1996).

First generation students also lack the social and communication skills needed for success in higher education; and feel stress more frequently and acutely resultant to their
lack of these skills (Byrd & McDonald, 2005). As a result, these students were grossly under-prepared for coursework and demands of the school/classes they attended. Thus, the level of anxiety was significantly higher of first-generation students versus their non-first-generation counterparts, and their knowledge/use of interpersonal skills and preparation were also significantly less than their non-first-generational counterparts. The resultant fact is that first-generational students are more likely to struggle, and less likely to academically succeed than non-first generational students (Francis & Miller, 2008). First-generation college students more frequently express this academic anxiety and stress as physical symptoms than non-first-generation college students, and self-esteem is a most important predictor of a first-generation college student’s well-being (Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008).

Barry, et al., (2009), report that first-generation students are more prone to social isolation than their non-first-generation counterparts. This affects them in several ways, including the students reporting less disclosure about issues and problems with family members, less disclosure about issues and problems with friends at the school and less disclosure about issues and problems with friends not at the school.

Parental involvement is a factor in determining first-generational student success, and often a barrier. First generation students whose parents are not involved in the college process, or unwilling to invest their time and interest in their education experience more culture shock and report a less enthusiastic approach to education (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Preibe, Ross and Low (2008) note that students were more apt to struggle when their parents were unaware of enrollment processes, including "university application, program selection, and obtaining funding" (p. 6) and Terenzini, et
al., (1996) reports that first generation students receive "less encouragement from their parents to attend college" (p.16)

First-generation college students are concerned with their finances in a different manner than their non-first-generation student counterparts. As they seemingly have more external pressures including family and other factors, the demand for their money is directed to places other than education, and thus the level of stress elevates. Additionally, the financial aid process is often perceived as allusive and mysterious, where the real needs of the students were not considered, but rather the schools assigned "random" amounts. In a study of 204 first-generation students, "Personal responsibility to follow instructions, read the literature available, and acknowledge their own role in seeking information was largely absent among the participants" (Eitel & Martin, 2009). Without control over the outcome, most students felt frustrated and helpless by the system. As such, students with an increased debt load or lack of financial understanding lean towards a tendency to “stop-in” and “stop-out” of school, lending to a negative effect on persistence (Harris as cited. in Coley, 2000, p. 13).

In addition, norms and expectations vary between first-generation and non-first-generation students, especially in terms of expectations from faculty. Collier and Morgan (2007) proposed that "in addition to academic skills, university success requires mastery of the ‘college student’ role" (p.425). By this, they are referring to the complex relationships that students have with not only the faculty, but the institution as well. Referencing Tinto's work concerning academic and social integration (1975, 1993), Collier and Morgan (2007) attempt to discover whether or not different demographics of
student experience different obstacles on their path to social and academic integration; i.e. the connection between the "college student role" and academic success (p. 426-427).

To this end, Collier and Morgan (2007) present cultural capital -- the knowledge and recognition of the societal/institutional roles that students and faculty follow; "students from a more traditional background enter the university with a level of cultural capital that makes it easier for them to become ‘role experts.’” Not only are they more familiar with higher education from listening to family members’ academic histories, but they also are likely to have more appropriate approaches for dealing with teachers and other educational authorities because of parental coaching” (p. 430)

The Role of Self-Efficacy: Academic and Social Transition, Integration and Success

To better understand the role of self-efficacy in academic and social transition, integration and success, we must first give a definitive notion of motivation. In 1951, Hull determined that “Motivation = Drive X Habit X Incentive (as cited in Weiner, 1989, p. 103). In this instance, drive is defined as energy, and habit is defined as direction (p. 93); to clarify, drive “corresponds to a ‘push,’ [and] incentives ‘pull’ the organism” (p. 104). If so, what does it mean in terms of students who are not privy to the demands of higher education; who are lacking in habit? Furthermore, achievement has been widely studied in terms of motivation, enough so that “motivation achievement” is widely used term within research and practice. Here, it will be referenced as part and parcel of motivational theory.

Achievement motivation has its roots in Hull’s work, with the terms ‘drive and need…often used interchangeably” (Weiner, 1989, p. 180). Need of course, is attributed to Murray (1959) as a “need for achievement” (p. 179).
There are several models concerning student transition and integration in both the academic and social aspects, as well as how this transition leads to success. The following will provide a historical to current understanding of this topic, as well as major works dedicated to its progression and continuation.

The first and most often used in terms of four-year institutions is that of Tinto's seminal 1975 Theory of College Student Departure. Tinto states that the "higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion" (p.96). Additionally, Tinto (1986) states:

Persistence requires that individuals make the transition to college and become incorporated into the ongoing social and intellectual life of the college…Beyond the transition to college, persistence entails the incorporation, which is the integration, of the individual as a competent member in the social and intellectual communities of the college (p. 126).

Based upon characteristics that take into account educational history, individual experience, gender, family (parental education and involvement) and socio-economic status, Tinto's model suggests that Academic and Social Transitions are not mutually exclusive; that is a student can fully integrate into an academic culture without integrating into a social culture, or inversely so (p. 92). Academic integration is thus based upon structural and normative dimensions; the structural construct is defined as the meeting of the institutional standards, and normative as the understanding of "individual identification with the norms of the academic system" (p. 104). Tinto suggests that both academic achievement (grades) and intellectual integration are a measure of academic
transition (p. 105). Social transition and integration happen through peer interaction and groups, interactions with faculty and extra-curricular activities (p. 107).

Tinto’s original theory involved five contributing factors of student retention: (1) a student’s pre-entry attributes (prior schooling and family background); (2) goals and commitment (the student’s individual aspirations in the institution); (3) experience at the institution (academics and faculty and peer interactions); (4) external commitments while at the institution; (5) integration both academically and socially (Metz 4). Later revisions show some changes and discrepancies in the work, as Tinto notes that often educators/administrators “see student departure as reflecting some shortcoming and/or weakness in the individual” (85). This clarification essentially argues that a student may be passing classes with flying colors and still decides to drop out for reasons unrelated to “shortcoming and/or weakness.” He suggests that the act of dropping out should not necessarily be linked to a negative connotation, and that the reasoning behind such failure is likely multi-faceted or external. To that end, Tinto (1986) notes:

Student institutional departure is as much a reflection of the attributes of those communities, and therefore of the institution, as it is of the attributes of the students who enter that institution. It is the daily interaction of the person with other members of the college in both the formal and informal academic and social domains of the college and that person’s perception or evaluation of the character of those interactions that in large measure determine decisions as to staying or leaving (p. 127).
Yet, revisions and criticism do exist en masse for Tinto’s work, both in its original and revised forms. Braxton, Sullivan and Johnston (1997) and Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) refute some key findings, including the constructs used to develop both academic integration and social integration. The argument believes that "active learning should not be confused with academic integration" (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000, p. 571) as active learning is a precursor to academic integration, but it is not academic integration in of itself. Academic integration is the rather experience of academic involvement, rather than the perception of grades (p. 571).

Additionally, Braxton, Milem and Sullivan (2000) take counterpoint to Tinto's definition of social integration, instead looking at academic integration as a catalyst for social integration. Students who frequently are involved in classroom (or active) learning often perceive their experience as more rewarding, and further integrate themselves socially as a result through the development of peer groups and communities, often reaching into the social realm. Those who receive fewer active learning opportunities often isolate themselves more in order to maintain or improve their academic performance (p. 572).

When put in the context of a two-year (or commuter) school, Tinto's model is also challenged. Deil-Amen (2011) stipulates that the experience of transition and success for a two year, commuter school must be carefully re-examined in relation to Tinto's original research. Commuter schools often do not have the social opportunities that residential schools have, and thus social integration must stem from academic integration; a "community of classrooms" (ASHE, 2004, p.48). These "community of classrooms" translate into a mechanism through which both academic and social involvement arises.
and student effort is engaged’ (Tinto, 1997, p. 615 as cited in Deil-Amen, 2011, p. 65). It must be recognized that the findings are emergent in respect to the institution type, and often in opposition to one another.

The criticism and revision does not stop here; John Bean’s creation of a new attrition model includes another set of five facets: (1) routinization – the idea that student life becomes routine; (2) instrumental communication – how well an institution distributes information about student life; (3) participation in classroom decisions; (4) integration; (5) distributive justice – whether rewards are consistent with effort expended (Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002, p. 6-7). This was created in response to the lack of personalization in Tinto’s work, in this case the lack of notation between students endure similar issues and problems when leaving either academic studies, or employment (Metz, 2002, p. 8).

Finally, William Tierney argues against Tinto’s reliance on a traditional age for college students, ignoring older, non-traditional and/or returning students (Metz, 2002, p. 9). Others have argued against the theory for its ignorance and omission of the two-year college student, and its failure to take into account the differing circumstances of minority students.

**Commuter and Part-Time Students**

It is important to note that community colleges do not just have first-generation students to contend with when making institutional and academic decisions, but also part-time students, and commuter students.
Laird and Cruce (2009) report that “in 2004, part-time students represented 37% of the total undergraduate enrollment in two- and four-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the U.S.” (p. 290). Yet, a 2007 study shows that "A majority of part-time students attended two-year institutions [and] ...eighty-three percent worked while enrolled. Of those, more than half worked full time, and forty-seven percent considered themselves employees first and students second, the study found" (Wasley, 2007). Additionally, these students tended to be "older, financially independent, and first-generation students. They were also more likely to be female, Hispanic, and less academically prepared; to come from low-income families; and to have lower educational expectations than full-time students.”

It is unsurprising, then, to note that part-time students less frequently complete a major degree of study, and those that do take longer to finish the degree than their full-time counterparts. Additionally, part-time students are more likely to have outside commitments than their full-time compatriots, often taking care of dependents, or working outside the academic environment (NSSE, 2004, 2006 as cited in Laird & Cruce, 2009). These students are also less likely to participate in meaningful academic discussions, study groups, "communit [ies], in a practicum or internship, in community service or volunteer work, or in foreign language coursework" (NSSE, 2004; Zhao & Kuh, 2004 as cited in Laird & Cruce, 2009).

Yet the problem is not entirely rooted in part-time student attendance or motivation. As noted in Gonzalez (2009), "sixty-seven percent of faculty members teach part time, yet typically teach half to two-thirds of all course sections." The result? The
interaction does not continue beyond the classroom; and yet academic learning and integration are not known to end when the class does.

If both students and faculty spend a minimal time on campus, that time must be optimized to produce student ambition, integration and assimilation. The report finds refutes this assumption; "About one-third of students (32 percent) reported that their colleges had provided the support they needed to thrive socially. Yet...88 percent of part-time students reported spending zero hours in a typical seven-day week participating in college-sponsored extracurricular activities...Fewer than one in five students (17 percent) had participated in an internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment, while 41 percent indicated that they had not had, nor did they plan to have, such an experience."

A 2006 article in Recruitment and Retention highlights realities that our part-time (and commuter) students face, including those that hinder academic integration and achievement:

**Commuter students need on-campus support networks.**

…Many times their [off-campus] support networks do not understand the time commitment and the juggling of roles that one has to do to seek an education, and so then it becomes an extra burden for the student to educate their family or their support network about their needs on campus, and about their educational needs, and how they can work together to meet those educational goals.
Commuter students need a sense of belonging on campus.

In many cases, there are inadequate opportunities for commuter students to develop relationships with faculty, staff, and peers,” Garland said. “Individuals rarely feel connected to a place where they have no significant relationships” (p. 5-6).

Part-Time Faculty

If the point and purpose of the community college is to serve any person that wants an education, and community colleges are known for serving underrepresented populations, and for their open enrollment policies and low tuition, they are especially valuable to underserved populations, including those who are low income, single parents with children, underrepresented populations, disabled persons, and those who are academically unprepared (Jaeger & Eagan, 2009, p. 168), the situation is only made worse by a lack of faculty integration and support. Additionally, “Community colleges maintain complex missions that include preparing students for degree programs, offering degree programs, preparing students to transfer to 4-year institutions, and providing a host of other educational and vocational opportunities” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003 at cited by Jaeger & Eagan, 2009, p. 169).

The role of part-time faculty in relation to student persistence and graduation is an area which is garnering more and more attention as of late, and for a variety of reasons. Two issues to note include the research showing the relationship of student success and graduation rates to faculty availability, competence and interaction as well as how part-
time faculty feel about their role in higher education, and how it affects their teaching, and commitment to students.

“Since 1993, up to 75 percent of the credit hours taught in community colleges have been taught by part-timers” (Monaco, as cited by Selingo, 2008). The use of part-time faculty not only helps keep institutional costs low, but also helps protect tenured faculty. Monaco states “The only way to defend the highly paid tenure track is declare lower-paid non tenure folks less competent” (as cited by Selingo, 2008). Whether or not non-tenured (or part-time) faculty are less competent is not an argument to be settled in this research, but noting that part-time faculty receive less professional development hours, less opportunity for grant-funded research and generally have less upward mobility within their place of employment is worth note; only 5% of department chairs in a recent survey said they would be willing to promote a long-term, part-time faculty member to a full-time position, even for a non-tenured position (Selingo, 2008).

It would be unfair to place blame solely with the part-time faculty for the corresponding graduation rates; yet a 2003 study conducted at 935 two-year campuses found that “colleges where nearly 80 percent of the instructors worked part time had graduation rates of only about 20 percent. As the proportion of instructors who worked part time declined, graduate rates rose” (Wilson, 2006).

However, it is not because of the number of part-time faculty present, nor the number of courses taught. Rather, the problem stems from “institutional hiring practices and employment circumstances” (Wilson, 2006). The lack of acceptable pay and benefits, fewer professional development opportunities, less upward mobility and often a lack of physical space/accommodations for part time faculty is the true culprit. As a
result, “reliance on part-time faculty may hinder both [student] social and academic integration” (Jacoby, 2006).
Chapter Three: Research Design & Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The incidence of first-generation community college students is high. These students are also the students that fail to persist within the community college system. Previously, the seven areas that affect persistence in the community colleges, and the fact that three out of four first-generation community college students that fail to persist are female were noted. The individual experience and the context of the experience for these students, and their underlying motivation to succeed often determines’ their ability to reach out and find and/or ask for academic assistance, such as the TRiO program. It is their academic and social experience once enrolled in such a program that distinguishes their persistence rates from those of other community college students.

