INVOLVING THE QUIET MAJORITY: A CASE STUDY TO UNDERSTAND CO-CURRICULAR ENGAGEMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INVOLVED COMMUTER STUDENTS AGED 18 TO 22

A doctoral thesis presented
by

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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
May 2016
Abstract

Student affairs researchers have spent considerable energy studying the affect students’ active participation in co-curricular activities has on student success, retention, and completion. Students becoming actively involved in co-curricular activities can have a positive effect on their overall success. However, much of the research pertaining to student engagement has primarily focused on residential student experiences and has often overlooked actively involved commuter students. This thesis contributes to the existing research by specifically investigating commuter student behavior. The study examines the success of commuter students aged 18 to 22 who are engaged in co-curricular experiences at a private, mid-sized, four-year university in New Jersey. The primary question guiding the research is: *What are the experiences of commuter students aged 18 to 22 who are engaged in co-curricular activities at a private four year university in New Jersey?* The study’s line of questioning and theoretical framework is based on Astin’s (1984) seminal I-E-O (Input-Environment-Output) model focusing on student involvement.

*Keywords:* commuter students, co-curricular engagement, student involvement, student engagement, extra-curricular activities, student retention, student attrition.
Acknowledgements

When you begin a doctoral degree, you have no real grounding point to gauge how your life will be affected by a project of this nature. You simply learn by doing. Along the path of academic self-discovery, you develop a greater sense of patience, fortitude, persistence, a healthy sense of humor (hopefully), and you draw upon the support of friends, family, colleagues, faculty, and your advisors. That supporting cast brings you back to center when you begin to doubt yourself, keeps you on track with assignments and deadlines, reminds you to breathe when you feel overwhelmed, and cheers you on when you cross the finish line. With that in mind, I feel compelled to thank a number of incredible people who have been with me on this trek over the past five years.

I feel obligated to first speak about the many students I have had the honor of knowing and advising in my 20 plus years of working in higher education. They serve as one of the fundamental reasons why I decided to pursue this academic challenge. I have spent most of my career encouraging and supporting students to do their best work, while also striving toward goals that may have seemed beyond their comprehension. I felt it was time to embody the same advice I had been offering my students.

As I reflect back upon this adventure, I have to begin where it all started by acknowledging Dr. Raymond McCarthy, my first professor in the CPS program. He helped me realize that through hard work, dedication, and a belief in one’s self, that I had to the potential to make my way through this all-encompassing experience. In essence, he showed me how to believe in myself and my abilities as a doctoral student. I want to thank Dr. Al McCready and Dr. Elizabeth Malher for demanding my very best in their courses. I have never worked so hard, yet learned so much in two classes. I also have to thank my CPS program colleagues for their
friendship, support, fellowship, and that much needed evening with the Red Sox at the end of my second week of residency.

Advising has also played a central role in my life over the past year and half. I will be eternally grateful to Dr. James Griffin for serving as my primary advisor. I feel truly fortunate to have worked with someone who understood my problem of practice and who enthusiastically guided me to the finish line. His insight, expertise, attention to detail, and genuine support for my academic well-being will forever be appreciated. Along the same line, I also have to thank Dr. Sandy Nickel who challenged me to be clear and exacting within my academic work in her role as my second reader. Finally, I have to thank Dr. Nancy Mezey for being a friend, a mentor and agreeing (on short notice) to serve as my third reader. Her willingness to take time out her incredibly busy schedule, in both the figurative and literal sense, has meant the world to me. I would also be remiss if I forgot to thank my editor Laura Meyer for helping everything make sense. I also need to thank the staff within the CPS program who were wonderful and consistently provided me with the right information/support whenever I reached out for guidance.

Family and friends have played an invaluable role throughout this process. My father, Dr. Vaughn H. Clay Jr., deserves a great deal of the credit for encouraging me to take on this endeavor, for being there to chart my progress, and for always making time to share in the small victories as well as to process that day’s challenge. I also have to thank my mother, Alice Lackner Gray, for her love and never ending belief that I could complete this unbelievable task. She has been an ardent cheerleader who always believed in me, even when my faith in myself at times may have waned. My step father Dr. James Gray and step mother Dr. Sarah Mantel also deserve thanks for the care and concern that they each offered throughout this journey.
My brother Robert, his wife Musiette and my nieces Kiera and Madalyn merit a big thank you for the long-distance love and support they have shared with me over the past five years. My sister Meghan also deserves a great deal of recognition for her love and constant enthusiasm that she offered throughout this journey. There are also the many friends and colleagues who have been there to provide words of encouragement and support along the way. I thank you all!

Finally and most importantly, I dedicate this work to my best friend and the person who has been in my corner from day one, my wife Lynne. Without her love, encouragement, steadfast belief in me, her sense of honesty when I needed it most, and her never ending supply of patience; this thesis would not have happened. Despite the never ending mornings, afternoons, evenings, days, weekends, and vacations I spent taking classes and working on my thesis, she was always there with a well-timed word of encouragement, an extra set of eyes to review my work, the occasional kick in the butt, and a much needed hug when I needed it most. She patiently cared for me when my progress seemed at a standstill and when my days appeared their darkest. I quite simply would not have begun, let alone finished this whole endeavor without her unwavering support. For that and much more, I am humbled by the love she continues to show me.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Engaging commuter students in the extra-curricular opportunities that exist in a college experience has long been a challenge for student affairs scholars and practitioners who support this population. Commuter students contend with a variety of issues that make it difficult for them to become immersed in the out-of-class experiences that resident students often take for granted (Jacoby, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Silverman, Alibadi, & Stiles, 2009). In addition, the way commuter students connect to their institutions, or fail to do so, has played a defining role in the conversations and strategic plans that include the persistence, retention, and student completion taking place at colleges and universities throughout the country. Despite the importance of commuter students to universities, limited research has focused on commuter students and the experiences they have in higher education (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005).

Developing an understanding of co-curricular engagement as viewed from the perspective of commuter students aged 18 to 22 speaks to the need for further research among this population (Jacoby, 2000). Providing scholars and practitioners with a better sense of who commuter students are in the context of undergraduate experiences can further address such concerns. The data collected for this study may guide student affairs practitioners to develop strategic plans that take into account the unique needs and concerns of an ever growing commuter student body (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Studies by researchers such as Astin (1984), Kuh (1993), Pascarella and Terrenzini (2005), and Pike and Kuh (2005) involving students at two and four-year institutions extoll the value of students becoming immersed in co-curricular experiences such as clubs, organizations, Greek life, intramurals, work-study positions, as well as participation in student leadership
opportunities. Astin (1984) was one of the first to suggest that connections students make beyond the classroom help to inform and enhance the overall experiences students have during their college years. A student’s success in college can be positively influenced by the amount of purposeful time that the student is able to dedicate to participating in co-curricular activities (Astin, 1984).

Despite what higher education has come to understand about student engagement, Jacoby (2000) suggests that much of the related literature has traditionally been viewed through the perspective of the student-as-resident model. Notable examples include Astin’s (1984) focus on the amount of time resident students invest in purposeful co-curricular activities, and Chickering’s (1969) study of resident students in understanding the development of their sense of self. Additional examples include Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) identification of seven variables that impact residential student learning, and Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991, 2005) longitudinal studies of how college affects residential students. Despite some similarities, commuter students are different from their residential counterparts in important ways. For example, commuter students’ experiences in higher education can be influenced by a host of variables including available time, support from friends/family, and financial considerations among many competing priorities.

The decision to commute from a home or permanent address is often the direct result of students not having the financial ability to live on-campus. Such decisions also play a fundamental role in determining to what degree commuter students are able to immerse themselves in co-curricular activities because of the competing demands that students encounter outside of university life (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). One key point defining the differences between commuter and residential students is the cost of attendance (Silverman et al., 2009).
Over the past thirty-four years, the annual tuition at most institutions has doubled three times, significantly outpacing inflation (Sobel, 2013). Student affairs practitioners and scholars now know a great deal about the financial decisions residential students make when they are considering college as a possible next step after high school (Nui & Tienda, 2013). The cumulative influences of the economy on choice of college has been an important point of study, as well as the financial decisions that students make once they get to college (Davis, 2003; Berg-Cross & Green, 2010; Curs & Singell, 2010; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2011; Slaper & Foston, 2013). Despite what research has revealed about residential students’ financial decisions, little is known about the financial decisions and related pressures that commuter students encounter, especially when it comes to this population’s ability to become actively engaged in co-curricular activities.

Research describing the experiences of commuter students has been limited in large part by the “dominant residential tradition of higher education” (Jacoby & Garland, 2004, p. 62). Jacoby (1989a) indicates that there has been a prevailing assumption that data collected from residential students could also correlate to the experiences of commuter students. Scholars argue that only considering the perspectives and experiences of residential students hinders what is known about co-curricular engagement among commuter students (Jacoby, 1989a; Likins, 1991; Wilson 2003; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Krause, 2007). Additional research supports the idea that commuter students are an important part of the higher education landscape because these students represent a significant percentage of the overall enrollment at many campuses (Jacoby, 2000; Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2011).

Even though Jacoby (1989a, 2000), Kodama (2002), and Krause (2007) respectively illustrate the need to recognize the value that commuter students bring to higher education, there
continues to be a disconnect among scholars in understanding the needs and concerns of this population. Researchers such as Wilson (2003) argue that commuter students are the “quiet majority” (p. 23) within higher education. At the same time, Jacoby (2000) has indicated that scholars and practitioners within the college setting have a limited understanding of the overall needs of commuter students. Silverman et al. (2009) provides a supporting view and proposes that when institutions develop strategies to serve commuter students’ interests, they “will improve retention and the engagement” (p. 239) for this population.

Higher education’s understanding of the experiences of commuter students remains limited (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Yet progress has been made through quantitative instruments such as the National Survey of Student and Engagement (NSSE) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). NSSE and CCSSE have been instrumental in advancing the field of student affairs’ understanding of the types and forms of engagement that occur among commuter students (McCormick, Gonyea, & Kinzie, 2013). As technology has evolved over the last two decades, scholars have been able to access algorithmic software making it possible to conduct nationally based assessments. NSSE’s introduction in 1998 served as a model of data driven assessment that changed the paradigm of student affairs based research (Kuh, 2001a). The data generated from NSSE and CCSSE has been significant in providing the field of student affairs with an understanding of commuter students at the local, state, and national levels. To date, over four million students from 1500 colleges and universities in the United States have taken NSSE (NSSE, 2014).

The efforts of a college or university to retain its students and guide them to graduation is an elemental function that exists in the student engagement dialogue taking place in higher education (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). Students occupy an essential financial role for most
institutions, particularly institutions that are tuition driven (Kuh et al., 2011). Therefore, understanding how to respond to the needs of commuter students is vital for institutions of higher education. Also important is for such institutions to remember that commuter students currently represent approximately eighty-six percent of students enrolling in two and four year colleges and universities (Horn, Berktold, & Malizio, 1998; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Silverman et al. 2009).

Creating new forms of research at the institutional level can lead campus leaders to structure programs and resources that better address the needs and enhance their experiences of commuter students (Burke, 2011). The data collected from a qualitative study is also valuable in helping commuter students identify pathways to becoming more engaged in the co-curricular programs and activities at their respective campuses. Such data could support past research involving commuter students to suggest that when commuter students are involved in the activities that occur outside the classroom there is the potential for a positive effect on broader institutional goals such as academic success, student persistence, and student retention (Jacoby, 1989; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Silverman et al., 2009).

**Significance of the Research Problem**

The literature has reminded researchers that engaging commuter students outside the classroom is both difficult and important (Wilmes & Quade, 1986; Jacoby, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). This statement would not surprise student affairs practitioners who work with commuters. Silverman et al. (2009) have documented that commuter students contend with a host of life and school related challenges that influence the degree to which these students will succeed, connect and persist. Students are often unaware of such challenges when students make the decision to pursue a residential experience. Scholars such as Jacoby (1989a) remind the reader that successfully navigating college as a commuter student is no small feat. Commuter
students contend with daily encumbrances that include the time spent traveling to and from campus, financial considerations such as the need to work, the degree of support they receive from friends and family members, as well as the students’ ability to balance life responsibilities while also attending classes. Success can be affected by variables including students’ satisfaction with the institution, students’ success in the classroom, and the intentional efforts an institution puts forth in retaining a cohort (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

Campuses that have commuter students who are unsuccessful or unhappy have difficulty retaining this significant segment of the student body and seeing them through to graduation (Tinto, 1987). Leone and Tian (2009) note that retention and persistence are two areas of study that have garnered a great deal of attention in recent years. Additional research by Renn and Reason (2013) suggests that understanding how to retain students continues to be a “primary goal” (p. 173) for leaders and scholars in post-secondary education. Furthermore, Baum, Kurose, and McPherson (2013) argue that getting students to graduation has become a top priority in higher education. Many institutions now invest considerable time, energy, and funding to improve the completion rates of their undergraduate students.

Whether or not institutions can retain the students who have enrolled and see them through to graduation, continues to be a critical part of the conversation occurring at most campuses today, not only for the sake of the students, but also because of economic reasons. Many colleges and universities rely on a significant percentage of the annual revenue that is generated from tuition from students, including those who commute. Enrolling, retaining, and graduating students are important goals for many institutions of higher education (St. John, Paulsen & Starkey, 1996; St. John, 2000; Baum et al., 2013).
Student attrition is another concern affecting higher education (Leone & Tian, 2009). Students who reduce their credits or drop out of college altogether place added financial pressure on an institution. Although fluctuations are not uncommon, colleges and universities try to plan for such swings based on enrollment trends. Enrolling and retaining commuter students, as well as the experiences of commuter students, are ongoing problems for higher education (Jacoby, 1989a, 2000).

Given the dearth of research on commuter students, and the importance of commuter students to the economic health of universities, the study presented here fills an important gap in the literature. Students who are engaged in co-curricular activities are more likely to enjoy and remain in college (Kuh et al., 2011). Yet being engaged is a challenge to commuter students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The study presented here endeavors to provide a greater understanding of co-curricular engagement as viewed through the eyes of commuter students aged 18 to 22. The data collected offers insight into how universities can improve opportunities for co-curricular engagement among the broader population of commuter students at the subject institution.

A second point of significance speaks to the need for further research regarding commuter students (Jacoby, 2000; Allen, 2003; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The existing research on commuter student engagement has been collected using quantitative methods (Kuh et al., 2001a). By drawing on qualitative data, this study provides a new and subjective perspective regarding commuter students in a higher education setting. The qualitative focus endeavors to understand the experiences of commuter students who are engaged in co-curricular opportunities at the university highlighted in the study.
A third level of significance exists at the institutional level where the study was conducted. Understanding factors related to why commuter students engage in co-curricular opportunities is important in developing institutional strategies to support commuter students (Silverman et al., 2009). Focusing on commuter students aged 18 to 22 who are involved in co-curricular activities at the institution illuminates important patterns of behavior. The data also has can inform the campus at-large, including students, staff, faculty, and campus leaders who are not aware of or understand the related experiences of what it means to be a commuter student. The study also has the capacity to influence strategic planning where the literature has suggested academic and administrative paradigms have traditionally been lacking (Wilson, 2003).

A fourth level of significance speaks to issues of persistence, retention, and completion among commuter students (Tinto, 1987; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Silverman et al., 2009; Baum et al., 2013). The ultimate goal for colleges and universities is to have students matriculate through, and graduate from, an undergraduate program. The data collected from the study can aid in identifying themes and patterns of activity common among engaged commuter students. Understanding such information can help universities develop targeted forms of support and assistance that will aid commuter students in persisting and ultimately graduating.

**Positionality Statement**

In order to advance the field of student affairs' understanding of commuter students, the study presented here focused on the experiences of commuter students aged 18 to 22 who are engaged in co-curricular experiences. The decision to focus on students between the ages of 18 and 22 was based on the use of a theoretical construct which primarily considers students in this age range (Astin, 1984). Despite the overwhelming presence of commuter students in higher
education, this sub-group struggles to engage in activities occurring beyond the classroom setting (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

One of the first researchers to study the experiences of both resident and commuter students was Arthur Chickering (1974) in his text *Commuting versus Resident Students*. Forty years later, Chickering’s (1974) observations about commuter students being seen as the “have nots” (p. 49) still resonate among scholars and student affairs administrators, as can be found in a recent study on commuter student integration (Lima, 2014). In addition, Jacoby and Garland (2004) suggest that higher education was originally designed to support only the needs of resident students. This includes the times during which classes are scheduled, the periods when out of class activities are held, the way institutions communicate with students, and the financial and personnel resources allocated to different categories of students.

According to Silverman et al., (2009) concerns related to engaging commuter students have included multiple life role issues such as the time a student spends traveling to campus, the need to work, financial concerns, and family obligations. Compounding the concerns already noted is the lack of research regarding the needs of commuter students. Scholars such as Pace (1984) have spoken to the point that student affairs researchers also need to consider commuter students by highlighting the need for further studies that identify criteria “appropriate for their experience” (p. 32). Scholars studying commuter student experiences appear to agree with the assertion that more research on the commuter student experience is needed (Jacoby 1989a, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2000; Krause, 2007).

The multiple life role challenges noted can adversely affect commuters in a number of ways and speak to the importance of finding practical solutions that better support the success and persistence of commuter students in higher education. Retention as Tinto (1987) noted
almost twenty-five years ago is still relevant, since many institutions rely on the revenue that is generated from tuition (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). Commuter students represent a significant part of that equation. Based on the issues already outlined, commuter students run a greater risk of enrolling intermittently or dropping out altogether which ultimately affects an institution’s retention rate (Tinto, 1993; Baxter 1999; Kodama, 2002). Another challenge related to engaging commuters is their level of satisfaction with the institution. Commuter students who feel marginalized or are made to feel as though they do not matter may be less likely to succeed (Rosenburg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1985). All of the issues noted serve as primary concerns that drive the problem of this doctoral study.

Not only is the doctoral study presented here important to colleges and universities, but this study is important to me as a researcher who was once a commuter student and is now a practitioner in a college setting. At various points during my own undergraduate studies, I lived off-campus, commuted from home, or lived in university housing. These collectively contribute to and form the basis for the work I now do with the off-campus and commuter students at the site of the subject university. I have worked in higher education at the university used in this study as a student affairs administrator for over twenty years. The institution is a medium sized, private, non-secular university with a total enrollment of 6300 students. The off-campus and commuter students represent 75% of the institution’s total enrollment. During my tenure, I have held administrative responsibilities in the areas of student activities, student center operations, Greek life, student organization advising, student leadership development, judicial affairs, student governance, new student orientation, and the first year experience. For the past fifteen years, I have directed the institution’s Office for Off-Campus and Commuter Services where I developed resources to guide students through the myriad of programs at the university. I also
worked to create support services to off-campus and commuter students connecting them to the many co-curricular opportunities that are available to all students at the university.

My connection to the student commuter population and the experiences they encounter in higher education is strong. I remember the challenges of traveling to campus and working more than twenty hours a week, while also trying to stay connected to what was happening at my undergraduate institution. I have learned that commuter students tend to operate on the fringes within the university community and only come forward when they truly need help with a question or concern. Once a solution is found, they tend to disappear back into the fabric of the campus. I have often wrestled with ways to identify models of practice that address the idea of engaging our commuter students and this concern serves as a defining challenge in my work. The issues noted in this study are grounded in the professional experiences I have developed in creating extra-curricular programs for resident and commuter students.

Supporting and representing the needs of commuter students has been one of the most persistent challenges of my professional experiences. Despite such efforts, many commuter students continue to struggle to connect with the resources and extra-curricular activities at the subject university. The implications are apparent, when presented with commuter student retention rates at the subject university that are seven to ten points lower than their residential counterparts. Finding ways to help commuter students succeed at the subject university served as the central motivation for my doctoral coursework. Therefore, the problem of study seeks to understand why certain commuter students become actively engaged in co-curricular activities. The study also attempts to identify themes or patterns of behavior that could help to inform my own work with this population of students.
Documenting and Addressing Biases

Understanding the perspectives and biases a researcher brings to a qualitative investigation can provide an important window into the accuracy of the data that is ultimately collected in a study. Machi and McEvoy (2012) note that, “The inquiring researcher knows that each person has biases, opinions, beliefs, values and experiences” (p. 7) that could affect the direction of the study. Yin’s (2009) literature has also notes that case studies are prone to bias because the investigator is asked to develop an understanding of an issue that could lead to preconceived and unaddressed positions. The investigator can also bring life experiences that will influence many aspects of the study. The life experiences of the researcher could alter the role he/she assumes as a researcher and the manner in which he/she interacts with the study participants. The experiences the researcher brings to the study could also affect the type and quality of information that is collected from the participants.

The points noted above are questions I contemplated as I worked through the problem of study. I made an ongoing effort to remove any form of bias during the recruitment of the participants, and the collection and analysis of data. Furthermore, I conducted repeated reviews of the data to ensure that no undue influence could be found in the transcripts or in the development of the thesis. Scholars such as Silverman et al. (2009) as well as Jacoby and Garland (2004) have shared these strategies to reduce bias. When considering the effect bias has on a study, Machi and McEvoy (2012) has reminded readers that “personal perspective should have no influence on the researcher’s thinking” (p. 7). It is also important to note case study investigators could wrongly select this method to pursue or advocate on behalf of a particular issue (Yin, 2009). Even though I outlined a certain bias, I attempted to construct a problem of study that limited such concerns. The larger goals of the study are important to the work I do.
and allow me to delve deeper into the issues of commuter student engagement at the university used in the study.

I also experienced college from a commuter student perspective and currently serve as a student affairs professional who works on behalf of off-campus and commuter students. A significant portion of my career has been spent supporting, engaging, guiding, and assisting thousands of commuter students who attend the university used in this study. Similar to the research reviewed earlier, as a professional in the field, I have long observed that commuter students are overlooked in the broader scope of the strategic planning occurring at the subject university and in higher education.

Research Questions and Goals

The purpose of, and main question asked throughout this qualitative study is, What are the experiences of commuter students aged 18 to 22 who are engaged in co-curricular activities at a private four year university in New Jersey? The study also examines two related sub-questions: (a) What, if any, barriers to engagement exist for commuter students aged 18 to 22 at the subject university, and (b) What motivates commuter students aged 18 to 22 to become engaged in co-curricular experiences at the subject university?

One of the primary goals associated with the study is to advance what is known about a population of students that has been underrepresented across the spectrum of higher education. Only limited efforts have been made over the past four decades that established a small degree of research specifically pertaining to this sub-group of students. Learning more from commuter students who are actively engaged in co-curricular activities could help scholars and practitioners understand how to support this population of students throughout the college experience and
onto the completion of a degree, thus increasing the quality of experience for the students, rents
notion of students, and create a more stable revenue stream for universities.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theory of student involvement was the culmination of decades of work by Astin (1984) who studied various environmental factors that were perceived to influence student success within a higher education setting. Thirty years later, Astin’s academic reflection continues to be cited in current literature and has been used in the study of engagement among commuter students (Astin, 1998; Silverman et al., 2009; Kuh, 2009; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009; Newbold et al., 2011; Elkins et al., 2011).

Astin (1984, 1999) developed what is known in student affairs literature as the theory of student involvement. The theory of student involvement is an important and definitive work that describes what happens to students when they become involved in activities outside the classroom (Astin, 1984, 1999). The theory of student involvement continues to be widely cited and has been used in the study of student engagement among commuter students (Wilmes & Quade, 1986; Likins, 1991; Astin, 1998; Jacoby, 2000; Kodama, 2002; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Austin, 2006; Silverman et al., 2009; Kuh, 2009; Newbold et al., 2011). The research by Astin (1984, 1998) is important to student affairs scholars because it attempts to define the difference between resident and commuter students in the context of engaging in co-curricular activities.

Based on years of research, Astin (1984, 1999) wanted to describe what happens to students when they become involved in various forms of learning occurring inside and outside a classroom setting. Student involvement theory is an interactive person-environment model that focuses on the variables of time and commitment within the context of a student becoming involved at his or her respective college or university (Astin, 1984, 1999). Astin (1984)
considered time to be a valuable commodity that can directly influence to what degree students will decide to pursue different forms of co-curricular engagement in college.

The field of student affairs has suggested differences exist between the terms involvement and engagement; yet Astin stated in an interview with Wolf-Wendel et al., (2009) that the terms are interchangeable. Additional research by Elkins, Forrester, Scott, Noel-Elkins, and Amelia (2011) has also noted an inseparable connection between the terms involvement and engagement, and students’ abilities to succeed in a higher education environment.

When discussing Astin’s theory, Hamrick, Evans, and Schuh (2002) noted that Astin emphasizes an idea where involvement should be viewed from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Involvement should include the actual amount of time a student devotes to co-curricular activities, as well as the amount of seriousness the student dedicates to the respective experience. A defining aspect of student involvement theory is Astin’s (1984, 1999) focus on the importance of time. Time is often in short supply for commuter students, and plays an important role in determining to what degree commuter students are able to get involved in activities outside the classroom (Glass & Hodgin, 1977; Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Astin, 1998; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Silverman et al., 2009).

In describing Astin’s theory, Long (2012) also discusses the role that the institution plays in promoting or inhibiting the learning process, as “background and individual characteristics” (p. 51) that can influence the success that students have during college. The factors noted could enhance or conversely impede the degree to which students may learn in a college setting (Long, 2012).

Scholars such as Jacoby (1989a, 2000) and Jacoby and Garland (2004) have repeatedly cited Astin (1984, 1999) in their research on how to help commuter students become more
involved and successful during college. Although Astin’s theory has a place in the promotion of student engagement among commuter students, Jacoby (1989a) also suggests that scholars and practitioners must distinguish among certain multiple life role issues, such as the time it takes to travel to campus, contending with traffic that can negatively affect a commuter student’s ability to become as involved as their residential counterparts. Astin (1984, 1999) posits that involvement is based on three elements that include inputs, environments, and outputs, as noted in Figure 1 below:

![Figure 1: Astin’s (1999) Environment, Input, Output Model](image)

*Figure 1: Astin’s (1999) Environment, Input, Output Model*

Inputs are variables such as the student’s background or demographics as well as any life experiences the student brings to college. The second element, environment, includes any of the experiences the student has during his or her time in college. Examples could include the courses the student takes, people the student encounters or befriends, and forms of learning (curricular and co-curricular) occurring at the student’s respective institution. The third element,
output, serves as the culmination of everything the student learns in college. At the heart of this
theory, Astin (1984) notes that all three elements could influence the degree to which a student
becomes involved in the cumulative experiences taking place in college.

In addition to the three elements, Astin (1984, 1999) also developed five assumptions that
describe how student involvement occurs: (a) students need to invest mental and physical
energy; (b) involvement occurs over a continuum with varying degrees of effort being applied to
different types of tasks or experiences; (c) involvement has both qualitative and quantitative
characteristics; (d) development is equal to the degree to which a student becomes involved in
the type and variety of different forms of involvement; and (e) institutional policies and
procedures will directly influence the level to which students are capable of becoming involved
with the institution. Each assumption shares a level of alignment with my doctoral study because
they focus on the inputs, environments, and outputs associated with understanding how
commuter students engage in co-curricular activities (Astin, 1998). Furthermore, Astin’s (1984,
1999) focus on a student’s degree of effort speaks directly to the data this study endeavored to
elicit from the participants.

Astin was one of only a handful of contemporary student affairs scholars who makes
reference to the commuter student experience in his research. However, that research suggests
that resident students have an easier time becoming immersed in extra-curricular activities, while
commuter students struggle to become involved in similar co-curricular experiences. The fact
that Astin’s (1984, 1999) theory of student involvement continues to be cited and referenced
played a defining role in my decision to use this framework in studying the co-curricular
experiences of commuter students.
It is also important to reflect on the works relating to and following Astin (1984, 1999) since he introduced his theory of student involvement in the mid 1980’s. The theory of student departure by Tinto (1987) is also a seminal work in student affairs research and practice, and focuses on related forms of student involvement (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001). As contemporaries, Tinto borrowed heavily from Astin (1984, 1999) by also constructing a triad (attributes, social, and academic integration, departure) of elements to define how students come to and persist in a college setting. Even though Tinto views the experiences students had during their time in college from a retention perspective, the lens from which he bases his research is similar to Astin’s (1998) three elements. Both theories concentrate on the idea that degree of effort is important to whether or not students engage with their institution and ultimately determines how connected students are and whether or not the students succeed (Astin, 1984, 1999; Tinto, 1987). Such illustrations help to define the influence that one theory may have on the development of another.

Within the research on commuter students, Jacoby (1989, 2000) has repeatedly cited Astin’s (1984, 1999) theory of student involvement. Although the theory of student involvement has a place in the promotion of student engagement among commuter students, Jacoby (1989) suggests that scholars and practitioners must continue to distinguish certain life experiences that negatively affect commuter students’ abilities to become as involved students who are living on campus. That Astin is recognized in the existing literature on commuter student engagement also suggests that a level of alignment exists that could be applied to my doctoral study.

Jacoby and Garland (2004) posit that commuter students are unable to become involved “in the same ways” (p. 67) as resident students. The overall value of Astin’s (1984, 1999) theory is in its simplicity and ability to relate to the needs of commuter students. The theory is not
constrained by a formula, vector, or hierarchy. The theory also provides researchers with a practical rationale suggesting students become more involved when institutions create opportunities for engagement that are timely, relevant, and considerate of the diversity of the commuter students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The notion of relevancy is particularly important because responding to the needs of commuter students has proven elusive for many four year colleges and universities (Kodama, 2002). The overall value of Astin’s (1984, 1999) theory is in its clarity and ability to relate to the needs of commuter students.

The research questions presented in this doctoral study speak directly to Astin’s (1984) theoretical framework by focusing on the influence that co-curricular engagement has on the personal development of students who commute to the subject university. As a person-environment model, Astin’s (1984, 1999) theory was an effective framework for a study of this focus. The three elements of Astin’s E-I-O model are connected to each of the research questions developed for this problem of study by focusing on the experiences the student participants had before they enrolled, during their time at the university and what they hope or expect their experiences at the university will bring them once they graduate. The model also effectively relates to the manner in which college has an influencing role on the experiences of the commuter students involved in the study.

The study attempts to expand scholars’ and practitioners’ understandings of why a population of students becomes actively involved in a higher education setting. The study also tries to understand the experiences of traditional aged commuter students, who are engaged in co-curricular activities at a private four-year university in New Jersey. The data collected have the potential to advance higher education’s understanding of how to encourage and promote
other forms of engagement to the much larger population of commuter students who fail to engage in co-curricular activities.

One of the main challenges of understanding commuter students rests in the amount of quantitative and qualitative data found in the existing literature (Jacoby, 1989a). Student affairs scholars and practitioners have found it easier to study resident students than commuter students, and have therefore gathered much more data on this population (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). Resident students live on-campus and are traditionally more accessible to researchers who are conducting studies. However, scholars have limited themselves and the field of student affairs by only considering the experiences of resident students.

Krause (2003) stated that an additional research challenge rests in how to identify consistently accessible pools of commuter student participants for research projects. Researchers such as Kodama (2002) and Jacoby (1989a, 2000) also indicate that limited research addressing the experiences of commuter students has made it difficult to learn more about this student population. Additional qualitative research on the experiences of commuter students could help to address such concerns. Despite the inherent challenges, more research needs to be conducted to fully learn about the commuter student experience given that commuter students represent a large, if not growing population within higher education today (Silverman et al., 2009).

Alignment has been a main topic of concern in the development of this doctoral study. An important consideration was the desire to identify a theoretical framework that supports the use of semi-structured interviews (Astin, 1984, 1999). The theory of student involvement was a strong fit because that theory describes how and why engaging students in learning opportunities beyond the classroom matters (Astin, 1984, 1999). Furthermore, Astin’s work (1984, 1999) is
relevant to the study of both resident and commuter populations (Jacoby, 1989a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The assumptions noted in Astin’s (1984) theory also provided a level of alignment because the focus of the study was on the degree of effort by the student to become engaged in activities that occur beyond the classroom setting. Each assumption connected directly with the primary and secondary research questions of the study. A further level of alignment existed when considering the methodological approach to be used by the researcher. Astin’s (1984, 1999) theory of student involvement has also been used in other qualitative research involving commuter students (Caputo, 2013). In addition, Astin’s framework is broad enough and flexible enough to fit either a quantitative or qualitative study.

**Definition of Terms**

**Commuter students:** The definition was based on research from Jacoby and Garland (2004) where commuter students are defined as not living at or residing at the college or university in which they are enrolled.

**Co-curricular engagement:** Defined by the researcher as any activity the student is involved in that falls outside the scope of the pursuit of an academic degree at the institution. Examples include joining a student club, taking part in community service sponsored by the university, holding a campus work-study position, or participation in intramural activities.

**Extra-curricular activities:** A student’s participation in activities, programs, and experiences that are student initiated, recognized by the institution, and support the student's curricular experience at the college or university.

**Non-traditional aged student:** Any student beyond 23 years of age attending college (Silverman et al., 2009).
**Student involvement:** The amount of time, effort, and psychological energy students devote to educationally meaningful activities (Astin, 1984).