To review, the research questions are, again:

- How do first-generation, female students enrolled in a TRiO program describe and understand persistence?
- What is the academic and social experience of these students?

The purpose of this research was to understand the academic and social experience of the students in the TRiO program and how the participants view and understand persistence. With such high rates of completion and academic success (and persistence), the experience of these students was one to be studied. The community college, as a whole, does not boast such impressive statistics, with “less than one-third of first-time, full-time students who enrolled in Maine community colleges in 2007 graduated within three years” (Du Houx, 2011). This information can be used to help
faculty and staff develop meaningful and purposeful ways of encouraging academic and social engagement.

These research questions took into account personal stories and idiosyncratic events; it investigated how experience plays a role in the development of academic and social integration and ultimately, student persistence. As a result, this study used a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world viable. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self)” (Denzine & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 36).

Because of this, descriptive statistics and individual experiences were obtained in order to both show met study criterion of the students involved in the study (e.g. program of study, age, previous educational experience etc.) but also to highlight the individual experience itself will be used data interpretation; for coding and ultimately dissemination purposes.

**Phenomenology**

For the purpose of this research, the intent was to discover and explore the TRiO student experience – both socially and academically, and gain an understanding of how the participants understood persistence. As such, this study was interested in the comprehensive experience of a student, and is best suited for a phenomenological research method. Creswell (2009) states, “The focus of qualitative research is on
participants’ perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives” (Frankel & Wallen, 1990; Locke et al., 1987; Merriam 1988 as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 195). Furthermore, because each individual has their own experiences, “the attempt is therefore to understand not one, but multiple realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 195). Kant continues this vein of thought “Knowledge of objects resides in the subjective sources of the self…sense (phenomena empirically given in perception), imagination (necessary to arrive at a synthesis of knowledge), and apperception (consciousness of the identity of things)” (Oliva, n.d., p. 44). More simply stated phenomenology “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57).

There are two main types of phenomenology; and for the purposes of this study, the one by Moustakas (1994) transcendental (known also as psychological) phenomenology was used. This type of phenomenology is less focused on researcher interpretations (Creswell, 2007, p. 59) which provides less room for researcher bias. Instead, it focuses on the description of experience provided by the participant and the disengagement of personal experience on the part of the researcher (known as bracketing) (p. 59-60; Smith, p. 96)

Husserl was perhaps the pioneer of transcendental phenomenology and his work is considered seminal ~ that there are “essential structures to any human experience” (Cohen & Omery, 1994 as cited in Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook & Irvine, 2008, p. 664 ). Patton (1990) follows in this belief, but identifies the three steps of a phenomenological study; epoche´, phenomenological reduction and structural synthesis. Epoche´ itself is the act of “grasp[ing] the essential invariant structures of a phenomenon or in other
words, its ‘essence’” (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook & Irvine, 2008, p. 664), but also eliminating personal bias and involvement. Moustakas (1990) warns that this process is not cut and dry, but rather:

An extremely demanding process, not only in terms of continual questioning and checking to ensure full explication of one’s own experience and that of others, but also in the challenges of thinking and creating, and in the requirements of self-dialogue, self-honesty, and unwavering diligence to an understanding of both the obvious and subtle elements of meaning and essence inherent in human issues, problems, questions, and concerns (p. 37).

Phenomenological reduction or textual description was used to give an actual account of the experience of each student as they entered into the academic environment, assessed their strengths/weaknesses and made the decision to seek further academic assistance.

The structural synthesis was where the both the theoretical framework (motivational theory) and the student experience met; this exemplified the “how and why” the academic and social experience reflected upon the TRiO program, and “how and why” the TRiO program influenced the academic and social experience. Moustakas notes that structural essences of imaginative variation are integrated with textural essences of the transcendental-phenomenological reduction. This was done so that the researcher could arrive at a textural-structural synthesis of meaning and essence of the experience of the participants, and the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36).
In this case, it allowed the researcher to understand the role of motivation in academic and social experience of the TRiO program.

**Site and Participants**

The study site for this research was one of the Maine Community College System schools. The school is home to roughly 2,500 undergraduate students. The demographics for these students include a male to female ratio of thirty-four to sixty-six percent, and a part-time to full-time ratio of seventy-one to twenty-nine percent. Furthermore, the graduation rate is thirty-one percent for women, and only twenty-four percent for men. It should be noted that all students are commuter students (College View, n.d.).

The incidence of first-generation students in the community colleges is estimated to be nearing fifty percent nationally, and as evidence suggests, part-time students and commuter students have additional hurdles to overcome in their journey to success. As a faculty member, it is easy to bear witness to these struggles, and to ask the questions of what more both faculty and administration should be doing to help these students succeed, as the attrition rate is high, and the graduation rate abysmal.

The research participants in this study were female first-generation, second-semester (or second-year) students. The reasoning for second-semester (or second-year) students as participants was that only students who have persisted into their second term (or beyond) gave recognition to the fact that these students will already have a base knowledge of their academic performance, academic strengths, weaknesses and assimilation/integration into both social and academic circles. Women, preferably of low income (though not a requirement for the study, it is a mitigating factor for TRiO
enrollment), full-time students (and, as noted, all are commuter students) were welcome to be part of the research, and accordingly, their descriptive statistics were transcribed within the study.

Creswell (2009) suggests that a purposeful sample is the best possible selection method in qualitative research (p. 178) and this protocol was followed for this study, with the inclusive requirement of being a female first-generation, second-semester (or second-year) student involved in the TRiO program. The requirement of “second-semester (or second-year)” was to ensure that the student has experienced the phenomena of persisting from term-to-term, or ideally, year one to year two. A sample size of six students was used for the study, falling into the range of five to eight individuals as recommended by Creswell (2007, p. 126) and it was a sample size that was easily attained as there were roughly a thousand first-generation students enrolled at the college at the time the request was made. Furthermore, this number allowed for individual stories to show, but also allowed the researcher to “develop a collective story” (Huber & Whalen, 1999 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 126)

The sample was created through a method of emails inviting participants into the study, with the caveat that they are female, first-generation, second-semester (or second-year) students and involved in the TRiO program. The other caveat was that the participants are not current students of the researcher, disallowing any type of ethical concern. Former students were allowed.

There was no control group in this study as all of the participants will be required to have evidence of student success (i.e. persisting from semester one to semester two) and the phenomenon being studies is the motivation that allows for such success.
Interview Questions and Protocol

The interview questions were developed in the essence of Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994). Interviewing itself is the ideal for a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), as it is a conversation with structure and purpose (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.3) which allows for a deeper, more thorough dialogue to occur between the researcher and the participants.

Interviews were taped, through the use of a digital recorder. An interview protocol was developed with broad questions and was followed by further probing questions, following the recommendations of both Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007), who postulate that over-archcing questions allow for data to be gathered; the type of data that gives both textual and structural descriptions of the lived experience, and “ultimately provide an understand of the common experience” (p. 61). The interview questions were given (via email) to the participants prior to the interviews themselves, in the hopes that the participants would review the questions and ask questions if they occurred. It should be noted that the data generated must “depict the experience in accurate, comprehensive, rich, and vivid terms. In heuristic research; depictions are often presented in stories, examples, conversations, metaphors, and analogies” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 49), and the interview took care to ensure that each participant was given free rein to relate stories and other incidental thoughts/ideas.

One interview with each participant was conducted with the allowance for clarification and follow up between researcher and participant. As noted, the interviews were recorded by use of recording software, and then transcribed (by hand) by the
researcher. Each participant was sent a transcribed copy of their interview within twenty-four hours of the interview, in the hopes that each person will review, edit and clarify information if needed. Each participant was invited to listen to the taped interviews. Because of this, the participants had not only early access to the interview questions (with time to ask questions and suggest changes/alternatives), but time to reflect, read and listen to what was shared during the interview. Because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, a pilot group was unnecessary. It is important to note that the researcher had access to demographic information; age, year of schooling, and program of study.

As prescribed by Moustakas (1990), the researcher supplemented the interviews with any “diaries, journals, logs, poems, and artwork offering additional meaning and depth” (p. 49).

After the interviews were transcribed, and given to the appropriate participant for review, the researcher studied the transcripts in attempt to highlight significant statements, quotes, reflections and/or sentences or quotes that provide the researcher a clear understanding of phenomena, but more importantly, how it was experienced by the participants. This step is that of horizontalization, as defined by Moustakas (1994). The researcher will take all quotes, reflections and/or sentence at equal value, with no weight given to any particular response. Irrelevant information and those that are recurring were not included in this process as they had no effect on the overall outcome.

Because the interviews were semi-structured in format; the participants were allowed (and encouraged) to give additional information that helps the researcher understand her experience. Also, the researcher was allowed to develop and change
interview questions dependent upon the direction the interview takes, and if further information was needed. As a result, the researcher had all of the tools necessary to gather the needed information within the singular interview. As a precaution, the participants were informed that a secondary interview may be needed in the event that the level of information needed is not acquired, or if the interview is cut short due to unforeseen circumstances.

The study itself was built in the framework of motivational theory – and the interview questions were based in experience; in essence trying to capture how the experience heightened student’s motivation, or how motivation allowed for their experience. Motivational theory and its sub theories explore internal and external (intrinsic and extrinsic) factors that influence motivation. By proxy, looking at academic and social experience of a student lends itself to wonder the relationship of motivation, experience and success. The interview questions (as seen in Appendix C) were semi-structured in nature, and participant responses helped shape other questions to fully grasp the essence of experience.

Data Collection

Moustakas (1994) states that the “empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience. The approach ‘seeks to disclose and elucidate the phenomena of behavior as they manifest themselves in their perceived immediacy’” (van Kaam, 1966, p. 15, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).
The data collection itself was a multi-step process. An interview was conducted with each of the participants, and was semi-structured in nature. Other evidence of “experience” was included, including journals, written responses, and general observation of the participants (Creswell, 2009, p. 61). This method of interviewing best aligned itself to the practices of phenomenology, and allowed the researcher to best understand and observe the student experience.

Because the interviews were semi-structured in nature, students has no external pressures in terms of honesty and fairness in answering the questions and were able to expand and explore as they deem necessary; but the very nature of semi-structure interviews, featuring open-ended questions; allowed the interviewer to adapt, add or rephrase questions to best fit the area of exploration.

Because the respondents has persisted for at least one semester (fall to spring, spring to fall), at the time of the interviews, they were able to not only relate their beginning experience of academic and social life to the researcher, but the meaningfulness and continued academic and social experience of persistence; in total attempting to recognize the “significance of self-searching and the value of personal knowledge” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 49).

The interviews themselves began with descriptive statistics. Students will be asked to provide demographic information (age, gender, part-time/full-time status, et al). The participants were then asked to answer interview questions about their experiences and integration into the college, both socially and academically. These questions focused on their self-efficacy, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in relation to their performance, and participation in active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction,
supportive campus environments and enriching educational experiences (including student services like TRiO).

Two forms of member checking occurred after the interviews, confirming the accuracy of the data, and the analysis. Those strategies are described briefly: The interviews were transcribed, verbatim, within 24 hours and a copy was provided to the participant (via email) for review to ensure accuracy and to make sure she was comfortable with the material.

The participants were aware they could request, follow up interview for clarification of information/intention, to give additional information or a further review of any question/answer given. While none of the participants requested a live follow-up interview, many wrote additional passages, thoughts and stories within the email exchange.

In terms of motivation, students who completed the interviews were notified that while their participation was completely voluntary, and they could choose to not answer any question, for any reason, and that their participation will help those in faculty and administration circles better understand what it is that they need to succeed. While they, as participants, may or may not directly benefit from taking the survey, there was no risk of discomfort in the interview process, as they are anonymous and the transcripts are confidential. The answers they provided may help those who come after them, as procedural rules, regulations and overall awareness of their needs are duly noted and incorporated into the academic and social structure of the college. Participants were notified prior to the interviews that all interviews will be recorded.
The relationship between the participants and the researcher will vary from one to another; some were former students (no current students were allowed) and some had no prior interaction with the researcher. This relationship (if applicable) was not a consideration for any study information.

**Data Analysis**

Phenomenological data is analyzed through the method of coding and emergent themes. The data from this study was coded in the method following the suggestion of Moustakas (1994), and Creswell (2007). The transcripts were transcribed by hand, verbatim, and the codes developed through a sentence by sentence analysis, and followed the five steps as outlined by Creswell:

- Reading through the written transcripts several times to obtain an overall feeling for them
- Identifying significant phrases or sentences that pertained directly to the experience
- Formulating meanings and clustering them into themes common to all of the participants’ transcripts
- Integrating the results into an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon
- Validating the findings with the participants, and including participants’ remarks in the final description (p. 89).
The initial analysis is framed by motivational theory (and its’ sub-theories), and the
start list of codes also comes from motivational theory. The initial codes and the coding
structure loosely followed the structure presented by Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2005),
and a rough template was developed a priori; again loosely based on the research
question and the concept of social phenomenology by Schutz (1967). Four broad
categories formed the code manual, “(motives, social relationships, systems of relevance,
and ‘common sense’)” (as cited by Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2005, p. 4).

These initial categories allowed the researcher to conduct a line-by-line analysis
as recommended by Creswell and further condensed the code categories. It also allowed
the researcher to attempt to understand the motivation and experience (academic and
social) of the participant. Each woman presented a unique story, each with personal
motives and goals, and each with individual social pressures, relationships and relevance
to their own lives.