**Student attrition:** The reduction in the number of students who are attending courses over a period of time at the institution.

**Student engagement:** For the purpose of the study, the degree to which students become involved in initiatives and experiences that take place beyond the classroom setting at the institution.

**Student retention:** For the purpose of the study, the number of commuter students aged 18 to 22 who attend the institution beginning freshmen year until their graduation or who transferred to the university (Tinto, 1987, 2006).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Over the past four decades student affairs scholars and practitioners have extolled the importance of students becoming engaged in the experiences that occur outside the classroom (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). When students become involved in extra-curricular opportunities, they tend to be successful in the classroom, satisfied with their experience at the institution, and are more inclined to graduate from the college or university (Kuh et al., 2011). However, some students find it difficult to pursue the same kind of extra-curricular experiences as residential students, which can negatively affect student persistence, retention, and completion rates.

The purpose of this qualitative, single site case-study was to learn more about the experiences of traditionally aged commuter students who are actively engaged in co-curricular activities at the subject institution. Understanding the motivating factors that prompted the participants to become involved in co-curricular activities could serve as a guide to student affairs scholars to better understanding commuter students (Jacoby, 2000). The data collected from this study can also speak to aspects related to commuter student persistence, retention, and completion. This chapter includes a review of relevant literature that focuses on commuter students in a higher education setting, with particular attention to co-curricular or extra-curricular engagement. The review begins with an introduction followed by a detailed 1) overview of the historical perspective of student engagement research involving commuter students; 2) an understanding of who commuter students are in the context of a higher education environment, including definitions of commuter students that appear in the literature and theories and concepts relating to engaging commuter students will be presented; 3) discussion of the theories and
concepts related to engaging commuters; 4) review of the challenges of engaging commuter students; and 5) review of the institutional influences affecting commuter student engagement.

Over the past forty years, social scientists have explored cognitive, behavioral, psychosocial, and environmental factors related to the developmental experiences of students in a college setting. Theory has served to initiate and inspire much of the research within the field of student affairs. For example, Erikson’s (1964) seminal work on psychosocial development was a leading theory speaks to the experiences students have in college. The study of students who are engaged in meaningful activities outside a classroom setting is also a well-travelled topic (Dugan, Garland, Jacoby, & Gasiorski, 2008). Scholars such as Pace (1980; 1984), Astin (1984, 1999, 2003), Chickering and Gamson (1987), Pascarella and Terrenzini (1991; 2005), and Kuh (1993; 2001a, 2001b) have all played pivotal roles in defining the value of engaging residential students in meaningful co-curricular experiences.

When residential students are involved in experiences and activities taking place at their college, they tend to be more satisfied, are better able to navigate the transition to life in higher education, perform better academically, and are less inclined to drop out of school (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1987; Schlossberg, 1989; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). Scholars and practitioners have learned a great deal about the value of engaging residential students; however, only limited research has considered student engagement from the perspective of students who commute (Jacoby, 1989a; Silverman et al., 2009). Student affairs scholars who study commuter students consider the limited research to be a central concern to understanding and supporting this population (Baum, 2005; Krause, 2007; Axelson & Flick, 2011).

Researchers such as Kim and Rury (2011) have reminded readers that since the 1960s, patterns of enrollment by commuter students have been outpacing that of resident students. The
literature by Kodama (2002) and Jacoby (1989a) suggest a misperception exists portraying commuters as less concerned about their academic success, too busy with the personal responsibilities in their lives, and less interested in establishing meaningful connections with their respective college or university. The effect of such misperceptions regarding commuter students means that these students are viewed as less interested and not as committed to the overall college experience. Researchers such as Jacoby (1989a, 2000) suggested the misconception of commuters is an important concern for higher education, because many institutions continue to treat commuter students as a secondary concern.

Another related point comes from Kodama (2002) who suggests that higher education has marginalized the needs of a growing commuter population instead of identifying ways to integrate this cohort into the co-curricular opportunities often afforded to resident students. Based on the “rational myths” that Dugan et al. (2008, p. 283) discuss, research has found that commuter students are less involved, take fewer classes, and drop out of school at rate higher than resident students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Higher education’s half-hearted response to supporting commuter students has had a negative effect on the success, attrition, and retention of this population. Another reminder comes from Silverman et al. (2009) who note that commuter students have to make the best of the limited resources and support that institutions provide to them.

Considering the challenges and concerns noted, the case study researched for this doctoral work focuses on the lived experiences of commuter students. Early research on commuter student engagement suggests that commuter students are less likely to pursue forms of engagement occurring outside the classroom (Chickering, 1974; Astin, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Other scholars of the commuter student experience argue that there is a real
need and desire among commuters to become involved; and commuter students are inclined to do so when they feel their needs are supported by their college or university (Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). My study attempts to learn more about the lived experiences of commuter students who are involved in co-curricular activities at one specific university. The data generated from this study play an important role in helping to inform student affairs scholars and practitioners in understanding how to serve the commuter student population.

**History of Commuter Student Research**

Commuter students have played an important role in the life and enrollment of many colleges and universities over the past one hundred years (Silverman et al., 2009). They tend to represent significant percentages of the student bodies at colleges and universities; however, Dugan et al. (2008) has noted that they are “historically underrepresented” (p. 284) within the context of higher education. Researchers including Wilson (2003) support that assertion while also suggesting commuter students are viewed as a silent entity and overlooked in post-secondary education. The lack of existing research makes it difficult for scholars and practitioners to define how to support commuter students during their collegiate experiences.

Early research on the commuter student experience was descriptive and focused on topics to include the academic performance of off-campus students (Walker, 1935; Jacoby, 1989a). Additional examples appeared in the 1960s and compared the academic achievement of commuter students and residential students (Baird, 1969; Dollar, 1966). The study of commuter students’ emotional development and mental health issues has also received attention in the literature (Lantz & McCrary, 1955; Stark, 1965; George, 1971). Existing research on the commuter student experience might not rival what has been discovered in the study of the resident student experience; however, there are still conceptual and theoretical guideposts worth

In a comparative study of resident and commuter experiences to determine student satisfaction with college, Hardy and Williamson (1974) place commuter students in a “singularly negative” light suggesting they are apathetic and less committed to college as compared to students who are residing on-campus (Dugan et al., 2008, p. 285). Dugan et al., (2008) notes that commuter students are viewed by student affairs administrators as less capable of making the adjustment to the curricular requirements of the institution (Jacoby, 1989a). Despite such limitations, Hardy and Williamson (1974) also suggest that there is a need for improved communication with commuter students, as well as the need to enhance services found within the student union to support this population.

Another important study comes from Chickering (1974), who devote an entire text to an empirical, comparative study of first-year commuter and resident students. The text *Commuting Versus Resident Students* by Chickering (1974) is considered a seminal work that continues to inform the field of student affairs (Lima, 2014). Chickering’s (1974) study included 28,000 participants from 270 different institutions, making it the first study of this depth that included commuter students. One perceived limitation of Chickering’s study is the lack of specificity assigned to the definition of commuter students. There is no way to determine whether or not the student participants were dependent or independent, full-time, or part-time students. Despite such methodological limitations, the important finding from the study was that commuter students do not have the same opportunities as their residential counterparts. This was an important designation for a study occurring in the 1970s and Silverman et al. (2009) supported that assertion by suggesting that the same lack of opportunities persists forty years later.
In addition to Chickering (1974), Alexander Astin (1984, 1999) also provided two important texts in the field of student affairs research: *Preventing Students from Dropping out* (1975) and *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years* (1977). In both texts, Astin points out the value associated with involving students in the processes of learning. Similar to more recent studies, Astin recommends that universities do more to support commuter student engagement (Dugan et al., 2008). Based on the data collected from each of the studies, Astin (1975, 1977) posits that living off-campus could be a detriment to the success of commuters. Astin (1975, 1977) also found that resident students are more inclined than commuter students to become involved in extra-curricular activities and more likely to experience satisfaction with their college. Although the data appear to cast a negative perspective in relation to the collegiate experiences of commuter students, Astin (1984, 1999, 2003) continues to be widely cited in the conversation on student engagement and is frequently referenced in the literature on engaging commuter students (Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

At nearly the same time as Astin’s first publication, and a decade after Chickering’s (1974) formative book on the experiences of resident and commuter students, Pascarella (1985) conducted a comparative study involving commuter and resident students using the following outcomes: (a) educational aspirations; (b) satisfaction with college; (c) rate of progress through college; and (d) intentions to persist after two years of college. A notable conclusion from Pascarella’s (1985) data contradicts Chickering by suggesting that no discernable difference can be found in the experiences of resident and commuter students. However, an important limitation of the study suggests that Pascarella’s pool of participants did not represent the different categories of students who were attending the sample institution. Missing from the
study were minority students, independent commuters, and part-time commuter students (Pascarella, 1985).

Another seminal work came from Pascarella and Terrenzini (1991, 2005) who, over the course of thirty years, have crafted what has been recognized by the field of student affairs as one of the most important examinations of the effects of college on the student experience in their text, *How College Affects Students* (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1991, 2005). Each of the two editions have become definitive resources to student affairs scholars and practitioners, and are frequently cited in the literature since their releases. Despite the intrinsic value of the texts, commuter students continue to play a minor role in the research Pascarella and Terrenzini’s (1991, 2005) work. In only a few passing references do the authors reference commuter students in either edition of *How College Affects Students*. What a reader can surmise from each edition is that being engaged matters to the overall development and success of the student, especially when considering the residential perspective. Researchers such as Kuh et al. (2001) have support the findings of Pascarella and Terrenzini (1991, 2005), while also suggesting that universities challenge commuter students to become engaged in co-curricular activities.

Technology has also had a positive effect on student engagement research as is evidenced by the creation and implementation of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Kuh et al., 2001; Kinzie, Cosgwell, & Wheatle, 2015). Thousands of students every year, from colleges and universities all across the United States, take part in this national quantitative assessment. A primary construct of NSSE is its emphasis on the amount of time and effort students dedicate to academic or other educationally meaningful activities (Kuh, 2009). Time on task is a central factor found in many of the theories and concepts on engaging students (Chickering, 1969; Astin; 1984, 1999; Pace, 1984; Chickering & Gamson, 1987). It is important
to see commuter students recognized within the constructs of a national assessment such as NSSE.

George Kuh (2009), who served as a member of NSSE’s original design team, suggests that for commuter students, proximity to campus influences a student’s level of engagement. Students who live close to campus are more likely to engage in co-curricular activities. This is important given that commuter students do not live on-campus. Therefore, the time spent travelling to campus can negatively influence the degree to which a student becomes involved in campus activities. Unfortunately, findings such as Kuh’s often perpetuate some of the myths pertaining to the lived experiences of commuter students in higher education (Silverman et al., 2009).

**Definition of Commuter Students**

Learning more about the students who pursue an undergraduate degree is an important step to understanding how to support the different populations of students who are enrolled in higher education today. One of the persistent, systemic challenges facing commuter students has centered on the manner in which they are identified in higher education. Of the twenty-one million students attending a post-secondary institution today, eighty-six percent are defined as commuters (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Included in the data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) are part-time and full-time students, undergraduates between the ages of eighteen to twenty-two, part-time and full-time graduate students, transfer students from two-year and four-year institutions, returning students, non-traditional students, and students who reside off-campus who are attending two-year and four-year institutions. Scholars and practitioners such as Jacoby (1989) and Silverman et al. (2009) suggest that commuter students are portrayed as a homogenous group despite the
unique nature and diversity found within this broad cohort. Researchers such as Dugan et al. (2008) similarly suggest that research “ignores the needs to examine within differences” (p. 283) of commuter students.

**Singular Descriptions of Commuter Students.** The literature presents a variety of definitions to identify commuter students. An early variant came from Munday (1976) who describes commuters as non-traditional or not living in campus housing, and suggests that more than one type of non-traditional student exists in higher education. Munday’s observation that commuter students are diverse was an important contrast to the belief that commuters are a homogenous group. Other scholars hold the same position (Jacoby, 1989a; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Thirty years later, Kuh (1993) revisited the use of the term non-traditional in a qualitative study describing commuter students without, however, making any reference to Munday (1976).

In developing the definition of commuter student, some researchers have drawn on the term “adult student” which originated with Knowles (1980, 1990) (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The term adult student applies to students twenty-three years or older who are attending college and is synonymous with the introduction of Knowles’ concept of andragogy. Unrelated to the early work of Knowles (1980), Lundberg (2003) conducted a study that sought to determine what influence time limitations, faculty, and peer relationships had on older commuter students. The study by Lundberg also used the definition of adult students in describing this population as students twenty-three years of age and older.

A researcher that has written extensively about the commuter student experience is Barbara Jacoby (1989a, 2000) who suggests that the definition of commuter students should include the factor of not living on-campus. The National Clearinghouse for Commuter Programs and the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) have respectively adopted Jacoby’s
definition. In a study seeking to compare the demographic and psychographic differences of commuter and resident students to their identification with an institution, Newbold et al. (2011) also refer to commuter students as not living on-campus or in institutionally sponsored housing and appears to reference the definition by Jacoby (1989a, 2000). For the purpose of clarity, for my study I borrow from the work of Jacoby and Garland (2004) to define commuter students as those students who do not live at or reside at the college or university in which they are enrolled. Another description comes from Keeling (1999) who presented the idea that commuter students are “reinvented” (p. 4) because of the many different roles they inhabit during their time as students. In speaking to that point, Kuh et al. (2001) suggest that definition of commuter students should focus on using any distance students travel to campus as a factor in describing this cohort. A common theme found in the definitions noted above is the singular perspective scholars attribute to commuter students. These definitions provide the reader with one way to view commuter students by forgoing a level of complexity and multiplicity that exists within this diverse collection of students.

**Complex Descriptions of Commuter Students.** While a number of the definitions of commuter students are singular in nature, scholars have also presented multi-faceted illustrations used to define this group. One of the first to develop a stepped matrix with eight separate definitions of commuter students comes from Rue and Stewart (1982) and includes: (a) dependent traditional full-time; (b) dependent non-traditional full-time; (c) dependent traditional part-time; (d) dependent non-traditional part-time; (e) independent traditional full-time; (f) independent non-traditional full-time; (g) independent traditional part-time; and (h) independent non-traditional part-time. The researchers (Rue & Stewart, 1982) suggest that 256 different permutations of commuter students are possible using the matrix. In an article on succeeding at
an urban commuter campus, Roe Clark (2006) took an element of the Rue and Stewart matrix and suggested commuters should be quantified as either dependent (living at a home or permanent address) or independent (residing on their own or with other students). Another approach presented by Silverman et al. (2009) involves the creation of the acronym CPTR (commuters, part-time, transfer, and returning) to identify commuter students. Complex descriptions of commuter students are also found in the demographic components of certain quantitative assessments.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is also noteworthy because it has provided higher education with tangible research delineating student participants by place of residence to include on-campus residents, walking commuters, and driving commuters (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The literature on engaging commuter students has respectively supported the value of NSSE (Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Yearwood & Jones, 2012). NSSE has also made it possible to identify results collected from multiple types of commuter students and the information has helped scholars and practitioners understand the unique needs of this population. NSSE uses the following indicators to classify commuter students: (a) dormitory or other campus housing (not fraternity/sorority house), (b) residence (house, apartment, etc.), (c) within walking distance of the institution, (d) residence (house, apartment, etc.) within driving distance, and (e) fraternity or sorority house. NSSE also plays an instrumental role in the collection of empirical data involving commuter students which identifies patterns of engagement based on demographics to include place and type of residence.

The literature has provided illustrations of commuter students that are unique and diverse, while also recognizing the difficulty in constructing definitive definitions of this population (Jacoby, 1989a; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The respective works of Rue and Stewart (1982), Roe
Clark (2006), Silverman et al. (2009) and NSSE (2014) are important because they introduced
definitions that seek to recognize the varying levels of difference found among commuter
students. While the field of student affairs continues to be challenged in creating accurate
descriptions of this student population, Krause (2007) noted that more must be done to add a
greater level of clarity in defining this group of students.

Challenges to Engaging Commuter Students

There are a host of challenges that many students encounter when they enroll in a college
or university today. On the surface, identifying or understanding such obstacles without further
investigation may be difficult. Commuter students come from all walks of life and aspire to
become engaged members of their campus communities; yet they struggle to find the time to
pursue the same kind of co-curricular experiences (Wilmes & Quade, 1986; Astin, 1984, 1999).
When a commuter student is enrolled in a college or university, a host of issues can negatively
impact the experience the student has. Kodama (2002) and Wilson (2003) described commuter
students as a quiet, if not silent, majority. One of the popular myths related to commuter
students suggests they are disinterested in learning and are less motivated than residential
students (Likins, 1991; Kuh et al., 2001). Schlossberg (1990) and Kodama (2002) have
presented findings suggesting commuter students also experience feelings of marginalization.

An overriding theme in the literature suggests the need for a greater level of clarity and
accuracy in defining the collegiate experiences of commuter students. Concurrent with what is
known about the commuter student experience, higher education is also facing a host of
important challenges with a particular emphasis on student enrollment and retention (Tinto,
2006). Researchers such as Johnson (1997) have supported this observation by suggesting
higher education has spent a great deal of time and energy trying to “recruit and retain students”
Leone and Tian (2009) reinforced that observation by noting, “In today’s highly competitive education market, to maintain and increase student retention rates becomes one of the most crucial issues for higher educational institutions to be successful” (p. 122). As higher education continues to look for ways to address the important issues of student enrollment and retention, campus leaders need to examine all possible factors (Tinto, 1987). As the literature has suggested, commuter students represent a significant and growing segment of the enrollment at many colleges and universities today (Jacoby, 2000). However, Jacoby (1989a) also reminds us that university administrators continue to overlook commuter students when considering issues of retention.

Astin’s (1984, 1998, 1999) and Kuh’s (1993, 2001b) literature on student engagement is clear in suggesting that involved students are more satisfied, perform better in the classroom, and are less likely to leave their college or university unexpectedly than students who are not involved in campus activities. Adjusting higher education’s focus to include the experiences and limitations of commuter students could have a positive influence on the commuter student’s ability to become engaged in extra-curricular activities. If scholars and practitioners want to learn more about this sub-group, they need to understand the daily challenges of what it means to be commuter student, as well as how commuter students are able to become engaged with co-curricular activities.

**Multiple Life Roles.** Multiple life roles represent another experience in the lives of commuter students that can influence co-curricular engagement. Multiple life roles encompass any competing commitment of time students have beyond their life at school that could affect the students’ success (Astin, 2001). Examples include the time it takes students to travel to and from campus, where and how long students work (on or off-campus) every week (Astin, 1998), the
level of emotional support students receive from friends, family, and employers, as well as any family obligations influencing students’ abilities to become involved on-campus. The literature has integrated discussions about multiple life roles into the influence on the commuter student experience (Glass & Hodgin, 1977; Wilmes & Quade, 1986; Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Kodama, 2002; Wilson, 2003; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Austin, 2006; Silverman et al., 2009).

Researchers including Jacoby (1989a, 2000), Astin (1998), Davis (1999), and Kodama (2002) have all provided examples of multiple life roles that define whether or not commuter students become engaged at the co-curricular level.

However, campuses persist in organizing course schedules, support services, and opportunities for co-curricular engagement around the needs of residential students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Silverman et al., 2009). The literature also indicates a number of factors that affect commuter students’ ability to embrace the same experiences that are commonplace for most residential students (Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Silverman et al., 2009). Davis (1999) suggests that commuter students have no “connectedness” making it difficult for this cohort to get involved in out of class experiences (p. 74). Researchers such as Silverman et al. (2009) also note the challenge of distance from campus as a defining element that affects commuter students’ abilities to become connected to their college or university.

One of the early references comes from Wilmes and Quade (1986) who outlines the effect of multiple life roles by noting the “several important demanding roles” (p. 27) within the lives of commuter students. Another reference comes from Davis (1999) who refers to multiple life roles by indicating how commuter students are too busy to make connections with their respective institutions because of the outside influences that make it difficult, if not impossible, to pursue some form of co-curricular engagement. An additional perspective comes from Jacoby
(1989a, 2000) who has written extensively about the commuter student experience and has repeatedly referenced multiple life roles by noting that regardless of age, commuting is one of a number of demanding roles students must navigate during their studies.

Central to the notion of multiple life roles is the idea that commuter students, unlike their residential counterparts, encounter daily challenges that include the time spent traveling to campus, the need to balance family and school obligations, and the amount of free time a commuter student has to spend with friends at home and friends made at school.

Literature from Silverman et al. (2009) provides an effective analysis of multiple life roles that expand the conversation to include part-time, transfer, and returning students. Research from Newbold et al. (2011) offers a supporting view of multiple life roles by suggesting commuter students “tackle challenges that the non-commuting student doesn’t typically face” (p. 143) that could include the time spent driving from an off-campus or permanent address to the campus, or juggling family responsibilities and college related responsibilities.

The literature clearly documents the idea that multiple life roles are an important phenomenon. The literature consistently suggests that commuter students’ ability to become more engaged with co-curricular experiences is influenced by a number of factors that are external to what happens at school, such as time spent traveling to campus, the need to work, family support/obligations, and financial considerations (Jacoby & Girrell, 1981; Wilmes & Quade, 1986; Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Davis, 1999; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Krause, 2007; Silverman et al., 2009).

**Sense of Belonging.** Feeling connected to one’s college or university is another important variable related to enhancing the co-curricular experiences of commuter students (Wilmes & Quade, 1986; Jacoby, 2000). In an essay detailing strategies to enhance the success of commuter
students, Jacoby and Garland (2004) speak directly to commuter students needing to feel a sense of belonging to their institution. When students feel little or no tangible connection to their school, they are less likely to establish significant relationships with classmates, staff, or faculty (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Jacoby and Garland also noted that a sense of belonging is essential to promoting institutional opportunities for engagement among commuter students.

Despite the value related to promoting a sense of belonging, only limited research involving commuter students exists. What can be found comes from Lester, Brown-Leonard, and Mathias (2013) who conducted a qualitative study involving non-traditional transfer community college students. Their study identifies sense of belonging as one of the predominant themes that emerged in the data. The results from the Lester et al. (2013) study suggests that co-curricular engagement among this group of students might be less important to traditional aged commuter students at a four-year institution. However, the need for transfer students to feel a sense of belonging is important to their academic success and retention, which is consistent with the information presented by Wilmes and Quade (1986) and Jacoby (1989a, 2000) in their research of traditional aged commuter students.

In a more recent study examining what influences successful black commuter students’ engagement in a post-secondary setting, Yearwood and Jones (2012) discussed the need for administrators to create “meaningful” co-curricular activities as part of the conversation to encourage engagement among this population (p. 121). In this instance, Yearwood and Jones concluded that when black commuter students feel the institution creates an environment that provides personally significant co-curricular opportunities, the students experience greater levels of success.
Support Networks. Unlike the experiences of students who reside on-campus, Jacoby (2000) suggests that commuter students typically establish support networks beyond the boundaries of the campus setting. Commuters often look to family, friends, or their places of work to serve as the primary support networks in their lives (Silverman et al., 2009). Support networks also have the capacity to enhance the level to which commuters engage in co-curricular opportunities. Miller (1986) has also suggested that commuter students are “diffused, wide scattered individuals” (p. 45) within the context of social support networks. The idea that commuter students develop support networks away from the college or university setting could play an influencing role in what Miller has suggested.

One element that seems clear is that the study of support networks among commuter students has been limited. Articles by Likins (1986), Jacoby (1989a, 2000) and Jacoby and Garland (2004) have respectively referenced support networks as factors that can impede the success of commuter students in higher education. In a similar manner, Somera and Ellis (1996) conducted a comparative analysis of resident and commuter students that sought to understand communication networks and perceptions of social support as antecedents to college adjustment. Somera and Ellis conclude that informational and instrumental network supports are most important to commuters. When commuter students receive relevant institutional support, that support can influence variables related to the classroom and satisfaction with the students' college experience.

Another study came from Kuh et al. (2001) who conducted a review of empirical quantitative data from NSSE to determine whether or not commuter students are disengaged. Researchers posit that commuters are less likely to engage with faculty members and less likely to take advantage of extra-curricular activities (Kuh et al, 2001). This observation led Kuh et al.
to assert commuter students are less inclined to experience the kind of supportive network more commonly found among resident students.

**Financial Considerations.** The cost of tuition also plays an influencing role in determining whether or not students can find the time to get involved in co-curricular activities during college (Slaper & Forton, 2013). Students and their family members are tuned into the many direct and indirect costs associated with attending college. The federal government’s decision to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to include a new provision, known as the Net Price Calculator (NPC) requirement, has had an impact on a student’s choice of college and whether or not a student will commute (NCES, 2014). Any college or university that receives federal funding must now provide current and prospective students with an NPC so they can estimate the net price of attending specific institutions. Colleges and universities also offer various forms of tuition discounting as an incentive to attract and hopefully enroll new students (Martin, 2000). Cost is important variable, so seeing students price shopping and comparing one institution to another, searching for the best deal, is common.

The recession of 2007 focused additional attention on concerns related to the persistent and steady increase of the cost of going to college (Berg-Cross & Green, 2010). Between 1996 and 2006, the U.S Department of Education (2007) indicated tuition, fees, room, and board rose from $11,563 a year to $21,170 annually at private institutions. Research by Oreopoulus and Petronijevic (2013) indicated the average cost of attending a private four-year university in 2011-2012 was listed at $29,242. Furthermore, 36% of the students studied attended institutions that charged more than $36,000 a year (Oreopoulus & Petronijevic, 2013). Researchers such as Sobel (2013) also notes that students are now carrying over one trillion dollars in student loan debt, the highest recorded amount in this country’s history. Navigating the cost of financing an
education has become a maze of financial aid, scholarships, grants, tuition discounting, and sliding price scales. Students and their families work hard to find ways to alter certain aspects of the educational experience (i.e. commuting rather than residing on-campus) to reduce any long-term financial burden. The cost of attendance can also impact the student’s ability to persist and ultimately graduate (Baum et al., 2013).

Another concern over the past three decades centers on the reduction in state subsidies that used to go to public and private institutions. Lillis and Tian (2008) have noted the median cost of tuition since the early 1980’s now runs 100 percentage points ahead of the Consumer Pricing Index (CPI). St. John (2006) noted that as greater numbers of students apply to colleges and universities, there has been significant growth in the amount of student financial aid being offered. St. John (2006) also remarked that financial aid levels in higher education have doubled over the past decade, now totaling 135 billion dollars annually. Students and their families are taking on greater levels of school debt in order to achieve one part of the American dream, a higher education. Cost is a defining factor for students deciding where to go to school and whether or not they can afford to be a resident or commuter student. The literature supports this assertion and suggests that when the economy is in distress, affording college is especially difficult for students and parents (Berg-Cross & Green, 2010).

Theories and Concepts Related to Engaging Commuters

Being able to understand and then apply theory to practice is what Love (2012) describes as a “critical” (p. 190) function of the role that student affairs practitioners should employ when attempting to understand and support students. Studying how and why students engage in out-of-class learning experiences in higher education has been taking place for over forty years. An early reference came from the work of Ralph Tyler (1932), as cited in Harper & Quaye (2009)
who considered the effect of time on task. Tyler (1932) suggested that when students become more involved in the collective experiences that relate to being in a college, they are more likely to be successful and graduate. Much has been written about the inherent value of students becoming actively engaged in the co-curricular experiences that occur in a higher education setting by scholars such as Feldman and Newcomb (1969), Pace (1980, 1984); Astin (1984, 1999); Chickering and Gamson (1987); Pascarella and Terrenzini (1991, 2005); Kuh (1993, 2003) and Kuh et al. (2001).

Understanding why students get involved in activities outside the classroom remains a topic of interest to student affairs scholars and practitioners. For example, Astin (2003) continues to generate ideas that speak to the ways that college affects students, with a particular focus on co-curricular engagement. Another article seeking to define the differences between engagement and participation, comes from Hoffman, Perillo, Calizo, Hadfield, and Lee (2005) who extend the conversation by focusing on one campus the authors believe is making tangible strides in fostering purposeful engagement initiatives. Research from Pike and Kuh (2005) attempts to determine to the possibility of creating a typology of colleges and universities that focuses on student experiences with a particular emphasis on student engagement.

The overriding principle shared in the literature on student engagement suggests learning is a direct function of how students spend their time in and out of the classroom (Kuh, 2003; Kinzi et al., 2015). The degree to which students dedicate themselves to engagement-related activities can have a corresponding effect on variables that include academic success, psychosocial development, and the students’ satisfaction with their institutions (Chickering, 1969; Tinto, 2006).
**Hierarchy of Needs.** Commuter students encounter challenges every day as they attempt to find ways of becoming engaged in co-curricular opportunities at their colleges and universities. The prevailing misperceptions involving commuter students, as noted by Jacoby and Garland (2004), suggest that these students lack the will, interest, or discipline to become involved. Certain literature has attempted to dispel such myths by highlighting what it actually means to be a commuter student in higher education (Jacoby, 1989a, 2000). Even though Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy was not based on the study of commuter students or student engagement, it does speak to the range of experiences that exist in the lives of all college students.

Five distinct needs are identified in Maslow’s (1943.) hierarchy: (a) physiological; (b) security; (c) love and belonging; (d) esteem; and (e) self-actualization. Basic needs such as finding a parking spot, accessing a campus resource such as a computer lab, finding classrooms, and sharing a meal with classmates are all important to what is happening in the daily life of a commuter student.

Commuter students want to feel secure when they park their car, walk to class, stay late to study, or attend a campus event (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Levels of engagement can also be influenced by the sense of belonging that students feel to their respective institution (Jacoby, 1989a). If commuter students believe the institution has their best interests at heart, it can have a positive effect in determining whether or not the student pursues a form of co-curricular engagement. Being recognized as a valued member of the academic community also speaks to the level of esteem that is shown to commuter students (Schlossberg, 1990). When taken in concert, self-actualization of the student can be possible.
Conversely, even though a college or university may be able to meet the needs found in Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy, getting involved can still be difficult for commuter students. Even in the best of circumstances, commuter students struggle to keep up with the many divergent responsibilities that encompass what is happening on a daily basis. Researchers such as Jacoby and Garland (2004) are proponents of Maslow’s theory as it relates to the commuter student experience. Jacoby and Garland (2004) have identified direct correlations between Maslow’s variable love and belonging, and the multiple life role issues that can influence whether or not commuter students can become engaged with their campus community.

**Concept of Mattering.** Introduced by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) this concept originates from Maslow’s (1943) need for belonging and esteem. A central tenant of the concept is that students want to feel they count in the college environment (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Researchers such as Schlossberg (1990) recognized a similar need among college students and expanded the existing research on mattering to include the experiences of adult college students. Understanding what students think and feel when they enter college continues to be an area of needed study in the field of student affairs.

In addition to defining the concept of mattering, Schlossberg (1990) played a defining role in the development of the *Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Higher Education* (MHE) (Schlossberg, 1990). The MHE is built around five scales designed to evaluate how adult learners aged twenty-three years and older perceive the educational environments in which they inhabit. The scales include: (a) administration; (b) advising; (c) interaction with peers; (d) multiple roles; and (e) interaction with faculty (Schlossberg, Lasselle & Golic, 1990). The linkage between Schlossberg’s Concept of Mattering to the engagement experiences of commuter students was a relevant topic of study in the work by Jacoby (1989a, 2000), Jacoby
and Garland (2004), and Kodama (2002), despite its limited focus on adult students. Literature from Jacoby also outlines the connection between Schlossberg’s concept of mattering and the experiences of commuter students. However, only limited research is available concerning the study of commuter students in relation to the concept of mattering. Much of the information on mattering among commuter students only appears in the form of dissertations (Hillard, 1996; Vampatella, 2000). However, a recent study by Dixon Rayle and Chung (2007), using Schlossberg’s concept of mattering, studied first-year student’s transition to college, which included a significant percent (55.9%) of off-campus and commuter participants. Dixon Rayle and Chung learned that when first-year students are able to find connective co-curricular experiences, those experiences can positively influence the student’s overall experience and success at the institution.

**Pace’s Quality of Effort Theory.** Quality of effort has been central to the work of Pace (1980, 1984) and culminated in the creation of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) (Pace, 1984; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Understanding how and why students become involved in academic and co-curricular activities serves as the primary focus of Pace’s (1980, 1984) research. The frequency in which students engage in co-curricular activities serves as the basis of the CSEQ. The CSEQ is now in its fourth edition and focuses on a student’s quality of effort based on the following dimensions: (a) how much time and effort the student dedicates to activities; (b) the manner in which the student perceives dimensions of their institutional environment; and (c) the benefit to the student by attending college (Pace, 1984). Important to note is that the CSEQ is a quantitative assessment that was a precursor to National Survey of Student Engagement (Kuh et al., 2001).
Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. Another area of research that has generated discussion about co-curricular engagement comes from Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. The seven principles originated at an invitational conference in Wisconsin. Chickering and Gamson were asked to draw upon their years of experience and identify a list of principles they felt are most important to student learning in higher education. The conversations that took place led to development of the following recommendations: (a) student-faculty contact; (b) cooperation among students; (c) active learning; (d) prompt feedback; (e) time on task; (f) high expectations; and (g) respect for diverse talents and ways of learning.