The data was turned into meaningful statements and combined into larger
categories and emergent themes (Madison, 2005; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Wolcott,
1994b; Creswell, 2007) and the research was analyzed within the parameters presented
by Moustakas (1994); and the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method:

This process followed a striated and proven format; “Epoche, Transcendental-
Phenomenological Reduction [textual description], Imaginative Variation [structural
variation] and finally the Synthesis of Meanings and Essences [the final truth]”
(Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Each of these has a specific point and purpose, as illustrated:

Epoche, known as bracketing is a Greek word, meaning to refrain from judgment;
that is, the researcher must push aside preconceived notions, ideas, opinions or
experiences in order to “best understand the experience of participants in the study” (Moustakas, 1994 as cited by Creswell, 2007, p. 235).

The initial transcendental-phenomenological reduction [textual description] was to give an actual account of the experience of each student as they entered into the academic environment, assessed their strengths/weaknesses and made the decision to seek further academic assistance. The textual coding provided the “what happened” information for each student experience, it was vital for the researcher to assess the phenomena as the individual experienced it. To understand the “what” is of vital importance, as “there are 55 variations of perception, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors and shapes” as noted by (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). The researcher needed not only a clear understanding of what the participant experienced, and but needed to understand it without personal variation or impression.

The structural synthesis is where the theoretical framework (motivational theory) and the student experience meet; this was the “how and why” the academic and social experience reflected upon the TRiO program, and “how and why” the TRiO program influenced the academic and social experience. Moustakas notes that structural essences of imaginative variation are integrated with textural essences of the transcendental-phenomenological reduction. This is done so that the researcher can arrive at a textural-structural synthesis of meaning and essence of the experience of the participants, and the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36). In this case, it allows the researcher to understand the role of motivation in academic and social experience of the TRiO program.
This synthesis was the culmination point – where the essence and lived experience of the participants were realized, without interpretation or influence by the researcher. Both textual and structural codes were defined in this the data analysis, allowing for broader themes and experience to come forth (Creswell, 2007, p. 156-160).

The emergent themes were used as another aspect of the structural description. These themes were established during the analysis, and reappearing themes are those with the most commonality within the sample population, and were seen as valuable tools that help identify and give structure to the overall experience of the students.

**Timeline**

The interviews for this study were conducted during summer 2012. Less than a month passed from the time the interviews were held, transcribed, participant-reviewed and posted as evidence and discussion.

**Limitations**

As stated in chapter one, this study does have limiting factors. They include the following:

- A single school was used to populate the sample.
- A mix of non-commuter students, and commuter-students was not possible, as this campus is entirely comprised of commuter-students.

Having both types of students complete the survey would allow for dissemination of whether or not commuter students respond differently to both motivation, self-efficacy and its relation to active and collaborative
learning, student-faculty interaction, supportive campus environments and enriching educational experiences (including student services like TRiO).

- The sample size was no less than three, but no more than ten participants. While this fell within the range of what is deemed "acceptable" for a phenomenological study, it still represents a small number of first-generation students.

- Men and women can be first-generation students; yet women fail to persist at a higher rate than men, and as such, only women are included in this study. A future course of research could involve first-generation students of both genders, and motivational differences/similarities.

Validity and Credibility

The largest concern with respect to internal validity is the possibility of interpretation, or "alternative explanations for relationships found in the data" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010, p. 337). In the case of this study, self-efficacy, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are being examined in relation to a students' participation in active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, supportive campus environments and enriching educational experiences (including student services like TRiO). There are many reasons a student may choose to participate (or not participate) in any of these activities, but these reasons are likely rooted in some form of motivation; the student will be responsible for identifying which type of motivation caused their action (or inaction).

Fraenkel and Wallen (2010) also note location as a potential for internal validity threat, and Creswell (2009) suggests four aspects to consider, the setting, the actors, the
events and the process (p. 178). Each student will be interviewed in a location on the community college campus; preferably in the library or adjacent meeting/study rooms. This will provide the participant with a quiet and comfortable space in which to complete the interview (p. 339-340). The researcher will follow similar protocols with each participant, welcoming them and thanking them for their time, explaining the process to the participant, asking if the participant has questions/concerns and if none, beginning the interview.

Within the instrumentation itself, there is a risk to validity, as the researcher is the instrument. It is possible that individual characteristics may come into play for those completing the survey, such as fatigue (for both researcher and participant) or a time obligation. While these individual characteristics cannot be controlled nor accounted for, allowance for multiple interviews eliminates this threat.

Following the example of Polkinghorne (1989), the researcher will review the research and will assess the following:

- Were the participant’s responses/answers in any way influenced by the interviewer?
- Is the transcript accurate? Does it convey the message and meaning of the interview?
- Were there other conclusions than those found by the researcher in the transcript analysis? Are alternative conclusions identified?
- Can the specific contents within the transcripts be accounted for in the general structural description?
- Is the structural description “situation specific, or does it hold in general
for the experience in other situations?” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 215).

Finally, this study was subject to member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that member checking is “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Member checking is the act of the researcher taking “data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). This was done by the participants through their review of the transcripts, of the data and presentation of data within the study. Participants were allowed to add additional data and ask questions about the process throughout the duration.

**Researcher Bias**

Fortunately, researcher bias is nearly a moot point in this study; as the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews provided all of the data, and the premise of phenomenological study is for the researcher to set aside personal influence/experience in favor of “describing the meaning of experience[s] of a phenomenon (or topic or concept) for several individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 236). While the researcher knew some of the participants (as former students), the researcher is not a first-generation student, and has no personal knowledge of the struggles this demographic faces.

**Rigor**

To locate suitable participants, the researcher contacted the registrar’s office, the academic dean and the coordinator of the TRiO program at the College. The researcher
also contacted these administrators to seek permission to interview the students. With permission, the TRiO coordinator then forwarded an invitation to TRiO students, asking for their participation in the study. Those who were interested contacted the researcher personally, not via TRiO personnel. This ensured confidentiality on the part of the participants.

The study holds its strengths in that it is a topic discussed heavily in current literature and will add knowledge to previous research. As this is a phenomenological study and is discovering the individual circumstance and phenomena of student motivation, the individual interviews themselves lend strength to the study, in that they were tailored to fit each individual and circumstance (Frankel & Wallen, 2010, p. 447).
Chapter Four: Data

Organization of Chapter

The first portion of this chapter, Section I, will include the method of data collection, reliability, credibility and trustworthiness of the study. It will be followed by descriptive profiles of each participant, including the discussion of the participants’ academic and social experience. The latter portion of the chapter, Section II, will explore themes and variations on a theme, experienced between the participants. As there is no priority to the participants’ experience, the participants will be introduced alphabetically. Each participant section is written mostly in the words of the participants, in order to give the background information about why they are attending school, but also what brought them to school, their fears, motivation, hopes and goals. These excerpts allow a brief glimpse into the information gathered by the researcher – and it is this information that eventually formed the themes, codes and essence of the phenomenon.

Interview Preparation & Data Collection

One on one interviews were conducted with the participants in this study. The time and place of the interview was arranged via email between the participant and the researcher. The place of the meeting was a comfortable location agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. In an effort to provide a relaxed environment conducive to sharing information, the researcher and participant spoke for a while before each interview commenced. The pre-interview topics ranged from those of an academic nature (two participants were former on-line students of the researcher) to personal interests, plans for the rest of summer, or the upcoming academic year. While the topics
themselves are not of particular note, they all helped establish (or in some cases, re-
establish) a dialogue and comfort level for the participants.

Because the purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand and reveal
lived experience and essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2002; Giles, 2006), both
descriptive and narrative data are allowed and used within this study.

While the participants were given both the example interview questions and a
copy of the consent documents, the protocol of the interview, including the topics of
anonymity, benefits/risk of the study, protection of files/transcripts and the purpose of the
study was then explained by the researcher, and the participants signed the consent forms
at that time.

**Interview Questions & Responses**

Each interview started with a battery of demographic questions. This was
intended not only to start the interview with “easy” questions, but also to alleviate any
initial discomfort at being digitally audio-recorded. Moustakas (1994) allows that
researchers can and should speak with study participants in an informal, friendly manner
to create a social dialogue prior to the interview. This allows for a “relaxed and trusting
atmosphere” (p. 114), allowing the participants to speak as they wished, and creating the
atmosphere needed to successfully complete the interviews, a free exchange of
information, thought, emotion, and experience.

The next series of questions were guided by the research question of this study,
and were based on the “example interview questions” given to the participants. These
questions were open-ended in nature, giving the participants full allowance to explore
their thoughts and answers as they needed. It also allowed the researcher to adjust questions, and improvise, creating new questions in an effort to gather a fuller, richer textural description and ultimately the themes and essence of their academic and social experience.

The interviews were transcribed and emailed to the participants within 24 hours. At this time, students were allowed to revise or add information, give a further explanation of information, and request further follow-up with the researcher. One participant also shared a journal/record log of her time within the college, highlighting her experience.

**Reliability, Credibility & Trustworthiness**

Reliability in phenomenological research is grounded in the lived experience of the participants. van Manen (1990) suggests “that researchers hold a strong interest in their subject of research” (as cited in Giles, 2007, p. 6). Husserl’s phenomenology emphasizes “subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and provides a systemic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge” (1965, p. 5-6) and utilizes “only the data available to consciousness – the appearance of objects” (as cited in Oliva, n.d., p. 45). It is important to note that interest in the topic does not belie opinion or indiscretion in relation to the subject, but rather a willingness and openness to explore and learn the true experience.

Yet, reliability is always a concern in phenomenological research, and it is the job of the researcher to uncover the lived experiences of their participants and accurately explore and transmit their stories. van Manen (1990) suggests that the researcher must
‘trust the process’ [of phenomenological research and attunement to the phenomenon] as this allows the possibility of ‘seeing’ the meaning of the phenomenon” (as cited in Giles, 2007, p. 6).

The credibility of phenomenological research stems from the lived experience of the participants and the researchers’ goal is to explore and unearth true experience, and the essence of the phenomena. For this study, validity and credibility were by the simple fact that the participants were the ones to experience the phenomena, first hand. As a faculty member, the researcher bore witness to their journey, but it was through the interviews, emails and journals shared during the data collection process that the true validity and credibility were rooted. Giles (2007) states that research “is not a static state of being but rather a dynamic and fluid process that sensitively follows the disclosure of the phenomenon as and when this occurs” (p.7).

It is important to note that this project initially seems more like hermeneutic phenomenology than descriptive, but allowing the researcher, in this case, to be “in” the research is vital to the study. The researcher, as a faculty member, already has experienced the phenomena; being able to differentiate and separate that experience from that of the participants, and to understand the description from the participants allows for a greater understanding of the participants’ lived experience.

Trustworthiness is often difficult to prove, but for this study, we once again reference Creswell (2007), in which he notes that the relationship between the researcher, participant and phenomenon is a vital part of the process:
High-quality interpretive or qualitative research involves reciprocity between the researcher and those being researched. This standard requires that intense sharing, trust and mutuality exist (p. 213).

It’s important to note that the researchers’ influence here is not a factor, rather the researchers’ openness to the experience and phenomena allows for trustworthiness. The very nature of this subject, and the fierce pride that the participants exhibited at being asked to share their stories, their own accomplishments, reveal the depth of credibility and trustworthiness of the data. Personal experience is just that, experience. Qualitative research is by its very nature subjective; a researcher can never deny one’s lived experience; they can merely retell the story for them.

Transcription

The transcription for this study was done by hand by the researcher. Given the small sample size, the act of personal transcribing, without the use of computer software, allowed the researcher to become more intimate with the material – to be receptive and aware of the participant responses, and remember the emotion of the participants as they told their story. It allowed for subtle nuances to be discovered and a fuller description to be formed. After each transcript was complete, it was sent to the participant, along with an invitation to have a second meeting, a chance to listen to the interview, or further exchange information.
Data Analysis

The method of data analysis can take on many forms in a qualitative study. For the purposes of this study, the research experience involved a ‘deepening’ consideration of the participant’s lived experiences. This consideration focused on that which lies beneath our taken-for-granted assumptions (Giles, 2006, p. 7). Such a concern cannot be rushed, timetables or deduced upon demand (Giles, 2006, p. 7). Husserl states that “phenomenology is the ‘science of science’ since it alone investigates that which all other sciences simply take for granted (or ignore), the very essence of their own objects (p. 23 as cited in Oliva, n.d., p. 46).

The method of data analysis followed that of Moustakas (1994) in that the researcher used “Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction [textual description], Imaginative Variation [structural variation] and finally the Synthesis of Meanings and Essences [the final truth]” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84) to analyze the data. These proven steps allowed the researcher to minimize personal opinion or experience in order to “best understand the experience of participants in the study” (Moustakas, 1994 as cited by Creswell, 2007, p. 235).

Coding

The coding for this study was also done by hand, and with the use of color-coded markers to separate material and quotes. Creswell (2007) notes that the process of coding is that of “narrowing data into a few themes” (p. 266). Deepening this thought are the writings of Lofland (2006, p. 144-167). This served as a guideline when looking for recurring words, meanings and phrases in the transcripts:
1. Cognitive aspects or meanings (e.g., ideologies, rules, self-concepts, identities);
2. Emotional aspects or feelings (e.g., sympathy in health care, road rage, work-place satisfaction);
3. Hierarchical aspects or inequalities (e.g., racial inequality, battered women, high school cliques) (as cited in Oliva, n.d., p.14).

Arriving at the emergent themes thus became a natural process, in line with the teachings of Husserl, who believed that to arrive at essence, a researcher must discover knowledge “by reference to the things and facts themselves, as these are given in actual experience and intuition” (p. 6 as cited in Oliva, n.d., p. 47).