The seven principles do not reference commuters, yet there are several possible to apply aspects of Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) work to this cohort. Researchers like Jacoby (1989a) speak of the value of having commuter students “encourage student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning and time on task” (p. 7). Promoting forms of active learning is also referenced in other literature on commuter students (Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Likins, 1991; Kodama, 2002; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Related to the seven principles is the work of Astin (1999) who also based his theory of student involvement on the amount of time and the degree to which the student becomes involved with the learning process.

How College Affects Students. Researchers Pascarella and Terrenzini (1991, 2005) have collectively provided the field of student affairs with important data in their text *How College Affects Students*. Their research is based on the pioneering work of Feldman and Newcomb (1969), *The Impact of College on Students*. Pascarella and Terrenzini’s longitudinal study spans thirty years and continues to provide higher education with a comprehensive understanding of student change by considering four areas of student development: (a)
psychosocial; (b) cognitive-structural; (c) typological; and (d) person-environment interaction. Each edition has painstakingly reviewed relevant developmental theories and models on student change. Furthermore, Pascarella and Terrenzini have advanced the field of student affairs understanding of the impact of college on traditional aged students.

One important limitation of *How College Affects Students* (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1991, 2005) can be found in its lack of analysis of the commuter student experience. With each text running at over eight-hundred pages, commuter students fail to appear in any definitive manner. In a later work, Pascarella (2006) suggests that despite what has been learned from both editions of *How College Affects Students*, future editions need to include more information and data involving commuter students (p. 514). Despite the limitations found in *How College Affects Students*, researchers can still gain insights into the experiences of commuters through the use of the existing research conducted on resident students.

**Institutional Influences that Affect Commuter Student Engagement**

Since the first American college was founded in the early 17\textsuperscript{th} century, higher education has organized itself around the needs and concerns of a residential student population (Renn & Reason, 2013). Current examples of such organization are found in the manner in which class times and academic calendars are set, how institutions dedicate student resources to the resident student experience, the way schools market to and communicate with commuter students, and the times when opportunities for engagement are offered to commuter students (Jacoby, 1989a). Jacoby and Garland (2004) note that a “dominant residential tradition” has served as an impediment to commuter students (p. 62). Important to note that commuting would have been impractical for any student attending a college in the middle 1600s. Travelling to and from one of the early American colleges would take time and introduce a certain degree of physical risk to
the student. For example, early commuter students would have potentially been affected by the weather and the quality of roads to and from campus. Recognizing this as an extenuating factor that led early American higher educators to focus on a residential experience is noteworthy. However, as the collegiate model has evolved over the past three centuries, higher education has been reluctant to adjust to meet the needs of an evolving student body (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

A continuing theme found in the study of commuter students centers on the disparity of services and resources offered to this population (Jacoby, 1989a). In responding to such concerns, Silverman et al. (2009) suggests that higher education needs to do more to “bridge the gap” between resident students and commuters (p. 225). Silverman et al. (2009) also allude to the idea that higher education exhibits a consistent pattern that fails to recognize the challenges found within the lives of commuter students. The body of literature that has concentrated on the study of commuter students is much smaller than scholarly works on residential student experiences (Jacoby, 1989a). One cannot deny that commuter students are different than resident students. Yet, colleges and universities continue on a trajectory that is unsuccessful in recognizing the needs of a sub-population of students that continues to grow (Silverman et al., 2009). Based on the depth, and variety of research being conducted on commuter student experiences, it seems clear that scholars and practitioners must do more to understand this diverse and growing segment of students.

This review has highlighted the need in higher education to conduct further research that would consider the experiences of commuter students. At the same time, certain literature has also referenced the necessity in higher education to pursue practical courses of action to promote co-curricular engagement initiatives among commuter students. A persistent voice and supporter of such assertions has been Barbara Jacoby (1989a, 2000), a student affairs scholar and
practitioner who has frequently referenced the necessity in higher education to identify greater resources to support the ever-growing commuter student community.

Conclusion

The focus of my study suggests that scholars and practitioners in the field of student affairs can learn how to support commuter students who are predominantly disengaged (Chickering, 1974; Jacoby, 1989a) by understanding the experiences of commuter students who are actively involved in co-curricular opportunities at a private four-year institution. Student engagement is an important factor related to student success, persistence, and completion (Astin, 1984, 1999; Kuh, 1993, Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005, Baum et al., 2013).

Therefore, studying the experiences of commuter students who are involved in higher education could provide the field of student affairs with an understanding of how to support this growing cohort of students. Studies of commuter students and their experiences in the literature has been limited in size, variety, and scope (Jacoby, 1989a). Existing literature suggests that commuter students are overlooked and underrepresented in scholarly studies (Wilmes & Quade, 1986). Based on such observations, this case study considers the effect that co-curricular engagement has on the lived experiences of commuter students aged eighteen to twenty-two.

The formative researchers in the field of student affairs, Astin (1984, 1999), Chickering and Gamson (1987), Pascarella and Terrenzini (1991, 2005), and Kuh (1993, 2009), agree that college students who are engaged in co-curricular experiences are more successful, more satisfied with their institution, less likely to drop out of school, and more likely to complete their degree (Renn & Reason, 2013). It is also clear that student affairs scholars and practitioners have predominantly studied engagement from the perspective of residential students. However, the literature has done little to provide examples that describe the experiences of commuter
students who are actively involved in co-curricular opportunities outside the classroom setting. Researchers such as Renn and Reason (2013) remind the reader that higher education in the 21st century could be held accountable to a number of student outcomes that include completion rates, levels of student learning, and student development. Another perspective comes from Blimling (2013) who provides a descriptive assessment of what the field of student affairs may need to consider with regard to being more accountable:

The current climate of assessment demands that institutions explain why college costs as much as it does; that they quantify how much students learn, what percentage of students graduate, and what the cost-to-benefit ratio of that education is in the labor market after graduation; and that they offer lower-cost options that provide the same content. It also demands evidence that institutions are using this information to make performance-based management decisions that improve quality and reduce costs. If student affairs organizations cannot demonstrate their educational value in this process, then the role of student affairs becomes little more than a staff function dedicated to the management of buildings, programs, and services for students (Blimling, 2013, p. 6).

Researchers such as Pascarella and Terrenzini (2005) talk about “a quiet revolution” (p. 645) sweeping higher education where more is required of scholars and practitioners in promoting learning-centered institutions. Scholars such as Kinzie et al. (2015) also speak of the need in taking quantitative data collected through national assessments such as NSSE, to “catalyze improvements in undergraduate education (p. 1). Incorporating additional qualitative research, as has been proposed, could speak in some way to the call for action that has been noted in this section. As campuses are held accountable to find new students and hold onto the
ones they already have, commuter students have the potential to represent a significant part of
the conversation and they deserve further study as has been described in this review of literature.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study seeks to learn more about the experiences of commuter students aged eighteen
to twenty-two, who are engaged in co-curricular activities at the subject institution. Central to
this concern is the idea that commuters trend away from pursuing extra-curricular opportunities
during their undergraduate years. The primary research question as well as two sub-questions
that guide the study are: (1) What are the experiences of commuter students aged 18 to 22 who
are engaged in co-curricular activities at a private four year university in New Jersey? (a) What,
if any, barriers to engagement exist for commuter students aged 18 to 22 at the subject
university?, and (b) What motivates commuter students aged 18 to 22 to become engaged in co-
curricular experiences at the subject university?

The focus of the study involves commuter students identified as actively engaged in co-
curricular experiences. The study includes participants from the subject university and protocols
that I developed to reduce any expected forms of bias in the selection of participants (Creswell,
2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I employed purposeful sampling in an attempt to
“gain an in-depth and information rich insight” into the lives of actively involved commuter
students (Walters, 2001, p. 185).

The personal and professional experiences I brought to the problem of study reflects a
career in student services and a long-standing concern for commuter students. I acknowledge a
bias that favors this population. These personal feelings, beliefs, and attitudes could influence
the results of the study. However, based on the limited amount of literature pertaining to the
commuter student experience, conducting such a study adds to the overall literature, research,
and dialog currently taking place (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Despite the perceived value of the study, I followed protocols so that the study was carried out in a uniform manner in an ongoing effort to minimize any form of bias that could be introduced. If the field of student affairs is to expand its understanding of commuter student and their needs, as has been suggested by Silverman et al. (2009), more research on this important population must occur. I selected a qualitative method for this reason.

Employing qualitative method allowed me to generate contextual and subjective data related to the experiences of the participants (Yin, 2009). The study also provides student affairs scholars and practitioners with new data that defines who undergraduate commuter students are in the context of the co-curricular experiences presented in a higher education setting.

**Rationale for a Qualitative Approach**

Over the last four decades, considerable quantitative research has been conducted on the topic of engaging college students in the experiences that exist beyond the classroom (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). One of the defining examples is the development and implementation of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE’s introduction in 1998 is unique since it is an analytically driven assessment model that changed the paradigm of student affairs based research (Kuh, 2001). The data generated from NSSE has been invaluable in providing higher education with an understanding of college students at the local, state, and national levels. Scholars and practitioners have learned a great deal from quantitative instruments such as NSSE; however, the same cannot be said for qualitative research involving commuter students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The literature highlights the challenges of engaging commuter students in such research and it is vital higher education learn more about this lived experiences of this growing sub-group through the use of a qualitative approach (Jacoby, 1989; Kodoma, 2003).
Learning more about the lived experiences of commuter students can help scholars and practitioners develop a broader understanding of the needs of students who, in terms of size and growth, are outpacing the enrollment of residential students at certain institutions. The way commuter students connect with their institutions plays a central role in ongoing conversations regarding student engagement (Jacoby, 1989); knowing more about this phenomenon is important. The data generated from a qualitative study can guide the development of strategies that take into account the unique concerns of this population (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). New research may also prompt campus leaders to restructure programs and allocate resources to address commuter student-experience at the institutional level. The data collected in this study could also be valuable in helping commuter students identify pathways to becoming more involved at their respective colleges or universities.

**Case Study Inquiry Research Tradition**

Case studies are investigations that consider a specific problem or issue occurring in what Yin (2009) suggests are real-life settings. Yin notes that case study method is preferred when a researcher is attempting to seek answers to questions of how and why target populations behave the way they do. Additional researchers, including Creswell (2012), remind readers that another component of case study methodology is that it is bounded or bracketed in time and space. In my research, I view a slice of time in the continuum of the issues related to the study in question by employing this method. Yin (2009) also suggests that, “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18).

Creswell (2012) also notes that there are defining elements of a case study approach that include: 1) identifying a specific issue or case; 2) the idea the case’s intent could be intrinsic or
instrumental; 3) the study could involve one or more case sites; (4) a good qualitative case study presents an in-depth understanding of an issue; and (5) case studies often end with the researcher forming a conclusion about the data that has been collected. Case studies also present the opportunity for an in-depth understanding of an issue, along with data analysis that provide a detailed description of the case presented (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, themes and patterns that emerge can be organized in a chronological order allowing the researcher to present conclusions that speak to a comprehensive meaning of the case (Skate, 1995). Case study methodology allows the investigator to explore real-life events in a holistic and meaningful manner (Yin, 2009).

**Qualitative Methodology and Overall Design**

For my doctoral study, I employed a single site, holistic case study approach focused on a single issue or concern (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2012). The study was bounded in time and presented an in-depth understanding of one specific issue. The study involved the collection of multiple points of data as recommended by Yin (2009) and Creswell (2012) that included semi-structured interviews with a defined set of participants, the collection of institutional documents, audio/visual materials, and digital materials found online. The study included in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten student participants. Interview questions (Appendix A) were based, in part, on Astin’s (1999) theory of student involvement. The study was conducted at a mid-sized, non-denominational, private university in the State of New Jersey and took place over the course of one academic semester.

**Sample Design.** The study involved a purposeful sampling of commuter students aged 18 to 22 from the subject university who, as part of the screening process, self-reported as being actively involved in co-curricular experiences such as clubs, community service, work-study
positions (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2012). Maxwell (2005) highlights the fact that purposeful sampling is often used as a strategy when a researcher is selecting persons or groups of people who have a shared knowledge or perspective. When considering sample size, Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) also discuss the value of data saturation, which is considered a defining component in the development of effective qualitative methodology. The point at which a researcher is able to identify redundancy in the data collected in the study is considered optimal (Marshall et al., 2013). Researchers such as Yin (2009) also highlight the need to develop a screening procedure that is effective in helping identify cases that support the purpose of the study. Identifying participants who lived at home, who commuted to campus, and also happen to be actively involved in co-curricular experiences at the subject university were defining requirements for the purposeful sampling approach employed in the study.

**Participants.** As part of the case study, the student participants ranged in age from 18 to 22, self-reported as commuting from a permanent or home address, and involved in co-curricular activities, such as student clubs, intramurals, work-study position at the subject university. Students who began their studies as traditional commuters and then moved off-campus were also considered as potential participants.

**Recruitment.** Off-campus students who initiated their academic coursework at the subject institution as residential students were screened out of the study. After approval from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix B) and the subject university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix C), I began the recruitment of participants. I contacted (email and in person when possible) the advisors of the university’s student clubs and organizations soliciting assistance in identifying potential participants. A recruitment email was sent to all commuter students (Appendix D) and I created and posted a
flier (Appendix E) on-campus to recruit participants. Another element of the recruiting process included my use of informal conversations with known advisors and support staff at the subject university.

I also made contact with the selected students to outline the purpose of the study and to provide an oral understanding of how the study could affect each participant. Furthermore, the participants were provided with professional background information about the researcher during the cursory conversation. Once the participants were selected for the study, each person was asked to review and sign an informed consent form from Northeastern University (Appendix F) and the subject university (Appendix G) that explained the voluntary nature of their participation and the fact that they could withdraw from the study at any point, for any reason. As part of the data collection process, I informed each participant that a pseudonym for her or his name would be created and used to protect their identity and to maintain confidentiality.

Data Collection

I was the sole researcher in the data collection process. The first phase of the study included a pilot interview with one participant to test the interview questions the order and presentation of the questions being used. Yin (2009) references the value of conducting a pilot study by suggesting its inherent value in identifying relevant field issues or questions that may arise. Such a process is valuable as it can help the researcher to “refine the interview questions and procedures” of the intended study (Creswell, 2012, p. 165). The pilot study made it possible for me to test the relevance of the questions presented to the participants while also allowing for the opportunity to refine data collection processes associated with the study.

The second phase of the data collection process included a review of institutional documents, artifacts, audio recordings, videos (Appendix I) and digital materials (Appendix J)
that pertain to engagement related opportunities that are offered to the commuter students at the
subject university. Yin (2009) highlights the value of including such information in the case
study process since it can offer insights into the cultural features and technical operations of the
entity being studied.

Yin (2009) suggests the collection and integration of multiple forms of data is an
important component to enhancing the depth and quality of the case study in question. Multiple
forms of data can further serve to corroborate what is being learned about the participants.
Integrating multiple forms of data including institutional documents, artifacts, audio recordings,
videos, and other digital materials provided the researcher with a fuller perspective of the
environment in which the participants exist. Yin (2009) further notes that the use and integration
of manifold methods of data are one of the defining strengths of a case study approach. For
example, a researcher could overlook related or hidden themes of behavior by only relying on
data solely collected from participant interviews. Incorporating additional forms of data into my
study prevented a one-dimensional perspective from developing and helped me form a more in-
depth and accurate view of the problem of study.

Once the pilot study was concluded, the interview questions were refined, and the artifact
analysis complete, a third phase of semi-structured interviews with each of the participants was
completed. The interview questions were divided into three categories that correspond directly
to Astin’s (1999) I-E-O model. Three primary questions were developed for each of Astin’s
categories including student inputs (I), environmental (E) factors, and outputs (O).

The interviews took place on the campus of the subject institution in a neutral
environment that was convenient for the participants. If a participant was to meet me on-
campus, an accommodation was made to ensure the study protocols were maintained, while also
taking into consideration the needs of the participant. The interviews lasted approximately thirty
to sixty minutes. Each interview was digitally recorded for clarity and accuracy, and stored in a
digital MP3 format on my computer.

The fourth phase of the data collection involved the creation of an in-vivo transcription
(Appendix H) of the digitally recorded interviews with each of the participants. Upon
completion of the in-vivo transcription, each participant was provided with the opportunity to
review the completed document as part of a member-checking process. The transcripts were
emailed to the participants email account for review. Researchers such as Creswell (1994)
highlight the value of member checking as a measure that can mitigate direct or indirect biases a
researcher could introduce to the data collection and transcription process.