**The Participants**

The six students who took part in this study are identified as Anna, Christina, Darcie, Daryn, Jana and Kathryn. They are all second year or beyond (graduated) students who have persisted in their academic studies. Of the six, at least three mentioned their placement on the dean’s list during at least one semester. Four of the six students were enrolled in (or had graduated from) a medical program, one from liberal arts, and one in education. Additionally, five of the six participants were over the age of 50, and the other one was in her late twenties. This was unusual, but added perhaps a more non-traditional student perspective to the data collected. Four of the six students are currently married, two are divorced. All are first-generation, female students (as
required by the criteria) and two self-identified as low-income. Below is the graphic representation of this information:

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Self-Identified as Low Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} Year +</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darcie</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} Year +</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daryn</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Liberal Std.</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} Year +</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} Year +</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} Year+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-Identified as Low Income may mean currently, or in the past**

Anna

Anna was one of the first respondents to the invitation to the study, yet one of the last interviews conducted, due to scheduling conflicts and other events. The interview was conducted on a Thursday during August break (summer classes let out in August), and was attempted outside, but we moved inside due to heat and other activity that detracted from the conversation. Her son was present (but occupied with games) for the duration of the interview. She is a 25-year-old, married student.

Anna shared some stories which she stated were both wonderful, and difficult for her to share, and at times had to pause and find the words she wanted to share. She started with her background, and explained that she has:

…Nine older siblings, I am the only one on my dad’s side – on my mom’s side she’s got nine kids. They range from me who is 25 to 42, I think; my parents divorced when I was 18. I am the first one to go to college, and I’ll
graduate in spring [2013].” Following this, she explained that “My mom’s been in prison for the past 4 years, she just got out recently. My dad’s a truck driver, he just moved down to Mass. I got pregnant with him [her son] when I was 18…My brother was the first to attempt college, he went to UMO for two semesters and failed out. He got on a football scholarship, and football was more important to him than passing, so he…once he figured that out, it was just too late for him to go back. So he ended up dropping out, and unfortunately that led to drugs, pot all that stuff, so he never went back. None of my other brothers and sisters attempted to go to school. But you’ve got to think, our support system isn’t that great. My dad, I’m the only one for my dad. But my oldest brother’s father abandoned him, my sister’s mother abandoned her, it’s just like, my mom abandoned me.

Her motivation to go to college came from both an internal desire, and external force; she explained that not only was her husband taking classes, but:

College is pertinent to this [her husband’s] family. In order to be one of them, you need to go to college. I was told, when I was pregnant with him [her son] ‘don’t think you’re getting out of this just because you are pregnant.’ I was enrolled in college – I had him in October, I was enrolled the following semester. They said ‘you’ve got to educate yourself’.”

Additionally, she noted that “I was working 60 hours a week…and worked at a deli on the weekends. I didn’t want to do that for the rest of my life cause that’s what my mom did. She couldn’t raise 9 kids on that salary,
and [while] I didn’t want to have 9 kids, but I didn’t want to be stuck in a trailer park for the rest of my life either, so I decided that I wanted to go to school. I enrolled. My mom and I don’t get along very well, and she told me I couldn’t do it, and I wanted to show everybody who didn’t believe in me that I believe in me, and that I could do it.

The conflict with her mother continued throughout the duration of her college experience, reinforcing her motivation and ambition to succeed. She stated “in college, for every step of the way that I’ve said ‘I can,’ she’s tried pushing me back, saying that ‘I can’t’ and that ‘I’m not going to.’”

Anna’s initial drive to attend school is not unusual in that it is multi-faceted, but her academic and social experience of the community college and of the TRiO program seemingly highlights both positive and difficult issues facing a student.

One of her biggest challenges was that of childcare. Yet, as she found out, assistance was available, “TRiO should have stuff like that ‘Having issues finding childcare? Look into Educare. Never have they ever… they offer all kinds of tutoring and stuff, but a lot of time, parents can’t go because lack of childcare.” While Anna did not use TRiO exclusively for tutoring or academic assistance, she used it as a gateway, a networking device to connect her to others – other students, potential job opportunities and other assistance programs. She stated:

They need to explain TRiO’s mission, advertise TRiO’s mission, and those of us in TRiO and those who want to be in TRiO [need to] know what they are going to be looking for – what’s expected of them and vice versa. Recommend [services] other than tutoring. [They should be]
networking, they should advertise more…childcare, technology and stuff. There’s a lot of people who lack computers, [and] laptops…there’s a program that I went through that got me a laptop. It was through the school but nobody advertised it.

While Anna relied on herself to find and explore new opportunities for assistance, even as part of the TRiO program, she did find other support there:

I’m only one person, everyone’s experience is different. When I graduate, they’re gonna…their success rate is their support. It’s being there, listening to your problems. I don’t know how many times I went in there, crying…I cried to her [TRiO personnel] because she was not a friend, but she was a friend…she was somebody who “knew,” who knew both sides of the story, the stress and pressure.

At the same time, Anna was able to reflect inwardly:

The TRiO program…isn’t responsible for how much I’ve accomplished. I don’t want to feel conceited, but I feel it was me that did all the work…ultimately once I figured out that TRiO wasn’t a magic pill, that I still had to do the work, I depended on myself. I became less dependent on the people around me and started depending on myself, for my success. TRiO can’t give you the grades; you have to work for them… I feel bad saying that because I love everybody in the program, I really do. But as far as TRiO goes itself, it wasn’t really what helped me out. It was having good relationships with the teachers, finding out that I needed to talk to the teachers.
For her continued success, Anna notes her past, and looks forward. “I had no motivation before I had him [her son] and once I had him…we just can’t live in a trailer park forever. Everything leads up to this moment, to spring, and graduating.” She admits “I’m so excited. My husband asked if I was excited to rub it in my mom’s face…I was like ‘yeah, that’s great too but I’m just excited I could do it’. I’m doing this for me, not to show her that I could do it. I’m doing it because I’m doing something that I love…”

Christina

Christina is a 52-year-old married woman who just recently graduated from the college with an associate’s degree. The interview was conducted during the summer after her graduation. Christina came to college in a way that’s quite non-traditional:

I went through the VA and got disability and was able to get assistance… I decided that I needed to do something for myself that I hadn’t done something for myself in many, many years, and I wanted to go to college. And they offered a program for vocational rehabilitation to help those who were in a dead end occupations, which I am, and help them to get something going for themselves.

While she wasn’t able to join TRiO immediately after she started attending college, she noted that:

I was having a having a hard time figuring out when to study, how to study, how to be productive; and I was actually working at the same time in that fall semester, and that was, it made it very difficult for me.
Basically, I had assignments that were all due; ‘How do I get them all done in the time that I have, without burning myself out, and still maintaining family things?’

At the same time, she noted “…because of the fact that I did really well with my grades in the spring… it was hard to get me in, the only to get me in was the fact that I was a first-generation [student]”. While her grades were good, Christina utilized the TRiO program for motivation, to keep her going through the more difficult times of the schooling process “sometimes it was the academics that I needed help with, and sometimes it was the social, and there were times where I was just getting frustrated with the whole thing! The whole thing [was] just getting to me, and I needed to just sit there, calm down, shut up, and listen to what they had to say.”

For Christina, the TRiO experience helped her socially, which in turn further strengthened her academic prowess:

I was always the kind that never interacted with others, or I interacted with other people, but not correctly. I don’t know how to explain it except for that way. I was very socially stigmatized in some ways because in school I was very quiet and withdrawn. When I went in the service, and after… I was a little better about it, but I still found I was doing things the wrong way. I didn’t know how to say things; I didn’t know how to do things, so I tended to be really awkward.

Perhaps then, it was the process of belonging and learning that shaped Christina’s academic and social experience of community college. Resultant to her enrollment in TRiO, “I actually tried to interact with more people. I tended to, tried to be more
social… I tried to open myself up a little bit, a little bit more to people when I started here.” Christina reflected:

What I quickly found out, which I didn’t realize it, was that the younger peers; the younger students looked up to those who were older because they thought that we knew… because of our life experiences. I didn’t expect that reaction whatsoever, and I felt like, almost like an adult in a child’s world… in a sense. But I was the child still… I feel like a child, somewhat as well, because I was learning as I was going along as well. So my daily life involved learning about people, and being around different people and personalities, and figuring out what they were doing, and trying to be more objective about how I felt about things as well; to make it so that it was easier for me to cope.

In time, Christina became more pro-active about the academic and social experience of a college, and what is has to offer, she states that she is “able to volunteer and step up and do things without really being asked.” She gives credit to TRiO for this, “I think being in TRiO gave me the confidence to continue to do that. I feel that it helped me in a lot of ways to grow as a person and as a mentor, and….being able to understand that other people are different, and that it is ok to be different; and to accept those differences a little bit more readily; I think TRiO helped me do that a lot.”

**Darcie**

Darcie is a married, 50-year-old woman with children enrolled in a medical program. She noted that while her parents never received education above grade school,
her children have gone to college, and one is in graduate school. Darcie is in her second year of her schooling. The interview was conducted during the summer break in August.

Darcie returned to college after going through layoffs and unemployment, but also citing “I always wanted to have a college degree,” and “I went to make my kids proud…we’ve got to finalize it, make it mine.”

This initial determination actually fortified itself when Darcie enrolled. As she tells it, “one day I decided I was going to come to school and sign up for a class. I didn’t sign up for a program at the time; I just walked into the school and said ‘This is the class I want to take. I have the money to pay you for it, so can I take it?’ and they said ‘Yes, you can.’”

However forthright Darcie was when she enrolled in college, she discovered that it was not all as it seemed. Entering into a program that graduates less than 50% of those accepted, it was an uphill battle. Combatant with anxiety, TRiO was able to step in and help, in both the academic and counseling areas, “I tried working with groups of students, in class, but they don’t have the skills to understand how our brains work – people in TRiO do; they know how we look at things…if you’re not getting it, they’ll try showing it to you this way, or that way…oh, ok now I get it. It’s more specifically tailored.” It’s worked. For such a difficult program, Darcie has only failed one class. She does state that TRiO is not without its flaws, and can’t be expected to do and know everything. One of the areas of weakness is the tutoring for the class that she failed. Even after asking questions in class, and meeting with the tutor, she did not pass, which was not only frustrating, but pushed back her scheduled graduation date, and requiring her to audit classes that she has already passed. She understands this though, and from a motivational
standpoint, agrees. “...there’s so much said that if you don’t go, you’ll never go. I figure
the school is looking at it in much the same way. If we [the school] don’t keep you in
there somehow, you’ll not come back to us at all.

At the same time, Darcie still struggles with interaction with faculty outside of
class, “I’m not so good with going to instructors in general…I’ve never done that, I think
my whole thought on that is they are busy, or they have the next class or they are
preparing for the next class…so don’t bother them…I mean I’m always talking in class,
I’ll always raise my hand and ask questions and make comments but…”

Darcie noted that she now recognizes within herself not only her strengths, but
also areas that she feels she needs to work on, and is continually working on
improvement, not only within herself, but in her classes within the TRiO program.

**Daryn**

Daryn is a 50 year old, married mother of three, with two additional stepchildren.
She is open, amiable and an individual who has much to give this world. An artist by
nature, she is creative and expressive in her communications. The reason that Daryn
came to college has similar roots as the other participants, with one caveat – her nuclear
family. She stated:

My family was, were not big proponents of schooling for me…I was the
firstborn, and I had three brothers after me. For the males in the family, it
was more of a push to get education, but not for me…Later on, my mother
realized that it was a huge mistake, and said that to me. And so that put a
plug in my head that hmmm…I wish I’d had that opportunity; I’d had
some things I’d wanted to do and I’d let them go, to the side. Life happened. I got married, divorced, had two kids, got remarried, had another child and I ended up losing my job.

But coming back to school was not an easy decision – not only was higher education a priority in her family as a child/young adult, but her K12 experiences were less than confidence inspiring. She recalled:

I had such a hard time in high school. I failed classes that I had to retake…

[It was] steeped in sexism. My science and math classes, I had people calling me stupid, but actually when I look back on it now, I just learned in a different way, and they didn’t know how to present it to me, or refused to try to present it to me in another way. I know that now, but back then, I just thought ‘Oh I’m stupid, I’m not learning this, I’m dumb, I’m…’ I had a fairly big block for math and sciences because I’d had male teachers who tended to…I felt like I was…kinda targeted in a couple of those classes as the dumb, or the student who was on purpose resisting what they were trying to teach, but I wasn’t, I just wasn’t able to get it, to understand it.

Upon deciding to go to college (a result of her unemployment), Daryn knew the odds were stacked against her and that she either needed to give her full effort, or she would fail. “I decided to just go for it, sink or swim. I knew that if I failed a lot in that first semester, I would probably drop out.” She notes “If college turned out to be like high school…my self-esteem was not at a place to keep going, to keep failing. I knew I needed
lots of support and systems in place… I looked up online ways to help yourself if you are a first-year, first-generation, first person to go to college in your family.”

Her research about being a first generation student brought Daryn to TRiO, and the success stories of TRiO that really pushed her to engage. “When I went online, it was looking at everything they’d done for women and the different women’s stories. I’m saying specifically women, [because] it kinda was for me. . I realized “Wow, there is this many of us who are first-generation and we’re all working towards this goal.”

To keep her going, Daryn most appreciated several facets of the TRiO program, including:

Networking, that personal time of having them sit down and talk with me about my career goals and how everything fit, were the most valuable for me. I hoped it would help me to not fail. I really didn’t want to fail. And I had a lot of apprehension. I know myself well enough to know that if I fail enough times at something, I drown. I didn’t want to drown…I knew that if I did start drowning…I’m not the kind of person; some people can start drowning several times and come back to life. I am NOT a good drowner. If I drown, I tend to like ‘AHHHH I’m sinking!!’ That’s it. I give up. And so, I needed to have, I really needed to have that safety net for me.

Daryn was open and honest about her fears of being in the TRiO program as well. This information gave the researcher a glimpse at the fact that while students (and people and general) can recognize assistance, fear plays a large role in their willingness to accept it:
I thought that there might be a stigma being part of the TRiO program, which may sound crazy but I’d equate it to when I had to go on food stamps, I was so embarrassed to have to use them. But, I’d just been through a horrendous relationship that I ended that because of domestic abuse, I needed to get my feet on the ground, I needed to get a job and I didn’t have what I needed. I went and got those food stamps, I used them…I used to drive to another town to use them because I was so embarrassed about having to use them, because of my pride…but I think a part of me felt that same thing with TRiO. There was a piece of me that questioned ‘Are people…there’s that stigma of “oh no, your parents didn’t go to school” or “you’re from that side of town” or “you grew up rural and poor” or “education wasn’t a priority”’ I really felt that, and I am so glad I was able to put those feelings aside, and I think a lot of that comes from my family background because they were very, ‘pull your bootstraps up,’ or ‘Do things by yourself’ or ‘you don’t need this or that’ when actually, I did. I would have been a way better student in high school if they had said ‘let’s get you a tutor’ instead of ‘oh no. you are fine. You can pull yourself out of the mire…’ when I actually I failed...Those old tapes run through your head and TRiO gave me the ability to shut those old tapes off and be able move forward.

For Daryn, TRiO was more than just the academics; and influenced her drive and motivation to stay in school. She stated “Sometimes, just because you are proactive doesn’t mean that you necessarily know that you are getting it right, that you are doing
it…that it matters, that it makes a difference, that you are reaching your goals.” She notes that TRiO plays a large role in this, “TRiO was there for me when I was stressing out, I gave them a call, or shot them an email and they always responded back…and having that safety net when you are at your wits end is something. It’s so, so helpful, it’s so important. It’s vital, really. I really feel if I hadn’t have had them there in that first semester, that might have been it for me. It was HUGE for me!”

**Jana**

Jana is a 53-year-old divorced woman who volunteers for campus organizations. She has three grown sons, and is in one of the medical programs. She is an enthusiastic lady, clearly passionate about not only her studies, but also her volunteer work.

Jana came back to school after years in the workforce; a common thread amongst the non-traditional student crowd, and indeed a common occurrence within Maine’s manufacturing workforce. Jana states “I worked for a business that didn’t close but downsized, and they’d been laying off for the last 10-12 years. I got downsized last year, I got laid off…and the trade retraining act; it’s part of the federal government…I always said if I got laid off, I would take advantage of furthering my education and that’s what brought me here.” Acknowledging why she is in college, and keeping the motivation to be in college are both topics Jana is comfortable with, and she minces no words when speaking to over-enrollment and waitlist issues that have plagued the medical programs of not only this campus, but of other Maine Community College campuses:
I was on the wait list and I don’t want to wait another year to get into the program, because I feel…I have all but two core classes completed, and if I sit out a semester or two semesters or three semesters, then chances are I’m not going to come back; so as long as I am in a program, then the funding will be there, and my motivation will be there.”

Speaking to determination, fear and motivation, she recalled her first “glimpse” at the college life, and remembers clearly the intimidation “I was walking through the door as a displaced worker, an older person thinking that college was all young people.” She remember that she was scared, and that “I’m going to be twice as old as everybody, gonna be old enough to be their grandmother … all that stuff’ and so I was nervous on that part, and it had been 35 years since I’d been in school.”

Jana was quick to note that her need and use of TRiO was not stagnant – it grew and changed over time, and impacted her motivation in a variety of ways. She stated:

When I walk down the hallway and I see them [TRiO students], I can say ‘Hi, how are you doing?’ and we have a conversation and we might talk about the classes we are taking. We may not have the same instructor, but we take a lot of the same classes. We may study together; we do the student-led tutoring or the study sessions that they have scheduled in the mornings. It just bonds you to, with somebody, it just makes the connection with somebody…feeling like this is my college, and TRiO helps me feel like this is my place.
Jana’s participation in the TRiO program led to unexpected results. Not only did she make the Dean’s List last semester, but she has become pro-active in supporting the TRiO program, as well as other forms of assistance for students. She recounts “I was in a new experience now, I’m in college, and I’m going to try what I can, use it for all its worth; shame on you if you’ve got opportunities if you’ve got a chance for support, networks, or study aides, that you don’t use them.” She also mentioned that TRiO is only as good as those who not only administrate the program, but the students themselves:

It’s as much federally funded and faculty/staff driven as it is student driven. It’s the students who…I don’t want to say make or break the program, but give it more inherent value I suppose…You can get accepted, go to tutoring or maybe have a couple advising sessions and really do nothing else…or…you can be as involved as you want to be.

In terms of motivation, Jana had several sources that she had drawn on in order to succeed, but TRiO was high on the list in a root-cause analysis. “It’s a proactive approach…TRiO gave me the tools to be able to open my eyes and see that there is more to this going to school thing than just going and sitting in classes and doing whatever the instructor thinks will be important for you.” Not only did Jana feel like TRiO gave her the tools in which to use in gaining her success, but also:

It’s [TRiO has] given me a lot of confidence I feel, as a mature adult. I feel I can talk to most anybody. I’m not a real extrovert, I’d prefer being independent and don’t support…I support other people but I don’t usually ask for support from other people, so TRiO has really given me the confidence to say ‘Y’know, I’m not liking this right now.’ She [TRiO
Kathryn

The interview with Kathryn almost didn’t happen. The schedules didn’t jive, the timing was off, and there were technical issues. Thankfully, the meeting finally happened. Kathryn had an amazing story; one of triumph, perseverance and courage. She is a 62-year-old, divorced woman with two grown children enrolled in a medical program. She stated that while she does not work, she does volunteer in the tutoring center on campus.

Kathryn was very matter-of-fact about her struggles to not only get into school, but to achieve happiness and independence in her own life. She stated:

I really wanted to go [to college] right out of high school, but there wasn’t any money. My folks – only went through 6th grade, so my mother said that college was for “people that are too damn lazy to go to work.” That kinda tells you that you need to go get a job. So I did. And I got married at 19, I lost two pregnancies, then I had two living children. As I was raising my kids I knew I needed more than high school. I wanted to get something that gave me the ability to support my family if it came to it – my then-husband had started out with osteoarthritis…right off the bat I knew that sooner or later I may end up being financially responsible for the four of
us. I figured that I needed to go to college to do that… There wasn’t any
time to go to school. There wasn’t any money to go to school. There
wasn’t any energy left to study. So it all went on hold.

Years later, after a messy separation and subsequent divorce, and losing her job,
Kathryn decided that something had to change. She went to Goodwill Workforce, a
division of the Maine Department of Labor, and asked for assistance. As she states
“Their job is to basically get you back into the workforce. They assess your education
and try to find the cheapest way to get you back into the workforce, whether that’s doing
a GED or helping with a resume…when things progress and it’s still not happening, we
look at certificate programs.” However, after speaking with a community college faculty
member, and enjoying her volunteerism at a local hospital, Kathryn discovered that a
certificate program would not yield the results that she wanted, yet the Goodwill
Workforce was not known to pay for an Associate’s Degree. She recalls the Workforce
Development caseworker stating “Oh we can’t do that. We can’t put you into a degree
program, they won’t pay for that.” She replied “with or without your help, I’m going.”

She did. She recalled,

At that point, I had blinders on, like a runaway horse, I wouldn’t stop. I
told them ‘you haven’t found me a job, haven’t given me any directions to
go in, I’ve found a direction and am not going to sit here and stare at the
wall all day and try to figure out what can I manipulate here, what can I
manipulate there to try and make it work? If it’s not happening, it’s a)
because I’m a woman, b) because I am 62 and c) I don’t have a degree. I
can’t change their minds, but I can change “c”. I’m not changing “a”, I’m not changing “b”.

She went back and got approval, and eventually funding from Workforce Development. Like many others, her introduction to TRiO came about because of another student, “I didn’t join TRiO until about five weeks prior to the end of the [first] semester. I didn’t have a study partner because everybody else had early registration, they’d gone to the introductory sessions…I don’t know if I’m the oldest but I’m close. There’s a lot of kids just out of school, there are some younger people who are married but don’t have kids, there are some single parents. We’re all from various backgrounds.” She commented that while this was a good thing, that generational differences make some academic learning more challenging, “Some of them find the technology, like the blackboard program we have to use, very easy. I didn’t. Again there wasn’t a class that gave the details. I went to some class, but she didn’t get into any specifics. So, it seemed to me that it was kinda stacked in the wrong direction.”

With her test scores going from 94, 80 to 70 to 64 to 60 Kathryn felt that “I’m drowning here, and I don’t know what to do.” She spoke with another student who “hadn’t had a good home life, she was young, she was single, and she was living with someone and she was ill” but was succeeding…and “we had a conversation one day in A&P and she said that I should go down and talk to TRiO. I said ‘What’s that?’ She said they’d help me to study, they’d help me figure out what to do to be successful in this class.”

She did. TRiO, at the time already had 180 students in it; however the director made an exception for Kathryn. She recalled “She took my information, because
sometimes people would drop out, sometimes ‘I [can] squeeze one more person in here or there.’ She said she could take 180 students, but she probably had 185 already. She looked at my information and said ‘I have to do this.’ And it’s been a tremendous help.”

Because of TRiO, Kathryn learned of a learning challenge that she has, similar to dyslexia. Upon learning this, parts of her past started to catch up, and her past struggles began to make sense. “In one job, I was doing secretarial work, and my boss, she thought she could just give me a whole list of directions and I could just go out and do it and I couldn’t. My perception of that was that she thought I was stupid, but my reality is…” [quite different]. After learning that there was in fact a reason for her past struggles, Kathryn continued to add resources to her motivation:

TRiO definitely helps my motivation, by helping me to understand my learning style, by helping me understand my challenges and to help me to see what help was available. That first semester I was here, I came into it not knowing I could find a tutor, not knowing that there was one-on-one tutoring, not knowing some of the learning challenges I had, and not being very organized even though I thought I was organizing my time and my work. They helped me to get organized, they introduced me, indirectly, to some students that I ended up spending some intermittent study time with which was helpful, but the biggest thing they did for me was provide me with a resource. Tell me what the process was, tell me that there really was…that professors would have time [for me].
Between her struggles in school, her failing and abusive marriage and its’ continued outfall (she is still the victim of a stalker), losing her job and all other troubles that have befallen her, Kathryn has found her freedom. “Yeah, there’s a freedom. There’s a power in coming home with that 93 on that final” but she admits is goes deeper than that; “there’s a power in getting my security system up. Yeah, you can come outside, I can’t stop you…but there’s a power in knowing that there’s a wall, beyond which you will be stopped. There has to be a safe space.” To help with this, Kathryn commented that:

I go to Al-Anon because he was a career alcoholic. You go to a meeting and when you step through the door, everyone is on the same footing. In their reading at the beginning, they say “No criticism.” None of us need it, we’ve already got it on the outside, we don’t need it in that room. That’s a source of strength, and when you come here; [the learning center director] is awesome. She’s motivational, even when she feels like she’s being impatient…

For Kathryn, not only did she feel a part of something larger than herself, she felt protected, safe:

Now I feel like I have a support net. And it’s awesome to be in that place, rather than where I was. I think for anybody looking at the TRiO program, that’s what it is. You are up there on a wire, and the wire may be fat or skinny, depending on your perspective, but TRiO is a safety net, and so if you fail a test, you don’t say ‘I’ve lost the class,’ you come down here and say ‘What do I do now?’ That’s a whole lot better place to be in instead of
trying to do it on your own. I don’t think anything good was ever accomplished by one person. Having a team, that’s the most important thing.

**Emergent Themes**

The themes that developed with this research were both anticipated as evidenced through my analysis of the available literature, and unexpected; emergent themes developed as the data was analyzed. The information given by the participants shows a greater range and depth of reason, drive and determination than expected. The themes themselves are over-arching, and allow for collective stories to develop as the participants entered and succeeded in college, each with their own experience of academic and social integration. Table 2 shows the emergence of themes, and how each participant contributed.

*Table 2: Distribution of Participant Responses and Emergent Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Sense of Belonging and Purpose</th>
<th>Building Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles</th>
<th>Seeking and Building Support Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darcie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daryn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of this table is to acknowledge that all of the emergent themes were developed as a response to multiple participant experience. Because of this, the emergent themes offer depth of discussion, as well as a breadth of content to be explored. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand the lived experience of each of the participants, and to uncover deeper meaning and motivation for their presence and persistence on campus. Table 3 highlights an example of how varied the experience could be, but how each participant contributed to the emergent theme of “Seeking and Building Support Systems.” For a further look at the raw data used to create the emergent themes, please see Appendix C.

Table 3: An examination of a theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Seeking and Building Support Systems”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darcie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daryn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Arriving at the emergent themes became a natural process, somewhat in line with the teachings of Husserl, who believed that to arrive at essence, a researcher must discover knowledge “by reference to the things and facts themselves, as these are given in actual experience and intuition” (p. 6 as cited in Oliva, n.d., p. 47).

The interviews transcripts were analyzed, from which a rich structural and contextual understanding was formed. All data was secured and accessed only by me and my advisor.

**Emergent Theme #1: A Sense of Belonging and/or Purpose**

The theme of “A Sense of Belonging and/or Purpose” stemmed from multiple responses. As five out of six participants were older than 50 years of age, a few of the participants noted that the inability to attend college in their younger years was mostly due to other commitments, such as working and/or raising a family. Daryn recalled "my husband and I put our own children through college, so it was a high priority for us, but neither of us had attended school. He had the opportunity but chose not to earlier in life, I was never presented with the opportunity, but had an interest in it.” Others noted that they’d never been able to earn a livable wage without a degree, and a few expressed intense grief and sadness that their lack of a degree (and thus a well-paying job) left them unable to provide for their children in a manner they would have liked. “After my divorce, financial support for my children and myself was my responsibility and generally I often found myself in unable to meet this need due to low wage jobs. I was never afraid of working to obtain what I needed to 'pay my way' but it was difficult and frustrating to work two jobs, be raising kids and still unable to make ends meet.” For
several of the participants, child-rearing was an issue that prevented them from attending college in their younger years - yet it seems to be an issue that transcends time, for the youngest participant, Anna, revealed that she was experiencing this difficulty now as she struggled to make things better for her eight-year-old son, and no longer live in a trailer park.