Data Storage/Protection

Data was stored in hard (printed) and digital form. Hard copies of transcripts are stored
in a locked cabinet inside my office and will remain there for a period of at least six months
following the completion of the study. At the official completion of the study, I will destroy all
hard copy data using a shredder. Digital copies of the transcripts were stored on my computer
and on a USB data storage device. All of the data has been encrypted and saved in a locked
cabinet belonging to me for a period of six months following the completion of the study. At the
official conclusion of the study, I will electronically delete all data.

All of the participants were asked to sign a consent form that permitted me to make
digital recordings of the interviews. Original copies of the consent forms and digital copies of
the interviews will be locked in a cabinet in my office and saved for a period of at least six
months following the completion of the study. I also made back-up copies of the consent forms
and digital recordings and secured them in in a locked cabinet.
Data Analysis

I conducted a multi-step analysis of the raw data by using an open-ended, inductive approach to examine the responses provided by the participants. The literature suggests case study analysis involves an examination of the data collected, the development of the categories of data, and an organization of tables to compare the data that has been collected by the researcher (Yin, 2009). Inductive approaches encouraged me to allow the findings to emerge from the raw data without any preconceived notions or biases (Thomas, 2006). This way I entered the study without purposefully introducing any biases into the problem of study.

When speaking to the topic of assessment methods for student affairs practitioners and scholars, Schuh (2009) suggests coding for qualitative studies helps the researcher determine specific categories that can be linked in some manner or fashion. Creswell (2012) views coding as a system of aggregation that attempts to take the visual or aural data and place it into definable or distinguishable categories. In carrying out the process of coding, Saldana (2013) also suggests multiple forms of coding that can be employed by a researcher. This study employed four forms of coding: memoing, descriptive, in-vivo, and axial (Miles et al., 2014).

**Memoing.** General notes were inserted onto tables that were organized by questions in an effort to identify common themes, phrases, words, or patterns that may have emerged during the interviews. The literature also speaks to the process of noting such patterns and themes by finding reoccurring thoughts, ideas, or feelings that can help connect that which may appear to be separate and unrelated pieces of data (Miles et al., 2014). Another recommendation from Creswell (2012) suggests memoing also has the ability to help develop evolving theories that would relate to the study at hand. Memoing is a broad stroke approach in the data analysis
process that can aid a researcher in refining the data collected into manageable and salient thoughts or points of view.

I developed a two-step process when conducting this aspect of data analysis. I first highlighted any common words or phrases relative to the responses based on whether or not they elicited a specific feeling, behavior, or action. I made a second copy of the transcript that identified connective ideas I found throughout the interviews and the participants. I then compared the notes from both tables to identify common themes that collectively emerged during the process of analysis.

**Descriptive Coding.** I continued the data analysis process by assigning what Miles et al. (2014) describe as descriptive codes to the written information collected during the semi-structured interviews. Descriptive coding is effective when attempting to organize data collected from a social environment (Miles et al., 2014). Descriptive coding was also useful in helping me organize the data into specific themes. I viewed the data analysis process at this point as a continuation of the refinement of the information collected through the semi-structured interviews, the collection of institutional documents and internet resources, as well as the audio/video materials. The literature has also suggested a process of this type can help to serve a researcher as an inventory that can categorize and index the raw data that has been collected (Miles et al., 2014).

**In-Vivo Coding.** The next phase of data analysis involved in-vivo coding. A primary component of this form of data analysis focuses on the actual information collected during the interview. A defining aspect of this phase of data analysis is the idea that no interpretation is added to the information collected by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). For this phase, I took the raw data and allowed codes and themes to emerge on their own. In-vivo coding is one of the
most widely used forms of data analysis and it is useful to the novice or beginning researcher (Miles et al., 2014). A hallmark of this form of coding focuses on the identification of words or phrases that re-occur throughout the data that may “point to regularities or patterns in the setting” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74).

**Axial Coding.** Another phase in the ongoing data analysis process involved axial coding. Researchers including Saldana (2013) suggest this form of data analysis can help researchers determine which codes are more dominant than others. As part of the continuing level of sorting that took place, I attempted to find prominent codes and themes among the participants. Axial coding can also be a way to help researchers identify ascendant themes in the data that is collected (Creswell, 2012). In conducting this form of coding, I attempted to find what Creswell (2012) suggested are the core phenomenon found in the data generated during the study.

**Trustworthiness**

Ensuring a level of trustworthiness of codes is paramount to the validity of qualitative data analysis. Miles et al. (2014) present a detailed primer on internal validity that suggests the researcher should create a process that provides the reviewer with descriptions that are content rich, with plausible accounts of the data, and with triangulation of the data collection. Additionally, the data and emerging theories should be well linked and the researcher should present clear findings, with study procedures clearly described, and any areas of uncertainty highlighted. Furthermore positive and negative evidence should be detailed, conflicting explanations should be reviewed, findings should be replicated, and conclusions considered accurate by the participants should be reported by the researcher. When discussing internal validity, Saldana (2013) takes a more direct approach by suggesting the results of a study have to
fit into the “that’s right” factor. All of the elements of the study have to resonate with the reader or reviewer in a way that leaves little doubt as to the study’s intent and corresponding results or objectivity.

Based on the need for trustworthiness, I sought to address the issue of objectivity which entailed the development of a defined and explicit methodology for conducting the study (Miles et al., 2014). I viewed this as another step in the process of ensuring a degree of trustworthiness that addressed the issue of reliability. Including a member check process of the data by the participants was important to address any accuracy issues through triangulation (Yin, 2009). I also included a pilot study of the interview questions in an effort to refine and reinforce the reliability of the interview process.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Any study that involves the participation of human subjects could include a form of risk, be it intentional or not, on the part of the researcher. Prior to beginning the study, I completed all of the necessary requirements for conducting a study that involves human subjects as defined by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the subject university’s Internal Review Board (IRB). The safety and security of the participants was one of my primary concerns. Researchers such as Yin (2009) and Creswell (2012) outline a number of ethical issues researchers must address best protect the participants’ identities and provide evidence that participants are taking part in the study under their own free will. To that end, the study employed the use of pseudonyms for each of the participants. The data collected from the participants was also secured in a manner that protected their safety and identity.
Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this case study was to learn more about the experiences of commuter students between the ages of 18 and 22 who self-identified as being actively involved in co-curricular activities at the subject university. Three questions guided this study:

- What are the experiences of commuter students aged 18 to 22 who are engaged in co-curricular activities at a private four year university in New Jersey?
- What, if any, barriers to engagement exist for commuter students aged 18 to 22 at the subject university?
- What motivates commuter students aged 18 to 22 to become engaged in co-curricular experiences at the subject university?

I asked each of the participants nine primary questions that I derived from Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement and his environment, input, output (E-I-O) model. During the recruitment process, I selected and interviewed ten participants. Two of the participants were first-year students, three of the students identified as sophomores, four were juniors, and one student indicated she was a senior. Seven of the participants were female and three were male. When comparing the pool of participants to the current population of undergraduates at the subject university, the groups were similar with overall gender distribution at sixty percent female and forty percent male. Each of the participants represented a small cross-section of the full-time, undergraduate commuter students who self-identified as being actively involved in co-curricular activities at the subject university.

At the beginning of the interview process, I gave each of the participants the opportunity to provide a pseudonym of his or her own design, which I then used in the study. Table 1 shows
a brief demographic description of each participant to provide a cursory illustration of who partook in the study.

Table 1

*Description of Student Participants in the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Major and GPA</th>
<th>Drive time to campus</th>
<th>Days on-campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Business with a concentration in Accounting. No GPA yet</td>
<td>50 minutes each way</td>
<td>5 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Business with a concentration in International Business and a minor in Political Science. No GPA yet</td>
<td>25 minutes each way</td>
<td>4 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>English, Creative Writing with a minor in Spanish. 2.7 GPA</td>
<td>35 minutes each way</td>
<td>4 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>English/Secondary Education, with minors in Theatre and Spanish. 3.925 GPA</td>
<td>25 minutes each way</td>
<td>5 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Health Studies, Communication Sciences Disorders with a minor in Information Technology. 3.1 GPA</td>
<td>35 minutes each way</td>
<td>5 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaclyn</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Business with a concentration in Accounting. 3.57 GPA</td>
<td>35 minutes each way</td>
<td>6 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicki</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>English with minors in Information Technology and Sociology. 3.86 GPA</td>
<td>20 minutes each way</td>
<td>4 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Psychology with a minor in Information Technology. 3.4 GPA</td>
<td>30 minutes each way</td>
<td>5 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vito</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Business with a concentration in Accounting and Real Estate. 3.3 GPA</td>
<td>20 minutes each way</td>
<td>6 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>English/Secondary Education with endorsements in Creative Writing and Special Education. 3.45 GPA</td>
<td>30 minutes each way</td>
<td>5 days a week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the interviews conducted, I also conducted a review of institutional documents (Appendix H) which included a description of the office of off-campus and commuters services in the university student handbook. I also found digital materials (Appendix
J) from the university website that included campus resources for commuter students, a description of the commuter student mentor program, information about a carpooling program for commuter students, information about the New Jersey (NJ) Transit student discount program, commuter students frequently asked questions, and a webpage that included links and resources for commuter students. The hard copy and digital information found correlated with further understanding commuter student co-curricular engagement at the subject university.

I then completed a multi-step analysis of the data that began with memoing, where general notes were jotted onto the completed transcripts in an attempt to identify common words, codes, themes, phrases or patterns. In speaking to the purpose of coding, Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) suggest that “Codes are primarily, but not exclusively, used to retrieve and categorize similar data chunks so the researcher can quickly pull out, and cluster the segments relating to a particular research question, hypothesis, construct or theme” (p. 72).

I continued the analysis process by assigning descriptive codes to the collected data, which I then represented on the transcripts. In addition to the descriptive codes and themes identified during analysis, I created an in vivo list of codes using the words and phrases that came directly from the data. My goal was to allow the prevalent codes to emerge (see Table 2) on their own, through the words of the participants.

Analysis of the data identified roughly thirty-five individual codes that participants generated during the interviews. As part of the ongoing analysis, I attempted to identity the core phenomenon within the data, through the use of axial coding (Creswell, 2013). That led to the emergence of eight primary themes to include (1) pre-college involvement, (2) delayed involvement, (3) opportunities to become involved, (4) factors affecting involvement, (5) family
support/expectations, (6) service to others, (7) personal development, and (8) life after college.

These themes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Descriptive Definitions of Primary Themes Identified During Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Themes</th>
<th>Central Identifiers Used to Describe Primary Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Involvement</td>
<td>Involvement in activities during high school, clubs and activities, honor societies, leadership development, mentors, sense of accomplishment, support from family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed Involved</td>
<td>The decision to delay becoming involved during the first year of college, emotional issues, transition issues, motivation, sense of fear, academic concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to Become Involved</td>
<td>Type and variety of co-curricular opportunities available at subject university, sense of pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors Affecting Involvement</td>
<td>Time, distance to university, work, academic obligations, commitment to religion obligations, financial concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Support/Expectations</td>
<td>Provide guidance in decision making, financial, emotional, career guidance, inspiration, sense of responsibility, promotion of maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to Others</td>
<td>Involvement must be meaningful, giving back to other, service to others, helping people, making a difference, adds meaning to one’s life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>Career development, social skills development, promoting sense of maturity, enhance ability to multi-task, time management, promotes personal motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life After College</td>
<td>Involvement helps to inform life after college, supports careers decisions/direction, become a better driver, enhance leadership skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre-College Involvement**

During the interview process I asked the participants to talk about the manner and degree to which they had engaged in co-curricular activities during their time in high school. I was interested in learning more about the life experiences of the participants before they enrolled at the subject university. I also hoped that such information would possibly serve as a guide to
understanding what may have motivated the participants to pursue forms of co-curricular engagement once they began college.

All of the participants highlighted some degree of co-curricular involvement during their time in high school. Many of the participants were also involved in multiple programs, clubs, activities and/or sports teams that were affiliated with their high school. A few of the participants also spoke about getting involved with community based activities. Vito noted, he had been “Involved in so many things”, and Veronica stated, “Oh my God, I did it all in high school.” Flower provided a detailed description of her involvement prior to enrolling in college:

In high school I was involved, I was pretty much after school every day. Cuz I was always in a club. I was involved in easily over six or seven clubs. I was always involved, I was involved in band, so that took up a lot of my time. And then I was in peer leadership and WYCD (what you can do), it was community service. I was in like a good amount of clubs that took up a lot of time. I was in SGA and also I was on a lot of committees for that, so I was always involved I high school.

When asked to talk about the motivation behind the different forms of co-curricular involvement in which they were involved in during high school, Alex discussed her desire to get into a good college. On the other hand, Flower said she had been motivated to be, “Known by her teachers and advisors.” When speaking about the motivation to get involved Brandon also noted, “Meeting new people” and Tara had indicated, “It was all things I enjoyed. It was all things I was interested in.” A number of the participants highlighted that they had been involved in one or more co-curricular activities while in high school. Some of the participants also talked about how they delayed such involvement during their freshmen year of high school until they
felt ready or comfortable with their transition. For example, Nicki pointed out that she was involved, “Just probably not my freshmen year. I tried to get involved, but I’m one of those that it takes a while to get involved.” The theme of delaying getting involved carried over to the experiences that a number of participants spoke about when they enrolled at the subject university.

**Delayed Involvement**

Even though the participants identified themselves as being currently involved in co-curricular activities at the subject university, some of the students said that they did not become involved during their first year of college. Making the transition from high school to college was initially challenging for a portion of the participants. Those experiences played a role in delaying the degree to which some of the participants decided to get involved that first semester. A few of the students highlighted the challenge of trying to make the transition from high school student to that of college. Nicki indicated that she, “Really didn’t’ get that involved her first year in college” and alluded to the challenge of becoming responsible for one’s self. What prompted Nicki to get involved was a brother who was attending another university, who she stated, “Inspired” her to make the most of her college experience. Jaclyn provided the following example of what her first year at the subject university looked like from a co-curricular perspective:

```
Like I didn’t do any my freshmen year here. I didn’t do anything. I would just come to school and every once in a while I would see a couple of my friends and hang out, but I would really just go home and they I actually hated it here. I wanted to transfer, I was like I’m out. This is not like a good school for me, I don’t like it, I don’t want to be there.
```
Flower also provided a related example, “Compared to where I know I was last year, that’s such a huge step for me. Because I was so nervous to try and get involved.”

Making the transition to life as a college student may have served as a central reason why a few of the participants did not pursue co-curricular involvement during their first year of college. Such issues are known within student affairs research and have guided how institutions support the first-year experiences of new students (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). However, factors unrelated to making the transition to college may also have the capacity to influence the experiences students have when they first enroll in college. In that regard, Tara spoke of the loss of a close friend as the primary dynamic which influenced her decision to not become involved in co-curricular activities her freshmen year:

When I first came to the university my best friend had just passed away. So I didn’t want to be involved cuz I was just very emotionally withdrawn from everything. I didn’t really want to, even my friends at home, I didn’t want to hang out. I didn’t want to go to class. I didn’t want to do much of anything. I was just in a very sad and kind of depressed place.

Despite the fact that all of the participants noted they were currently involved in one or more co-curricular activities, many of the students highlighted their struggles to make a connection with the university during their first year.

**Opportunities to Become Involved**

Researchers such as Jacoby (1989, 2000) and Silverman et al. (2009) speak of the many challenges commuter students face when they make their way through a college experience at a four-year institution. Accessing institutional resources and opportunities where commuter students are able to connect with their school or become immersed in the co-curricular activities
that are offered, is one of the primary roadblocks affecting student persistence and completion among this population (Jacoby, 1989a). In speaking about how the subject university makes opportunities to connect available, many of the participants shared a similar perspective. Flower noted, “I feel like there’s endless amounts of opportunities, I feel like there is something for everyone.” Tara echoed that perspective by noting, “There’s a ton of…clubs that I never heard of until I knew people that were in them.” When speaking specifically to the types of co-curricular experiences that commuter students may pursue at the university, Alex said, ‘Honestly, everything is really open to commuter students” and Brandon noted “Commuters can pretty much do everything.”