What was surprising about this theme was that all participants acknowledged that they recognized the importance of higher education, even if they were unable to attain it. Those who had grown children (Darcie, Daryn, Jana) fought for higher education in their children’s lives (with some soon to be attending and a few having already attended), even at the expense of their own education, due to financial and time constraints. Even those who admitted a personal “failure” to get their children in higher education recognize the value. As Kathryn stated “It’s been a long process to get here, but because my folks didn’t get college educated, I didn’t get my girls into college. This has always been in the back of my mind, sitting like “here I am” and finally, when I lost my job; I said ‘this is time to do it.’”

Nuances to this category included a veteran of the armed services, who, while had military experience found that the skills acquired during her military tenure did not befit the local business world and economy; leaving her to rebuild her portfolio. While Christina acknowledges her love of her service time, she also acknowledges that it did not in fact help her pursue a career outside of the military, and, combined with a lack of job and upward mobility, led her to school. She notes “I went through the VA and got disability and was able to get assistance…they offered a program for voc[ational]
rehabilitation to help those who were in a dead end occupations, which I am, to get something going.”

**Emergent Theme #2: Building Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem**

I did not anticipate that first-generation, female students wanted to engage in volunteerism; it was a complete surprise to learn how much these students were not only currently giving as they completed their studies, but had given previously. A common cliché is “If you want something done, ask a busy person to do it” with the idea that busy people will somehow fit it into their schedule, if it is important. Such is the case with volunteering.

These students often have families and jobs (whether part-time or full-time) and often struggle with their academics, yet they were giving back – to the school, the TRiO program and to their communities; the participants were often involved in several volunteering programs at one time.

If one performs a root-cause analysis of this (which in of itself is another phenomenon to explore), the answer is clear – those who grew up with little, yet managed to persevere against the odds, have had assistance in some form or fashion, be it the tutoring center, TRiO or even an inspiring faculty member, yet were not often the sole instigator of this assistance, and were often uncomfortable during the beginning process. As a result, they understand (perhaps better than anyone) the plight of those in a similar situation, and what is needed in order to survive and to succeed. They return the favor to those going through a similar experience; perhaps to make it just a bit easier, or just a bit more friendly as they attempt to navigate admissions, financial aid, learning assistance and sometimes just a courteous answer.
This theme has some common elements with the first emergent theme (A Sense of Belonging and/or Purpose). Not only are these TRiO students learning and gaining their own sense of belonging and purpose, they are helping others do the same; allowing new students to build their self-confidence, self-esteem and establish a “safety net” and collective group of constituents. As Kathryn stated:

…they [new students] come in here [learning center] and they are like ‘I’m in a pool and its ten feet deep and I don’t swim…I had someone come in the other day and ask where such-and-such and office was. I answered ‘No, but let me find out…’ They come here to get their questions answered and the door is open. We’re not just sitting behind a desk with our nose in the paperwork…I was very pleased when [the director] gave the orientation, and she said, “when someone comes in and says ‘where’s 202 Smith?’ you can say, ‘it’s upstairs’ and follow it with ‘let me lock my door, and I’ll walk you to the room’.

Yet Kathryn has a deeper call to action, and it spurred not only her enrollment in college, but determined her choice of coursework, and influenced her volunteerism.

“Three brothers and a sister that all went into the Army. I had two brothers that went to Vietnam; I lost one to Agent Orange. For me…when I was provided the contact by my adviser at Togus, the light bulb came on…” For a woman who has overcome such challenges, losses and sorrows in her life, Kathryn is amazingly resilient, and determined.

Both Christina and Jana volunteer their time and efforts, and to more than one cause. While she was taking classes, Jana spent as much time volunteering as many do in a part-time job. “While I was taking my classes, I was doing 4 hours a week at the
Learning Center, with an additional, most weeks it was an additional 8 hours, so I was doing at least 12 there, as well as doing the student orientation which varies from 4 hours a week to no hours a week.” She also volunteered in other ways. One class requires a service learning project, but Jana completed two – one to help a scholarship foundation for the school, and one sponsored by local businesses (such as the YMCA/YWCA and local hospitals), known as “Move and Improve”. Additionally, she volunteers at blood drives, at gala events and other venues.

Christina is a habitual volunteer of at TRiO; she has volunteered her time at not only academic events, but also her time (and in some cases, belongings) to TRiO-run (but open to all) swap events – events that allow students who are less fortunate to browse through donated items like household wares, and clothing, and take what they need. If the individual has something they no longer need, they may donate it. The program is called “Freecycle” and it was TRiO students that created it.

When asked why she volunteers, Jana noted that her social experience with TRiO brought about a new confidence; a knowledge that she did have something to share with the world, and the ability to do so; Christina noted that TRiO helped relieve her anxiety of social situations, and helped her interact with others in a more positive and meaningful way. To them, the process of belonging to something larger than themselves, of gaining self-esteem and self-confidence was vital to their success – someone took the time to help them; they are passing the gift on to another.
Emergent Theme #3: Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles

The emergence of this theme, overcoming challenges and obstacles was anticipated; especially as most of the participants were non-traditional students in addition to being first-generation students. While the literature notes that students who fail to persist in the community colleges tend to be female; there was no indication that the participants would give such personal and intimate reasons leading to their success, and overcoming the odds. As a researcher, it was humbling to be given this information, and to bear witness to the struggle, emotion and burden that these women have carried and still carry. It was also empowering and heartening, especially as a female, to watch the sheer determination and resilience of these women as they overcame what, at times, seemed to be insurmountable obstacles.

Many of the participants grew up with parents that were from a generation that still emphasized traditional gender roles. This way of life may have transferred into a marital relationship, or otherwise still played a role in their self-confidence, self-advocacy and assertiveness. For many of the women, the transition from living with the stereotypical “gender norms” into an independent, creative and assertive person came later in life, only after breaking free of whatever traditions, restrictions or situations which held them back.

The exception to this generalization was of course, Anna who is part of a much younger, much different generation, with different norms and expectations. While not experiencing gender-bias per se, Anna had to come to terms with an all-but-absent family. With a mother in jail, a father who lived states away, and no clear connections to siblings, Anna struggled to find her identity and prove to herself that she was worthy of
an education, and the benefits of an education. “My mom’s been in prison for the past 4 years, she just got out recently… I’ve always been the kind of person to get stepped all over, I’m the youngest, the baby – [they told me] ‘I don’t know what I’m talking about, I’m my dad’s little girl’…There weren’t big accomplishments in my family – it was what I couldn’t do, I’m the youngest, still a child. I did definitely earn it – I earned being assertive. In college, for every step of the way that I’ve said “I can,” she’s [her mother] tried pushing me back, saying that “I can’t” and that “I’m not going to.”

On the other end of the spectrum were Daryn and Kathryn. Both are survivors of domestic abuse, and both grew up in a time where women were not treated with any semblance of equality, especially in education. A lifetime of sanctions and condescension makes attending college a difficult and intimidating proposition.

Daryn noted that it was her research about the TRiO program, and how they helped women (specifically, though they assist both men and women) that gave her the courage to apply and then succeed. “When I went online, it was looking at everything they’d [TRiO] done for women and the different women’s stories. I’m saying specifically women, but it kinda was for me. I had a fairly big block for math and sciences because I’d had male teachers who tended to…I felt like I was…kinda targeted in a couple of those classes as the dumb [student].”

Kathryn offered a different perspective; “I spent 3 months pounding the pavement, doing all the connections and the directions. Unfortunately, I didn’t have a degree. Everybody wants a degree now, for whatever position you are seeking and so, I really didn’t have any luck.” She knew what she didn’t want to do as a career, and that involved anything which put her in a position of inferiority with a predominately male
population. “Look, I grew up with that, I married that, and I’m not going into that.” For her, going to college and studying for the career of her choice was just that, her choice, her chance to become and identify herself, apart from any family or martial relations.

The theme of overcoming obstacles is truly an over-arching theme; it not only drew attention to gender-bias (at home, in the workforce and in education), but also domestic violence, generational norms, financial issues and more. Including all of these obstacles highlights the determination that each participant demonstrated in her effort to succeed.

**Emergent Theme #4: Seeking and Building Support Systems**

The final theme grew from the other emergent themes, A Sense of Belonging and/or Purpose, Building Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem, and Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles. Instead of looking at these themes as individual units, this theme concentrated on “how” the participants achieved belonging and/or purpose, built self-confidence and/or self-esteem, and overcame challenges and obstacles. The seeking and building of support systems allowed the participants to do so, and each story is unique, though the result (success) is the same.

For Anna, it was her marriage and subsequent pregnancy – all of her husbands’ family attended college, and extended their support to her schooling and betterment of herself, she started attending school with a three-month old baby. Additionally, it was their support that drove her to become more a part of their family and increase the distance from her own family. “And my mother, every time she put me down, every time she told me…my mom told me that she couldn't believe I graduated…his mom was just
like ‘what do you mean? She had high honors… They stood up for me; they’ve created a fence around me when it comes to her.’” Anna feels honored to be a part of her “new” family, and credits them with part of her success. Without having a goal to reach for (to be “one” of them), she is not sure she’d have even gone to school. “If it wasn’t for me being with my husband, and getting pregnant by him, I wouldn’t be where I am. I probably wouldn’t have gone to college. I had no motivation…”

Darcie also worked to fulfill a gap in her life. For her, she had a husband with a college degree, and worked hard to put her three sons through college. She understood wanting to have the degree, but also the struggle to get it – not only as a student, but as a parent. “When our oldest son got out of high school, he was supposed to go to Brandeis…two weeks before school started he came to us and said ‘I’m not going to Brandeis.’ It was like ‘uggh. It was fear – there’s so much said that if you don’t go, you’ll never go.”

For her, the program she joined graduates less than 50% of the students who start. Her desire to complete the degree, and provide a more stable future for herself and her husband figured into her thoughts about staying in school. “I figure the school is looking at it in much the same way. If we [the school] don’t keep you [the student] in there someone, you’ll not come back to us at all.”

This story was similar to the one that Daryn shared. She too worked to see her own children through school, but had never gone herself. While her husband was given the opportunity to go to college (but did not), she never had the opportunity. Coupled with the loss of her job, Daryn was looking to fill more than one role with her degree. “When I went to unemployment, which I had not collected before, they were like ‘wow,
you have all this work history, it’s fantastic, but you have no education to back up where you are coming from…””. For her, it was not a good feeling, and yet another indication that she was up to the challenge, and on the right track; it was the inclusion into a larger population – the working world that were degree holders, and joining the growing numbers of degree holders in her family.

For Christina, it was also inclusion, but it was also the fact that she’d be in a leadership role and will deal with members of the public. She needed the experience of college, and the degree to do so. Perhaps most importantly she needed the confidence. “I think I’ve gained a lot of confidence in that field and that area [interpersonal communication], and I needed to gain the confidence in order to deal with the parents of the children that I’ll have to deal with…[it] was really important for me to learn that. TRiO helped to facilitate that, as well as some other peers in my group that I worked with in the school.”

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the stories of both academic and personal struggle as well as the path to confidence, independence, and success as related by the participants. The data is raw, as were the emotions and experiences as retold by these women. The process of learning and understanding the experience and the essence was one the allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the unseen burdens and struggle our students are faced with, and work to overcome on a daily basis.

The following chapter will take the data that was presented here, and the emergent themes of “A Sense of Belonging and Purpose, Building Self-Confidence and Self-
Esteem, Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles, and Seeking and Building Support Systems” and discuss how the data and themes relate to not only the theoretical framework of motivational theory, but the body of literature concerning these topics. The findings and relevance of what was found will be discussed.
Chapter Five: Findings

Introduction

As a faculty member at a community college, it is easy to see how many students fail to persist in their academic studies. It is also easy to recognize some of the common struggles (balancing work, family) that students face. The literature is rich with studies highlighting failure rates and the common causes, persistence rates among specific demographics of students, and retention solutions developed by specific institutions (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006; Bailey & Morest, 2006; Jones, 2012).

Missing from the available literature are the stories of those students who succeed in college against the odds. This study explored the participants’ thoughts and experience of persistence, as well as their beliefs about how and why they are persisting and aimed to explore the academic and social experience of first-generation, female community college students; the demographic with the highest historical rates of failure (Eitel & Martin, 2009). This study specifically focused on participants enrolled in a TRiO program, as TRiO success rates rebuff the generally accepted attrition rates, with a record high 93% success rate (Jones, 2012).

The findings supported current literature, exploring the relationships between campus involvement and perceived community/happiness and, between student/faculty interaction and student support networks on campus, but also showed the absence of some key elements to success, including obstacles that the participants were unable to navigate even with assistance. Additionally, the participants clearly articulated their needs and how the fulfillment of these needs related to their experience; each one described the opportunities and relationships that supported her success. As the school in
this study is both a community college and a commuter campus, understanding the needs of students will help facilitate educational programs, student-led organizations and social integration opportunities. Several participants noted that they felt that “owning” her voice was of vital importance to their success. It didn’t matter who was listening, just that someone was listening to her questions, problems, and story. Many of the participants noted a need for alignment of administration, faculty and student representation, believing that administrative attention and student advocacy will the school move forward in its quest to help students not only attend school, but also become part of (and ultimately, graduate from) the college.

This chapter will discuss how motivation played a role in the participants’ acceptance to college, their admission to the TRiO program and, ultimately, their persistence. It will be inclusive of the emergent themes and will help identify the relationships between experience and persistence.

**Review of Theoretical Framework**

It is important to remember that the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation is a specific meta-theory and is different from other motivational theories. Deci & Ryan (2000) state “Specifically, a critical issue in the effects of goal pursuit and attainment concerns the degree to which people are able to satisfy their basic psychological needs as they pursue and attain their valued outcomes” (p. 227), and that “…specifically, in SDT, three psychological needs—for competence, relatedness, and autonomy—are considered essential for understanding the what (i.e., content) and why (i.e., process) of goal pursuits” (p. 228). Furthermore, Deci & Ryan (2000b) state that “motivation is hardly a
unitary phenomenon. People have not only different amounts, but also different kinds of motivation. That is, they vary not only in level of motivation (i.e., how much motivation), but also in the orientation of that motivation (i.e., what type of motivation)” (p. 54). This last assertion is paramount to understanding the essence of the lived experience for the women who participated in this study.

The following section describes how the findings of this study relate to the theoretical framework of motivational theory. The experience that each participant brought to the table was unique. It was the collection of these experiences which helped answer the research questions of:

- How do first-generation, female students enrolled in a TRiO program describe and understand persistence?
- What is the academic and social experience of these students?

**Finding #1: Creating a Community of Communities**

“This is My Place” - A Sense of Purpose

College is as much communal experience as it is an individual experience. Each woman’s experience in higher education brought with it varying degrees of motivation. For these women, motivation ebbed and flowed and changed throughout their higher education experiences. Motivation for these women was a living, breathing, almost sentient part of their lived experience. Because of this, the experience of higher education and the building of networks was unique to each participant.

Knowing that “intrinsic goals, such as community contribution, health, personal growth, and affiliation, are differentiated from extrinsic goals, such as fame, financial success, and physical appearance” (Deci, Lens & Vansteenkiste, 2006, p. 22), these
women showed that the two types of goals were not mutually exclusive for them, and they often experienced one or both during their tenure at the college.

An important element of intrinsic motivation is that it “is enhanced by feelings of competence and optimal challenge. Competence refers to how [people] feel about themselves with respect to certain domains of their life (e.g., physical abilities) while optimal challenge refers to situations where the challenge of an activity is balanced with their abilities” (Weiss & Bressan, 1985 as cited in Mandingo & Holt, 1999, p. 6-7). For many of the women, the camaraderie borne from the TRiO program enhanced their determination to succeed in challenging situation. It nurtured that sense of competence, and gave many of the participants not only the ability to face and overcome challenges in a smaller, less-intimidating environment, but also to take that self-confidence and apply it to their external lives. TRiO did not create the community for the participants; but it did invite them into one of the few communities on campus. TRiO also offered the tools needed for the women to create their own groups, their own communities. Whether or not the participants used the tools, was an individual choice, and one that linked directly with their motivation, and experience.

“I Am Worthy” - Building Self-Confidence, Self-Esteem and a Sense of Self

The women in this study all knew there was more to their lives than what they were currently experiencing, and their common ground was their need for self-improvement, increased self-confidence, faith, familial standing and financial security; wanting “more” out of life was the common experience. While they all had different reasons for going to a community college, they all seemed to make the most of their
experience, pursuing academic success to develop their own personal growth. Their motivations may have changed during the course of their journey, but it kept them pushing forward, at times against high odds. Coming full circle back to a needs-based motivation, Deci & Ryan (2000b) state that “…when lonely, people may explicitly seek out companionship; when controlled, people may explicitly seek out autonomy; and when feeling ineffective, people may explicitly work to become more competent” (Deci & Ryan, 2000b, p. 230).

The realization and recognition that they were worthy of “more” was not present when the participants started college, but was something that was fostered and developed over the course of their studies. To feel worthy of a place in a classroom, in a familial unit, in the workplace, or in a community larger than oneself, is an immensely personal and internal process. The women of this study were open to discussing how their experience bolstered their feelings of self-worth, and how this process effected their motivation.

For example, participants spoke of abuse (domestic, parental or otherwise) and sexism as root causes for their lack of self-esteem, and self-value. Yet, participants also noted that as their confidence grew, their beliefs started to change and they realized that they did not need to believe what they’d been taught about themselves, or their inherent value. To this end, TRiO again acted as a conduit; recommending counselors or therapists for help, or giving information about stress management, or tips on how to work through anxiety and fear. Students opened up their belief systems and learned that everyone is worthy of attention and success. Often the participants created a niche that
enabled them to give back to the communities they created and joined, fostering a sense of community for the next class of students.

“People Come Here for Help” - Seeking and Building Support Systems

In the same sense that community is important to success, so are individual support systems. “Strong social networks such as family or friends who are familiar with higher education can provide assistance in identifying potential support within a college” (Burns, 2010, p. 37). The commonality that the participants found with others in the TRiO program is testament to the open, caring environment of the program. However, for the students, it goes much further. The participants of this study revealed that TRiO allowed them to simply be themselves, to put their strengths and weaknesses out on the table, and to be accepted for who they were. Not only that, but they were given the tools to improve areas they felt lacking, and strengthen areas they felt needed reinforcement. It also helped them to connect with others in meaningful ways and learn from these interactions. TRiO also offered referrals beyond the classroom and college; further pushing the boundaries and “comfort zone” of the participants, and encouraging them.

As a result, the participants were given the means to build individual support systems of many kinds, including academic, personal, and emotional. Some joined study groups they were once afraid to approach. Some went to a professional counselor to seek assistance with personal issues, and others decided to give back, starting fundraisers, clubs and volunteering their time, often turning an individual idea/project into one that a community rallied around. In fact, “the more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely they are to persist and graduate” (Tinto, 2005, p. 3). As the
participants each built social, academic and personal support systems, the support systems built their confidence, provided comfort and helped further their education and development.

“I Did This For Me” – The Role of Community in Fostering Individual Achievement

The idea that one gives to a community and the community gives to an individual is not new, and these participants experienced community as both a means of inclusion, and a system for garnering support. Levels of self-efficacy and motivation varied with each participant, with respect to how they approached community, and how they received community support. Zimmerman (1989) noted that “students personally initiate and direct their own efforts to acquire knowledge and skill rather than relying on teachers, parents, or other agents of instruction” (p. 329). Those who spoke to areas in which the TRiO program was lacking still recognized that the program allowed them the opportunity to find their confidence, self-advocacy skills and, for a few, the desire to give back (social responsibility) to those newly entering the school and/or the TRiO program. That type of information is vital to the growth and development of the program itself, and how it assists the students.

Most commonly, participants noted that TRiO often gave them the tools to study, helped build the confidence that enabled them to network with peers, join study groups and broaden their horizons as to what opportunities were available and to reinforce the fact that they were part of a larger community. It also gave them self-assurance that they were worthy of education, and something larger or better in their own lives. It is this essence which ties back into the literature – the feeling of connection, of being part of
something larger than themselves. Indeed, Gonzales (2009) states that “88 percent of part-time students reported spending zero hours in a typical seven-day week participating in college-sponsored extracurricular activities...Fewer than one in five students (17 percent) had participated in an internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment, while 41 percent indicated that they had not had, nor did they plan to have, such an experience” (p. A19). In reflection, the TRiO program provided a baseline of experience for the students, but the true essence of their experience was still up to the individual and their motivation; each woman put into the program and took from it what she deemed necessary. Yet, the opportunity for each woman to learn and experience growth, assimilation and independence, was connected to her acceptance into the TRiO program, if not necessarily a direct result. TRiO offered the opportunity for each of these needs to be met. Individual motivation gets a student into TRiO, and their continued motivation makes use of the skills and aid that are offered.

**Finding #2: Any Help is Good Help**

*“Not a Magic Pill” - Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles*

Participants described their initial experience as full of intimidation, fear, uncertainty and self-doubt. If these experiences are the cause, the literature notes that first-generation students are less likely to understand the importance of their degree, or how to make positive academic and social decisions while in school (Pascarella et al, 2004, p. 252). They also noted that these initial experiences were challenging, demanding and frustrating; however, eventually their experience became motivating, inspiring and enjoyable. The process of this change, from a negative experience to a
positive experience, is the essence of why these participants have persisted in their studies. The process of change itself became a catalyst for the participants as they began to understand what the experience should be like, that it was not one of turmoil, trouble and struggle. For those who had a negative prior experience, the process of change was even more profound.

The factors the participants associated with positive experience included finding a sense of belonging and purpose, building self-esteem and self-confidence, finding the initiative and wherewithal to overcome barriers and obstacles, and seeking and building support systems.

The TRiO program, as the data showed, is what the students make of it. Enrollment in the TRiO program alone will not suddenly initiate good grades or automatically create networks, it is simply an avenue in which students can find others with common interests or struggles and get help, but only if they are willing to ask for it. Even once accepted into the TRiO program, it is the responsibility of the student to utilize and capitalize on the programs’ offerings, as “...students need high levels of social capital to understand that faculty and staff can serve as advisors and how to approach them for help” (Burns, 2010, p. 37).

“Pull Up Your Bootstraps” – Getting Help

Chickering & Reisser (2003) state that first-generation students must “develop confidence, manage emotion, move through autonomy towards interdependence [the recognition and allowance that others can and help make decisions for the betterment of ones’ life/situation], develop mature interpersonal relationships, establish identity,
develop purpose, and develop integrity” (p. 45-50). The participants who seemingly had the most to overcome also showed the greatest depth of determination.

But getting assistance is a difficult obstacle for many to overcome. While the participants very clearly illustrated the need to persevere, they still struggled with asking for help. For some, it was a stigma of “oh, you’re not smart enough” or thoughts such as “get through the mire, yourself” that kept them from truly utilizing TRiO and its offerings. The participants overcame this struggle to varying degrees; those who did most successfully understand that it was through TRiO that they developed confidence, learned to keep emotions (such as fear) at bay, and to understand their greater purpose which was far greater than just taking classes; it led to helping sustain and further build the community they had joined, and most importantly recognizing that their voice was important, their questions needed to be asked, and that help was available, if they chose to pursue it.

These women pursued higher education for many reasons. Some did so to pursue a career, some to reach a personal goal, but all did so to better their own lives in a meaningful, personal way. Women are more likely to be driven to succeed academically (Francis, 2000; Van Houtte, 2004), and women frequently outperform men in a classroom environment (Jackson, 1998 as cited in Rinker & Speirs-Neumeister, 2006, p. 305). Additionally, Brooks and Terry (1988) state that first-generation students have “a commitment to graduation (determined by satisfaction with the degree program, perceived benefit, and the behavior of significant others); a clear vision for a future career, including specific goals; and high self-efficacy for reaching those goals” (as cited in Rinker & Speirs-Neumeister, 2006, p. 305). All of the participants held some sort of
job prior to attending school, but for various reasons each felt there was something more
to be had in their life; they needed the skills to pursue whatever next level they had
chosen (be it a career move or personal goal).

In all, it wasn’t that the participants didn’t want assistance, it was that they didn’t
know how to get it. TRiO provided the safe haven, the place to ask uncomfortable
questions, to find assistance. For many participants, their experience with TRiO brought
about the realization that assistance comes in many forms; from peers, from staff and
from faculty, provided they (the participant) was willing to ask.

Finding #3: A Cultural Disconnect
“They Are Busy…Don’t Bother Them” - A Disconnect with Faculty and Institution

Understanding that the participants needed to foster not only a sense of
community and support, but also develop the confidence needed to seek out assistance,
the final finding focuses on what is perhaps the largest barrier to those needs. The
literature speaks to common themes such as those explored by Tinto (1975) “[the] higher
the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his
commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion" (p.96), and
it addresses the lack of community fostered when there is a combination of part-time
students, commuter students and part-time faculty (Jacoby, 2006). While the women in
this study all sought and built support systems, and all reported good degrees of success
when it involved peers or others in the TRiO program, many of the participants noted that
not even the TRiO program could help them overcome their fear or reluctance to
approach faculty. This is yet another example of the fact that while TRiO provided the
baseline for the students to expand their horizons and enrich their experience, much of work still needed to be done by the individual. While TRiO gave the participants an opportunity to be around like-minded students, faculty interaction was a common area in which the participants struggled and not all managed to overcome. The literature suggests that faculty/student interaction is vital to student success (Tinto, 2005). Additionally, the employment of adjunct/part time faculty (as is common at community colleges) further exacerbates the issue (Wilson, 2006). A 2003 study suggests that “colleges where nearly 80 percent of the instructors worked part time had graduation rates of only about 20 percent. As the proportion of instructors who worked part time declined, graduate rates rose” (Wilson, 2006). Additionally, “They don't have offices, and some schools don't even list part-time faculty in their directory…People don't even know how to find them” (Jacoby, 2006 as cited in Wilson, 2006).

These participants were already struggling academically and socially, and interacting with faculty was an issue that many struggled to overcome. The duality of the problem exacerbates the issue; the students are reluctant to approach faculty and the part-time and adjunct faculty are often unavailable. It is proving to be an uphill battle and one that the students frequently lose. For those that do approach faculty, it is the perception about the character and worth of the interaction that dictates whether or not they will try again (Tinto, 1986, p. 127).

Another component of this issue is how part-time faculty feel about their role within their institution and/or system in terms of respect, voice and compensation. “68 percent of us [part-time faculty] earn less than half of what the other 32 percent do for equivalent work…even institutions that succeed in establishing a 75-percent-to-25-
percent balance between tenure-track and part-time faculty members will still leave a shameful quarter of them vastly under-earning the rest” (Street, 2008, p. 4). Feelings of resentment and inequality run rampant, which shows up in the attrition rates for colleges with high number of part-time faculty. It is simply “inequity at the core of our higher-education institutions: It has weakened our colleges and all of us in them” (p. 4).

The participants of this study also believed in principles such as ‘pull your bootstraps up,’ or ‘Do things by yourself’ or ‘you don’t need this or that’. These sentiments are what many of the participants struggled with; a fear of interacting with professors only contributes to the problem. While these women ultimately did seek out help, assistance is still lacking. Tinto (2005) notes that there are six areas vital to student success, “commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning” (p. 2). Without strong faculty involvement, there is no commitment to the students, and they do not get the full collegiate experience or the most out of their education. “Students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success, hold high expectations for their success, provide needed academic, social, and financial support, frequent feedback, and actively involve them, especially with other students and faculty in learning” (Tinto, 2005, p. 5).

“A Bridge or a Pathway…an Identity”
Connecting Commuter and Part-Time Students with Their Campus

The participants in this study all related stories of frustration, obstacles and challenges that they strived and successfully overcame on their way to success. One of those topics involved their struggle into assimilate to the campus culture, or identify with the college itself. One of the reasons for such issues is that these participants were all
commuter students, and many of them attended school as part-time students for at least a semester of their program.