The participants also highlighted the role of personal motivation as being an important element that sets them apart from their peer commuter students who may not be involved. Brandon highlighted that point in the following way, “Well there are other commuter students who just come and just leave. Then there some like me and some other friends who stay, hang out here, study, go out to eat and take part in extra-curricular life.” Veronica offered a similar perspective:

You really have to be motivated to put the effort in…because sometimes you just don’t want to…like I think it’s easier to have a last minute meeting or a last minute anything, and say “oh yeah, I’ll just walk over”. But to commute, it’s also easy to use that as an excuse and say I’m not going, I can’t make it cuz I commute. But then you’re not involved, so it’s self-defeats the purpose.

A number of the participants seemed to be in agreement that the subject university provided a wide variety of co-curricular opportunities for all commuter students to become
involved. However, the participants also spoke about personal motivation as one of the factors that could influence whether or not commuter students actually become involved.

**Factors Affecting Involvement**

Research suggests that commuter students encounter a host of challenges and multiple life role issues that can influence the degree to which they are able to become engaged in the co-curricular activities and experiences at a respective college or university (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Silverman et al., 2009). The participants in this study were no exception to that observation. In fact, there were four sub-themes that participants highlighted.

**Distance to campus.** This issue was viewed by some of the participants as a primary factor that affected when and how students would stay on-campus, come to campus or return to campus more than once during a given day. Tara offered the following perspective:

> It definitely has because like I said you know, the time and the distance ahh, I have two nights a week where I’m here until 9:30 at night and driving home at 9:30, 10 pm at night is not fun, when I’ve been here since, 8 am. Umm, so I think I’m little less involved in the sense if I know I have already been here since 7 or 8 am, I’m like I’m not going to go to that because I’ve already been here all day.

And I have to drive home.

When discussing the influence that distance may have on becoming involved, Nicki noted, “So it makes it a lot more difficult.” As a first year student, Frank was the participant who travels the furthest to campus. He offered a related view on distance to that of Nicki by indicating, “It’s definitely difficult for me to drive here every day for these events, simply because I live ahh, so far away.”
Some participants also viewed distance as a barrier that would affect when and how often they would return to campus for the co-curricular programs and activities that were being offered at the university. With regard to distance and its effect on when the participants would get involved in co-curricular activities, Jennifer spoke of wanting to become involved in a club soccer team when she first began at the university by noting:

They said they were going to have morning practices before 8:30 am classes, so I said no thank you. Cuz I did not want to get up at 5 am to drive to soccer practice then go to class. I would be exhausted. Cuz I can’t go home and take a shower after rehearsal or practice. I have to go straight to class. So that definitely made me not choose club soccer.

In another example, Flower spoke of the movies that are held on campus in the evening by noting, “So it’s definitely like I’ll see something and it starts at 8 or 9 pm and I’m like never mind, I won’t go. Cuz it’s just too late.” When speaking of distance to campus and the degree to which she is able to get involved, Veronica also noted, “I think it definitely does impact it, cuz you have to worry about things that other students might not consider, like the time spent travelling back and forth.”

**Financial considerations.** A number of the participants also listed financial considerations as a factor that influenced the degree to which they were able to become involved in co-curricular activities. Jennifer highlighted the fact that, “My family is not well off” and “I’m surviving on financial scholarships and academic scholarships and financial aid.” Vito offered a related perspective by stating, “I’m on a lot of scholarships” and “Both of my parents are I guess are low to mid income. So we’re kind of struggling to get through college without loans at least.” Flower also stated, “I pay for my books” and “it’s like I don’t have a lot of money,
because college is so expensive.” While Tara indicated that she was fortunate not to have to worry about financial considerations, she was aware of the issue through the commuter student friends that she had and suggested, “Some people don’t have the money to join clubs that they want to join or you know do activities they want to do.”

**Religious obligations.** Almost half of the participants touched on the role that religion played in their lives and how it affected their ability to pursue different forms of co-curricular involvement during college. When asked to talk about any responsibilities that influenced whether or not they could become involved at the university, Flower said, “I can’t do anything on Friday’s after 5 pm, because I’m Jewish and I have to have like a dinner and I can’t do anything after 5 pm.” Brandon also noted, “As a Muslim we are required to pray 5 times a day. So taking that time out, out of stuff that I am doing throughout the day and making a schedule” appeared to influence when and how he was able to become involved at the university. In a similar manner, Jennifer pointed out, “Umm, also I’m Catholic, so I go to church every week. So if there is something on a Sunday morning or an event then, I don’t go that because I’m at church.”

**Work.** Another variable that influenced when and how the participants were able to pursue forms of co-curricular involvement at the university related to the on- and off-campus positions they held. Research shows that commuter students often work on and/or off-campus during their time in college, which is viewed as factor that negatively influences co-curricular engagement among this population (Astin, 1977; Jacoby 2000). During the respective interviews, all but one of the participants noted they were currently holding one or more jobs on or off-campus. Furthermore, the student participants indicated they were working between five to forty hours a week. Another important point was that at the time of the study, all of the
participants were enrolled as full-time undergraduate students carrying between twelve and eighteen credits.

Jaclyn had the heaviest work schedule of all the participants. She noted, “In the fall semester it’s usually ten to twenty. Umm…in the spring semester, it’s anywhere from 20 to 40 hours, just because of tax season.” When responding to the idea of work and its effect on getting involved at the university, Alex noted, “I work Friday, Saturday, and Sunday every single week, so I don’t really have a day off anymore” and “I guess that really takes a toll on me.” Flower offered a similar point of view by noting, “Now I’m working 10 to 12 hours per week” and “Now I see myself working one to two days per week, because it just doesn’t accommodate my schedule anymore.” Brandon offered a more definitive perspective on how work affected his ability to become involved at the university:

Ahh, well my dad has a business and he wants me to be working there at least…I mean ideally he wants about fifteen hours a week, I usually give him about seven (laughs). So his business, I definitely have to consider it when making my schedule. I have to see how many hours of the day. Or what day of the week I could leave. Like for example I have Thursdays off. That’s when I dedicate my time to the office. So that’s definitely a factor.

Vito also discussed the effect that work has on his weekly schedule by noting, “I work early mornings, a couple of days a week. So that has put a strain on a lot of things I’m involved in.”

**Family Support**

Silverman et al. (2009) discuss the value of family members in supporting the experiences of the students who commute to campus. Research further suggests that commuter students tend to do better in and out of the classroom when they have friends and family
members who are supporting, encouraging, and assisting them while they are in college (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

Most of the participants highlighted some degree of support or form of encouragement they received from a parent or family member, in relation to becoming involved in co-curricular activities at the university. A common thread of conversation that came up during the interviews focused on the overall emotional support the students received from their immediate and extended family members. When discussing her involvement in co-curricular activities at the university, Veronica noted, “But the support is there, I mean my mom wants to hear all about and what I’m doing” and “So they [her parents] are always very curious and they’re supportive.” When talking about the emotional support she received from her parents, Jennifer indicated, “My parents are always there to help when I stress out, upset about anything.” When discussing what motivated Vito to pursue forms of co-curricular involvement at the university, he stated, “Well I’ve said this in the past, my grandfather was probably the biggest influence in my life.” Nicki also spoke about a sibling who inspired and supported her to become involved at the university by noting, “My brother was the biggest influence for me.”

Another form of family support was identified during the interview with Jaclyn where she discussed a time during her first year at the university when she attempted to transfer to another university in Pennsylvania. Her parents eventually intervened by attempting to get her to reflect on the effort she had made, up to that point, to connect with the subject university. Jaclyn noted:

My parent’s kind of, umm did, cuz when I had made a big deal about I don’t like the [subject university] and I want to transfer. Obviously their first thing was all right, well what can you do to maybe not want to transfer and I like think that
really got it started. Like I would see my friends love their schools. And like they like they live there. And I would see my friend’s love it and I would be like what do you do? And they would give me this whole long list of things. So that kind of made me want to do stuff.

Family support was another theme of conversation that came up with most of the participants during each of the respective interviews. Each of the students highlighted the various forms of support that typically began during high school to include being driven to and from activities, to family members expressing interest and/or support in the different forms of co-curricular involvement in which the students were associated.

Service to Others

As part of the selection process, all of the participants had to self-identify as being involved in some form of co-curricular activities at the subject university. This could have included involvement in a student club or organization, participation in intramural/athletic activities, holding a work-study position, holding a student leadership position or possibly assisting a professor with a research project. All of the participants identified themselves as taking part in some combination of the forms of co-curricular engagement just noted. However, one area of co-curricular engagement that consistently registered during the interviews centered on what has been termed *service to others*. This theme spoke to the idea of helping people or giving back to the university or a local community in some way.

A number of the participants spoke of a desire to become involved in purposeful or meaningful activities during the free time they had each week. For example, Alex spoke of, “Helping people in lower privileged communities” as a motivation to become involved in college. Vito highlighted a similar perspective:
I just like helping people. I like…being like I said involved gives me a sense of satisfaction with myself. It makes me feel like I’m being a more well-rounded person and I’m also helping other people become more well-rounded people. Like the Knights [of Columbus] and the [Boy] Scouts and a lot of the orgs I’m involved in are very service oriented, so self-betterment I guess.

Flower provided a related example by noting, “I feel that that might be first year service project for me. Because I figured we do a lot of community service and it would be good.” Nicki spoke of a desire to, “Help others” and Jennifer outlined an interest where she noted, “I want to be involved in helping other people.” As a first-year commuter student, Brandon highlighted his cultural background as a guide that has led him to pursue forms of co-curricular involvement that could affect change by helping people. He spoke of social justice as well a desire to address bigotry and hate:

I guess being kind of a minority, I mean I am a Muslim. I am a first generation American and I kind…especially in these days with all the bigotry and hate, ignorance. It kind of motivates me to show people like that I know that we’re not like some people who are doing horrible things around the world. So that is definitely a motivation to somewhat change the perception that people have, by meeting people that they usually don’t meet every day.

As the other first-year student in the study, Frank spoke of pursuing forms of co-curricular engagement that began in high school and wanting to carry those kinds of experiences forward into college. He noted, “Again, just like in high school, I wanted to get involved in high school helping people. I felt like ahh, I could implement those skills in the university.”
A number of the participants spoke of helping others and service from the perspective of volunteering personal time and taking part in community service types of programs and initiatives. However, Tara outlined the idea of having a purposeful frame of thinking when she decided to apply to become a peer tutor and volunteer with Big Brother and Big Sisters. As an English major who has plans to become a K-12 teacher after graduation, Tara noted:

Well because I wanted to teach, it’s hard to kind of find a job, while you’re still in college that relates to teaching unless you’re physically subbing in a classroom. So I work in the writing center right now, which is helping students with their papers and that you know I figured that was a job that aligned really well with my career, with what I wanted to go into. So I started with that and umm I do the big brothers, big sisters program, which is a mentoring program. So you know, kind of along the same lines, I just found things connected with what I liked and got involved that way.

A number of the participants spoke of a desire to have their degree of involvement mean something both to themselves and to other people. If they were going to spend their free time getting involved, they wanted to make a difference through a variety of activities, including volunteering in programs or projects that originated at the university, taking part in a community service project, or possibly through a work-study position.

**Personal Development**

Another outcome of getting involved in co-curricular activities centered on the individual development the participants felt was occurring in their lives. Each of the students identified elements that fell under the theme of personal development. For example, Flower spoke of becoming a “mature adult” because of the many issues she had to encounter while commuting
and juggling being involved in college. Furthermore, Flower noted the value of getting involved by indicating, “It made me more of a social person.” Veronica stated, “time management” as a practical application within the context of personal development. Jennifer talked about making the most of her time in school by noting, “College is supposed to be the best four years of your life, so I figured I would try to make that happen.” Tara offered another example of what getting involved should do toward promoting a sense of personal development by stating, “I think every experience you involve yourself in teaches you something and if it doesn’t, in my opinion, you’re wasting your time.”

Even though Frank was a first semester freshmen, he expressed an understanding of the value of co-curricular involvement and its influence on personal development by indicating, “It’s definitely given me a different perspective of working or volunteering time to help and seeing my superiors work and set examples for others.” When speaking of work, Nicki offered a related example by stating, “So joining the newspaper, trying something new, literally created my career. I had no idea I would want to do something like this, but I do.” As a senior who will be graduating in less than a year, Jaclyn offered a summation on personal development when speaking about commuting, getting involved, and how both have affected her personal development over the previous three and half years:

I think like I said when I was a freshmen, I think like a big reason I didn’t get involved because I was scared to. And it think that’s always a big thing when you are scared to do things by yourself. It’s scary to be a freshmen and walk into a club meeting by yourself and not really know anyone. So I think like that’s just a big thing, in life in general when you walk into a new work environment and you walk into a…like if I was working in the accounting department at a company and
I walked into a Christmas party and didn’t know anybody there, but it’s OK, because it just helped. Getting involved helps you to, like when you’re an adult, I feel like be able to get into certain situations and be comfortable that sort of.

Life After College

A primary reason I used the theory of student involvement centered on Astin’s (1984) E-I-O model is that the theory considers the overall life experiences of students during college. The final theme that I identified in this study spoke directly to the element known as output (Astin, 1984). Output has been considered by Astin (1984) as the culmination of everything the student has learned during his or her time in college.

In speaking to how being involved at the university influenced any decisions they would make in their life after college, Alex talked about now having, “Experience under her belt.” Jennifer noted, “I feel like it’s strengthened” in response to the experience she gained through co-curricular involvement. Brandon offered a perspective on career development in noting, “Being involved, like is like building my resume.” Flower also pointed out that she wants to, “Take everything I learn from what I’m doing here and put it towards my life after college.” Jaclyn highlighted the idea of being better prepared to multi-task by indicating:

But I think just the fact that I got really used to the juggling of a lot of things because I did like clubs and sorority, like I did all of that. And I’m used to now juggling a lot, it will probably be easier for me in the future when I am trying to juggle working and the CPA exam and like a life and just like things like that.

A few of the participants highlighted specific skills they felt they developed because of their involvement in co-curricular activities. Nicki spoke about becoming a stronger leader through her roles as a commuter student mentor by stating, “It’s a big leadership role and that’s
an important thing for a professional career after college.” Flower spoke of a growing, “Confidence” that had been developed and Veronica touched on, “Dealing or working with groups of different people and just the compromising part of it.”

A few of the participants also alluded to the idea that having to commute was good preparation for life after college. For example, Frank indicated, “Ahh, well your job, the proximity of where your job is located, I feel like ahh, being a commuter student driving to your university is just like driving to your job.” Vito echoed that perspective by stating, “Well I mean I’m kind of used to commuting to and from campus, when I have an office job or wherever I end up, I’ll be used to making a commute every day.” Tara also noted:

Ahh so I think in your life going forward, you can look at what different experiences in college taught you. So you know whether it’s how to be a team player or how to help other people who need it or you know what your own time management skills are like, or your own organizational skills or what do you need to improve on.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the experiences of students between the ages of 18 and 22, who commute from a permanent address, and who self-identified as being actively involved in co-curricular activities at the subject university. In carrying out that task, I tried to learn more about a group of student participants, why they to became involved in co-curricular activities, and what barriers, if any, influenced the students from getting involved at the subject university.

In attempting to address those questions, I completed a review of the institutional documents, artifacts, audio recordings, videos, and any digital materials that existed at the
subject university. The information collected helped to provide a snapshot of the programs and resources that are provided to all students who commute to the subject university.

A review of the institutional documents (Appendix H) and digital materials (Appendix J) offered a cursory understanding of who commuter students are and how the subject university support that population. The general focus of much of that data centered on addressing practical needs and concerns to include how to obtain parking decals, the manner in which commuter students can purchase meal-plans, where parking lots are located, as well as recommendations to the students for travelling to and from campus safely. What I did not find within the institutional documents was any substantial recognition of who commuter students are within the context, mission, or strategic plan of the university community.

Within the digital information (Appendix J) included in this study is a representation of a commuter student mentor program that all incoming first-year commuter students may access. This was noteworthy because it specifically speaks to the development of commuter-centric programs and resources as have been recommended by researchers such as Jacoby (1989a). The commuter student mentor program also provides the reader with a sense of how the subject university attempts to specifically support a sub-group (first-year commuter students) within the spectrum of commuter students at the university.

I also conducted an in-depth, semi-structured interview with ten student participants who had been selected through purposeful sampling to take part in the study. An analysis of the data led to the emergence of eight themes that included: (1) pre-college involvement, (2) delayed involvement, (3) opportunities to become involved, (4) factors affecting involvement, (5) family support/expectations, (6) service to others, (7) personal development, and (8) life after college. 