The literature explores common issues for commuter and/or part-time students; ranging from the fact that most part-time students who work place importance and emphasis on their job first, and education second as jobs pay for day-to-day living expenses for the student and their family (Wasley, n.d.). Additionally, students do not feel connected to a school if they have no significant relationships with others, including other students or faculty. For those without a sense of belonging, the college experience often becomes similar to a stop over, like “‘stopping at the mall’ to get what they need on their way to somewhere else” (Garland as cited in Recruitment & Retention, 2006, p. 6).

Isolation and intimidation were common references for the participants of this study. Many felt intimidated by the size of the campus, the unfamiliar layout of buildings and classrooms, and several mentioned the fear of either being part of, or not being part of a social group (such as a study group). The lack of camaraderie and struggle to integrate academically and socially was often attributed to being off-campus, or being a part-time student.

In all, the barriers to student success are numerous; from identified traits of the demographic to institutional barriers, there are many reasons why students fail out of school. Nothing that the experience and involvement in TRiO greatly improves persistence rates boils down to the fact that TRiO gives its participants the tools for success, and gives them a support system. What the participants make of the tools and assistance is still an individual determination. Those who utilize the support and tools given to them have a more positive, more engaging experience than those who do not.
They are more likely to engage the campus and its constituencies, and utilize the system to their advantage, earning their success. These findings highlight key areas of not only success, but areas that still need improvement.

**Future Topics of Study**

This study investigated the academic and social experience of first-generation, female community college students on a commuter campus. As such, it is limited by the scope of the study and by the parameters for inclusion. While this demographic of college student carries the highest attrition rate, other students still fail to persist. TRiO and other academic support services are of course open to both male and female students, but traditionally they have a higher percentage of female participants. The voice and experience of the male student is not one which can or should be overlooked; gender and cultural norms may influence the college experience, and allowing for those stories to be told is vital to gaining a more thorough understanding.

Furthermore, this study could be divided into smaller units. Is the experience of first-generation, non-traditional college students different than that of the first-generation student coming straight out of high school? How does academic and social experience vary between these two groups, and does one group make up a larger percentage of those that fail to persist?

As the enrollment of the Maine Community College System continues to grow, a fuller, richer, and deeper understanding of its students and their needs and experience will only raise the level of service that faculty, staff and administration can provide. Higher education is about upward mobility – enabling students to grow, learn and take on new
challenges in their personal, business and academic lives. In short, the experience of higher education allowed these women to recognize themselves, and separate themselves from their past. It allowed them to find their self-worth, self-esteem and the self-confidence to face new challenges, and gave them the tools to find others that will support and help them in their quest. Motivation brought these women to college, helped them find TRiO, and TRiO gave them the tools to drive their motivation; to seek out services, groups, and other help that they needed to succeed.

The Maine Community Colleges can learn from this study. TRiO was never designed to be an all-encompassing program, and while most of the Maine Community College System schools are not commuter schools, they still enroll commuter students, part-time students, and first-generation students. The collective experience of these participants showed a need for inclusion which TRiO provided. While the community colleges offer student development activities, tutoring and other services, they don’t have another program (similar to TRiO) that any student can join.

The community colleges need to operate as a community of communities, in which all are welcome and all can find their fit, and a group that supports their goals, understands their fears and needs and encourages their success. Such supportive communities change the culture of a school. Once a culture of success is predominant, people rise to the occasion; like begets like. At the same time, it would be ignorant to think this will help every student, and that retention rates will rise dramatically, as the choice is still up to the student. What the Maine Community Colleges can do is to offer an avenue, a guided pathway to student inclusion and success. If the colleges can promote
student development, growth, and inclusion, they will produce more satisfied student, who is more likely to persist and succeed.

**Conclusion**

There is no singular new discovery that occurred because of this study; but this study provided an examination of personal experience, adding depth to student experience, looking at personal discovery, growth and the continuance of motivation as a process, and is its own experience. The participants in this study drew motivation from many facets of their lives as they applied to school, gained admission and ultimately persisted in their studies. Their motivation ebbed and flowed as did their experience, as a living, fluid process; it grew and changed as they went about their studies, jobs, and daily lives. The Self-Determined Theory of Motivation suggests that it is part of the adaptive design of the human organism to engage in interesting activities, to exercise capacities, to pursue connectedness in social groups, and to integrate intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences into a relative unity (Deci and Ryan, 2000b, p. 229).

Perhaps then it is fair to say that while initial experience was rooted in generalized terms of intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation, neither necessarily remains a primary source, but rather the experiences of these women indicate that their motivation was truly fluid, growing as their experience did. Looking at the emergent themes of this study, it is easy to understand why. Higher education is a transformative process; these students learned not only what was taught in class, in TRiO and in textbooks, but also learned from the support systems they created and often from within themselves. They found a place within the walls of the school, but also within a small community in the
school. Here, support systems allowed for opportunities for exploration, freedom, the development of advocacy skills, and the growing of self-confidence and self-esteem. In turn, the participants found their own limitations diminishing and their boundaries expanding; perhaps finding a place in a family unit (or having the confidence to be recognized within a family unit), the ability to engage (or re-engage) in the workforce, or the ability to move beyond a history of violence or suppression. In all, their basic needs were being actualized.

This study gave birth to a few insights about how to improve upon the excellent work TRiO does. The first is to keep on doing what they are doing, but to more fully explain what the role of the student is. These participants now understand that TRiO won’t do anything for them, but will help them do whatever it is they choose to pursue; TRiO is an avenue to success, not a guarantee of success. The second is to more fully integrate the program with other facets of community college life, again the idea of “community of communities.” TRiO helps build camaraderie and networks, but thinking beyond the scope of “academics” and “social interaction” will bode well for the program and its participants. The addition of referrals to programs such as Educare and low-cost school supplies supports a demographic that is often struggling with financial and time constraints. TRiO teaches for success, not for failure, and their success rate proves it. For TRiO, it’s not about expanding the breadth of what they do for their students; it’s about adding depth and further purpose to the opportunities they present.
References


*College Facts (n.d.)*. Retrieved November 11, 2011 from:

http://www.collegeview.com/schools/kennebec-valley-community-college/figures


Appendix A.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1.1.** The Self-Determination Continuum, with Types of Motivation and Types of Regulation.

(Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 16)
Appendix B

Example Interview Questions:

1. How did you decide to enroll in college? Describe this journey.
2. How did you find out about TRiO?
3. What about the TRiO program influenced your decision to join it?
   a. What did you already know about the program?
4. What have you liked and appreciated most about Trio?
5. What were some of your hopes in joining TRiO?
6. Describe how TRiO affected your ability to interact and engage with peers and faculty.
   a. Describe a time when you engaged with a TRiO peer or faculty member, and how your work with TRiO influenced this interaction.
7. Describe daily life here on campus.
8. What are some of the experiences that you’ve had here at KVCC that you identify as a result of being in the TRiO program?
## Appendix C: Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A Sense of Belonging and/or Purpose</th>
<th>Building Self-Confidence And Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles</th>
<th>Seeking and Building Support Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anna</strong></td>
<td>The kids were my mom’s responsibility, my dad went out and worked…If it wasn’t for me being with my husband, and getting pregnant by him, I wouldn’t be where I am. I probably wouldn’t have gone to college. I had no motivation before I had him [her son] and once I had him…we just can’t live in a trailer park forever. Everything leads up to this moment, to spring, and graduating.”</td>
<td>“None of my other brothers and sisters attempted to go to school. But you’ve got to think, our support system isn’t that great. My dad, I’m the only one for my dad. But my oldest brother’s father abandoned him, my sister’s mother abandoned her, it’s just like, my mom abandoned me.”</td>
<td>“My husband, he has a stepfather, a father and a mother, and all three have been very supportive of him. College is pertinent to this family. In order to be one of them, you need to go to college. I was told, when I was pregnant ‘don’t think you’re getting out of this just because you are pregnant.’ I was enrolled in college – I had him in October, I was enrolled the following semester. They said “you’ve got to educate yourself.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christina</strong></td>
<td>“I went through the VA and got disability and was able to get assistance through them. I went for disability, I decided that I needed to do something for myself, that I hadn’t done something for myself in many, many years, and I wanted to go to college.”</td>
<td>“I think…being able to volunteer and step up and do things without really being asked…I think being in TRiO gave me the confidence to continue to do that. I feel that it helped me in a lot of ways to grow as a person and as a mentor…”</td>
<td>I was very socially stigmatized in some ways because in school I was very quiet and withdrawn…after that [US Armed Forces Service]…I was a little better about it, but I still found I was doing things the wrong way. I didn’t know how to say things; I didn’t know how to do things, so I tended to be really awkward…”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darcie</td>
<td>“I had several layoffs; in the economy as it was, it was downsizing and I always wanted to have a college degree. I never really knew what I wanted to do, but I’d worked 10 years in long term care as many roles.”</td>
<td>“I think the reason for me doing is… I didn’t set myself up too well, retirement wise. I’m going to have to work, much later.”</td>
<td>“I went to make my kids proud. Three with a college degree (kids and my husband). We’ve got to finalize it, make it mine.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daryn</td>
<td>“Motivation came from the desire to not have to rely on anyone for an income. I also wanted to have a job that provided a living wage. Being financially independent is needed for every individual. After my divorce, financial support for my children and myself was my responsibility and generally I often found myself in unable to meet this need due to low wage jobs. I was never afraid of working to obtain what I needed to 'pay my way' but it was difficult and frustrating to work two jobs, be raising</td>
<td>“My family was, were not big proponents of schooling for me… For the males in the family, it was more of a push to get education, but not for me.”</td>
<td>“My husband and I had put our own children through college, so it was a high priority for us, but neither of us had attended school. He had the opportunity but chose not to earlier in life, I was never presented with the opportunity, but had an interest in it.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>“I worked for a business that didn’t close but downsized, and they’d been laying off for the last 10-12 years. I got downsized last year, I got laid off…and the trade retraining act; it’s part of the federal government, I always said if I got laid off, I would take advantage of furthering my education and that’s basically what brought me here.”</td>
<td>“There are emails all the time from different places asking for volunteers, and like I said, I never felt like I had value to add to them volunteering, but TRiO supported me and let me know that yeah, I do…TRiO has showed me that I have more to offer than just studying for a test…” It’s helped me become a well-rounded college student.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>“I do a lot of volunteer work. I want to work in a place where care is demonstrated, where you are doing something to put someone at ease, or are clarifying something…” “This is my passion, to give back. If I can go to Togus, or PCHC or any other clinic where they serve people who’ve been at a disadvantage for a long time, it isn’t the money. Yeah, I want to earn a living so I don’t have to worry if I’m going to pay...”</td>
<td>“Want the bottom line why I’m here? I am here to prove to every woman who’s ever beaten or battered, that you can survive. Because once I get that degree in my hand, you’ll be looking at the bottom of my shoes, you won’t be able to see my face cause I’ll be up there…” [Cloud 9]. “What I want you to do is take from this time, that if this person was told all her life that she didn’t measure up, isn’t good enough, was asked ‘why did you do that?’ or ‘why did...”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for this bill or that bill. That’s true; all of us have that concern. But for me, it’s going home at the end of the day knowing I did something.”</td>
<td>you say that?” or ‘you could’ve done this better’…don’t take it in…. Find your shield and hold it up and say “I am worthy” and “I can.” If there was really ever a reason, it’s because of the five years of trauma that I’ve been going through. I’ve been told all my life “you can’t”. TRiO says “you can.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

## TRiO

### STUDENT INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Student ID #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Zip Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Phone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell Phone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How do you prefer to be contacted?**

- [ ] Home Phone
- [ ] Cell Phone
- [ ] Email

**Ethnic Background (check all that apply):**

- [ ] American Indian or Alaska Native
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black or African-American
- [ ] Hispanic or Latino
- [ ] White
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

### ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

**Do you have a physical or learning disability?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If yes, is the documentation on file with the SCC Disability Services Office?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Has your mother received a 4-year college degree?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Has your father received a 4-year college degree?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Which parent did you regularly reside with & receive support from until you were 18 yrs. old?

- [ ] Mother
- [ ] Father
- [ ] Both Mother & Father
- [ ] Neither Mother or Father

**Have you applied for financial aid?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If not, do you plan to in the near future?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

**Please Note:** The federal government requires that we have documentation of income on file for all our students. If you have applied for financial aid, we are able to obtain the necessary information through the Financial Aid Office. If you have not applied for financial aid, we ask that you provide documentation, such as the previous year's income tax forms (1040, or 1040A, or 1040EZ, etc.) when you return this application. Please contact us if this information is unavailable.
Will you be:  □ Full-time or □ Part-time  What is your Major?  

What do you plan to graduate and/or transfer?  

Briefly explain your educational and career goals:  

Can you think of anything that might keep you from completing your goals?  

How did you hear about TRiO?  

---

**How can we help you complete your goals?**  (check all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Skills:</th>
<th>Advising and Career:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Career Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Skills/Improving Grades</td>
<td>Choosing a Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Taking/Test Anxiety</td>
<td>Academic Advising/Planning/Course Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Transfer Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note Taking</td>
<td>Goals/Decision Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Skills</td>
<td>Financial Aid Advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Computer Skills</td>
<td>Other:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring - Which Classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Certification & Release**
I certify that the information I have provided on this application is, to the best of my knowledge, true and correct. Furthermore, I understand that by applying for this program, I authorize the Student Support Services Program to obtain records or data pertinent to my participation from other sources (including but not limited to, Financial Aid Office, Disability Services Office, and Registrar's Office), and to release information as required by law or the terms of the Student Support Services Grant, to the grant-funding agency of the federal government. The U.S. Dept. of Education requires reporting by Social Security Number. If accepted into the program, you will be required to provide this information.

**Signature**

**Date**

This application must be completed, signed and returned to the address below before you can be evaluated for admission into the Student Support Services (TRiO/SS) Program. Submit your application to:

---

Student Support Services is a federally funded program by the U.S. Department of Education in cooperation with an equal opportunity educator and employer.

(TRiO Project, 2011)