*Pre-college involvement* spoke to the co-curricular experiences the student participants pursued
prior to enrolling at the university. The theme *delayed involvement* references the idea that the participants did not pursue co-curricular experiences during a period of time that comprised their first full year at the subject university. *Opportunities to become involved* speaks to the various forms of co-curricular engagement the in which participants become immersed during their time at the subject university. The theme *factors affecting involvement* references the multiple life issues that have influenced the degree to which the participants are able to become involved in co-curricular experiences at the subject university (Jacoby, 1989a). *Family support/expectations* refers to the type and degree of support the participants receive from family members as such support relates to the participants’ desire to become actively involved in co-curricular activities. *Service to others* denoted the participants desire to pursue forms of co-curricular involvement that focus on various types of community service. *Personal development* speaks to the ways in which the participants experience forms of perceived personal growth due to their involvement in co-curricular activities at the subject university. *Life after college* refers to the ways that becoming involved in co-curricular activities affects the personal experiences and professional decisions the participants may pursue once the complete their studies at the subject university.

The simple act of leaving home and getting to school took some of the student participants upwards of fifty minutes. If students travel to campus five days a week, they would be spending between four to six hours driving to and from campus. Yet, despite such challenges, students such as Frank succeeded in becoming immersed in many of the programs, activities, and resources that the university has to offer. Much of the current research pertaining to commuter students has highlighted the many challenges this cohort encounters on a daily basis (Jacoby, 1989, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Silverman et al., 2009). Understanding the desire to get
involved inherent within a student like Frank and his peers who took part in the study, served as one of my central motivations for conducting this study.

What can be learned from the data collected in this study may help the field of student affairs better understand how to support the much broader population of commuter students who fail to pursue forms of co-curricular engagement at colleges and universities across the country (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Furthermore, if more commuter students are able to become immersed in the co-curricular experiences that most colleges and universities offer, that could potentially affect the degree to which this cohort is retained, persists, and ultimately migrates onto the completion of their degrees.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this single-site case study was to learn more about the experiences of commuter students between the ages of 18 and 22 who self-identified as being actively involved in co-curricular activities at a four-year private university in New Jersey. In carrying out that effort, I employed a qualitative case study that focused on the question: (1) What are the experiences of commuter students aged 18 to 22 who are engaged in co-curricular activities at a private four year university in New Jersey? There were also two sub-questions that supported the study: (a) What, if any, barriers to engagement exist for commuter students aged 18 to 22 at the subject university? and (b) What motivates commuter students aged 18 to 22 to become engaged in co-curricular experiences at the subject university?

The research questions were based upon a review of the extant literature of the commuter student experience in higher education, with a particular focus on co-curricular engagement as viewed through the seminal work of Alexander Astin (1984) and his theory of student involvement. The development of the study’s interview questions aligned to Astin’s (1984) E-I-O model, which was embedded within the theory of student involvement. This chapter includes a discussion of the themes that emerged during the review of the data in connection with the primary and secondary questions, the theoretical framework, and the existing literature that informed the study. I also present recommendations for practice and future research, along with a discussion of the study’s limitations.

Conclusions from the Findings

A central point of focus associated with this study has been an effort to learn more about the lives of commuter students in college. This is significant because campuses with unsuccessful or unhappy commuter students may find it difficult to ensure their retention,
persistence, and completion (Tinto, 1987). Leone and Tian (2009) note that retention and persistence are two areas of study that have garnered a great deal of attention in recent years. Additional research by Renn and Reason (2013) suggests that understanding how to retain students continues to be a “primary goal” (p. 173) for leaders and scholars in post-secondary education. Baum, Kurose, and McPherson (2013) also argue that moving students through to graduation has become a top priority in higher education. It should come as no surprise that many colleges and universities now invest considerable time, energy, and funding to improve the completion rates of their undergraduate students. The findings from the study provided me with a fuller understanding of what it means to be a commuter student.

Another goal of the study was to identify recommendations that could be put into practice at the subject university to improve outcomes. After completing the study and analyzing the data, eight themes emerged which include: (1) pre-college involvement, (2) delayed involvement, (3) opportunities to become involved, (4) factors affecting involvement, (5) family support/expectations, (6) service to others, (7) personal development, and (8) life after college. The themes noted support previous research concerning this cohort in the existing literature (Jacoby, 1989a; Jacoby & Garland, 2005; Kuh et al., 2001; Silverman et al., 2009). My research also contributes to the existing body of knowledge through the following conclusions that emerged from my study: co-curricular involvement may have the capacity to influence commuter student success; co-curricular involvement could be viewed as a form of influencing meaningful commuter student engagement; and institutional and personal factors influence commuter student success.
Co-curricular Involvement and its Potential to Influence Commuter Student Success

Becoming involved at the subject university played an important role in the overall life experiences of the student participants. Each of the students outlined examples that addressed the inherent benefits they felt from becoming involved in co-curricular experiences. In speaking to the value of co-curricular involvement among commuter students, student affairs researchers have spent considerable energy attempting to learn more about the effect that such experiences have had on residential students at colleges and universities over the past four decades (Jacoby, 2000). Studies by researchers such as Astin (1984), Kuh (1993), Pascarella and Terrenzini (2005), and Pike and Kuh (2005) have highlighted the importance of students becoming immersed in co-curricular experiences to include student leadership roles, student organizations, Greek Life organizations, honor societies fitness/athletic based activities, and work-study positions.

The participants in this study provided specific examples of the co-curricular activities and experiences they had pursued during their tenure at the subject university. They also noted the ways that becoming involved had affected the degree to which they felt successful in and out of the classroom at the university. Therefore, becoming involved had positively affected the lives of the students involved in the study. In illustrating this point, Alex stated that being involved has “helped me so much in wanting to see what I want to do later in life.” Flower also noted:

So being involved in these clubs almost makes me learn a little bit about myself and makes me think of all of the opportunities that I could have after college. Because how am I supposed to find these things out about myself if I don’t put myself out there?
It is also important to note that almost all of the participants spoke of a delay that occurred during their first-year when they did not pursue any form of co-curricular involvement. Observed in the findings, I identified this theme as delayed involvement. Making the transition to life in college has been a common issue found among some first-year students (Tinto, 1987). When first-year students struggle to adjust to being in college, it can affect the students’ academic success, the degree to which they connect with life beyond the classroom, and the students’ degree of satisfaction with the college or university.

The data I collected also support the literature that notes the challenges commuter students encounter when they enroll in college (Jacoby, 1989, 2000; Kuh et al., 2001; Kodoma, 2003). What makes my findings noteworthy is the idea that most of the participants worked through the difficulties of becoming a college student and then transitioned to life as engaged members of the university community through their involvement in activities such as clubs, fraternities and sororities, community service activities, and campus work-study positions. A number of the participants spoke of moments and life experiences during that first-year that prompted them to change their mental frame of reference which related to the degree to which they did (or did not) become involved at the university. The manner by which students dedicate themselves to engagement related activities has the potential to have a corresponding effect on academic success, psychosocial development, and students’ satisfaction with their institution (Chickering, 1969; Tinto, 2006).

Astin (1984) also suggests that students making connections beyond the classroom help to inform the overall experience students have during their college years. A student’s success in college has the potential to be positively influenced by the extent to which he or she is able to dedicate time and effort toward co-curricular experiences (Astin, 1984). This study may help
support Astin’s (1984) assertion with one caveat surrounding the amount of time the students were able to devote to such experiences. Time appeared to play a defining role in the point to which commuter students are able to become involved in co-curricular activities. Time was a concern that was noted in the theme *factors affecting involvement*.

In addition, multiple life roles such as availability of time, are a well-documented phenomenon and have the capacity to negatively affect how involved some commuter students will be in college (Jacoby, 1989; Silverman et al., 2009). Furthermore, the literature suggests that commuter students’ ability to become more engaged with co-curricular experiences could be influenced by a number of factors external to what was happening at school (Jacoby & Girrell, 1981; Wilmes & Quade, 1986; Jacoby, 1989a, 2000; Davis, 1999; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Krause, 2007).

Alignment also occurred between the existing research on co-curricular engagement and elements found in some of the other themes that emerged during the study. For example, within the theme *pre-college involvement*, the students spoke of the innumerable ways that becoming involved supported the personal, academic, and professional goals they had beginning as early as their time in high school and into their lives at the university. Silverman et al. (2009) speaks of co-curricular involvement within the context of developing a sense of engagement and community (Astin, 1973, 1984; Borden, 2004). Today there seems to be agreement among student affairs researchers that when college students immerse themselves in curricular and co-curricular activities, they may enhance satisfaction with the overall experiences they are having at their respective institution (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al. 2001; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005).

Within the theme *opportunities to become involved*, study findings aligned with previous research when participants talked about how their involvement resulted in being happier and
feeling more connected to the life of the university. Developing a sense of belonging is a powerful emotion that has been discussed in research on the commuter student experience (Schlossberg, 1990). Furthermore, being recognized as a valued member of the academic community also speaks to the level of esteem that is shown to commuter students (Schlossberg, 1990). In speaking to that point, Flower provided a relevant example by noting, “I think just knowing that feeling when all of the teachers knew you and they knew you as the person who always involved, like I like that feeling.”

**Meaningful Forms of Co-Curricular Involvement for Commuter Students**

One of the prerequisites for participation in the study centered on the students being able to identify forms of co-curricular engagement in which they were actively involved at the university. Throughout the interviews, many of the students highlighted examples that spoke to that requirement. The one area of engagement where a number of the participants were in agreement centered on the idea of helping and/or giving back to people. This finding is represented in the study under the theme *service to others*. Some of the students detailed their desire to identify meaningful types of co-curricular engagement that gave back to the university community, that focused on community service, or that took the form of helping people in need. Examples included community service projects, aid based initiatives, volunteer opportunities, as well as mentoring and tutoring roles in which they had applied for or joined during their time at the university. Tara further reinforced this observation by noting, “I knew that I liked helping other people and I wanted to do something that involved helping people.” Vito also provided a related example by indicating, “It makes me feel like I’m being a more well-rounded person and I’m also helping other people.”
Findings from the study suggested that becoming involved had to add meaning to the participants' lives if they devoted time to such activities. Identifying meaning in such forms of involvement speaks to the concept of being identified as a valued member of the academic community and touches on the level of esteem shown to commuter students (Schlossberg, 1990). The meaning that students gave to particular activities is further seen as an important element. Such meaning appears to guide the students in their pursuit of specific forms of co-curricular involvement.

The desire for college students to become involved in different forms of community service is not new in student engagement research (Fitch, 1987; Marotta & Nashman, 1998). Jones and Hill (2003) speak directly to the topic of college student engagement in community service activities. Findings suggest that such participation has the capacity to influence the development of identity within some students (Chickering, 1969). One of the central conclusions by Jones and Hill (2003) is their notion of service being personally meaningful. Research by Eyler and Giles (1999) also asserts that the quality of the community service influences the degree of meaning in which the students will assign to such involvement. In speaking to the role that higher education should play in supporting such forms of co-curricular engagement, Jones and Hill (2003) offer the following recommendation: “College faculty and administrators can enhance the likelihood of community service involvement by making opportunities visible and easily accessible as well as helping students negotiate demands on time” (p. 535).

An overriding finding shared in the literature on student engagement suggested that learning is a direct function of how students spend their time out of the classroom (Kuh, 2003; Kinzi et al., 2015). The degree to which students dedicate themselves to engagement-related
activities has the potential to have a corresponding effect on other factors such as academic success, psychosocial development, and students’ satisfaction with their institution (Chickering, 1969; Tinto, 2006).

**Factors that Have the Potential to Influence Commuter Student Success**

As has been noted throughout this study, much of the existing research on the commuter students’ experience is limited. However, Jacoby (1989a) compiled a comprehensive primer on commuter students nearly thirty years ago and offered a prescient reminder:

The relationship of commuter students to institutions of higher education has been neither understood nor incorporated into the design of policies, programs, and practices. Too often, it has been assumed erroneously that what has worked for residential students will serve commuter students equally well. More discouragingly, some institutions still barely acknowledge the presence of their commuter students (p. 5).

Concurrent with the information presented in the literature review is the idea that commuter students struggle to become fully immersed in the life outside the classroom. This struggle existed squarely among students in my study and falls under the titled *factors affecting involvement*. Each of the students spoke about life-related issues that affected almost every part of their day. Elements that resident students may take for granted such as getting to class, making time to study, spending time with friends, as well as attending campus programs and events all fit within such parameters.

On any given day, commuter students encounter a host of issues that can negatively affect their college experiences. A number of participants in my study provided examples of such negative experiences, including when their cars break down, they are delayed in traffic, they sleep in, or they are negatively affected by the weather. Vito provided an example that was
commonly expressed by many of the participants, “Time is tough. I have commitments most days of the week. I don’t have a lot of free time.”

What makes the experiences challenging is the fact that many commuter students often fail to express such concerns to friends, family members, or faculty and staff at their respective colleges or universities. Commuter students tend to have a degree of stoicism and independence (Jacoby, 1989a), including the participants who took part in my study. In speaking to that point, Kodama (2002) and Wilson (2003) describe commuter students as a quiet, if not silent, majority. One of the popular myths related to the commuter student experience has suggested this cohort is perceived as being disinterested in learning and is less motivated than their residential student counterparts (Likins, 1991; Kuh et al., 2001). Compounding matters further, Schlossberg (1990) and Kodama (2002) found that commuter students also experience feelings of marginalization because of the related challenges noted earlier in this section.

A related concern found in the study of commuter students has centered on the disparity of services and resources that are made available at many campuses (Jacoby, 1989a). Silverman et al. (2009) suggest that higher education needs to do more to “bridge the gap” (p. 225) between resident students and commuters. Silverman et al. (2009) also suggest that higher education exhibits a consistent pattern that fails to recognize the challenges found within the lives of commuter students. The participants in my study echoed a number of related concerns by highlighting the daily challenges associated with managing course schedules, the university’s academic calendar to that of their own personal schedule, as well as accessing certain programs and services offered at the subject university. To counteract such concerns, the literature recommends that colleges and universities implement targeted strategies to enhance the manner
in which commuter students become engaged with the out-of-class experiences taking place at the institution (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1999).

Even though researchers such as Jacoby (1989a) and Silverman et al. (2009) paint a bleak picture pertaining to commuter students in a higher education setting, colleges and universities maintain the ability to positively affect the personal, social, and professional experiences of commuters as evidenced from the qualitative data collected in this study. Institutions have the capacity to design, support, and implement programs and resources that directly target commuter students who would create a return on involvement (ROI) (J. Griffin, personal communication, February 10, 2016). Some commuter students appear to want to get involved in co-curricular activities, meet people, feel engaged, all while working toward personal and professional goals that will help them prepare for life after college. Despite the academic and personal challenges that commuter students continue to face in higher education, there are still pockets of commuter students who successfully endeavor to become fully engaged in the co-curricular programs and experiences that exist at most campuses. The participants in this study fit that description and represent a potentially untapped opportunity for campuses that are attempting to positively affect retention and completion rates among their respective undergraduate populations. Learning more about other commuter students who also happen to be involved in co-curricular activities has the potential to reinforce, if not expand some of the findings generated in this study. I intentionally selected commuter students who self-identified as being actively engaged in co-curricular activities to determine if any differences exist between this sub-population and the much larger cohort of commuter students who rarely become involved in co-curricular activities during college (Silverman et al., 2009).
The literature suggests that commuter students contend with a host of personal, academic and other challenges that have the capacity to influence whether or not they will become active and engaged members of their colleges or universities. However, the data in this study suggest that some within this cohort persevere and find ways to become active, connected members of their colleges or university communities. Understanding who commuter students are, what motivates them to become involved, and what barriers, if any, impede their pursuit toward being involved, helped frame the research questions for this study.

**Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

The efforts by colleges and universities that are designed to retain and guide their students toward graduation are primary functions that exist in the student engagement dialogue taking place in higher education. There is a financial component to student engagement as well. Students play an essential financial role at most institutions, particularly those that are tuition driven. Therefore, understanding how best to respond to the needs of commuter students is vital for most institutions of higher education (Kuh et al., 2011). If commuter students are unsuccessful or unhappy in college, the institution could struggle to retain that cohort and shepherd them through to graduation (Tinto, 1987). Renn and Reason (2013) also promote the idea that understanding how to retain students should be a top goal for leaders and scholars in post-secondary education today. Baum et al. (2013) offer a related point in noting that supporting students through to graduation must become a top priority in higher education.

Campuses are investing considerable time, energy, and funding to improve the completion rates of their undergraduate students. Yet despite all that we know about enrolling and retaining undergraduate students, higher education still has a limited view of who commuter
students are and how best to support them. The recommendations noted in this section seek to address a few of those concerns.

The findings from this study provide scholar-practitioners with a broader understanding of traditional aged undergraduate commuter students who self-report as being actively involved in co-curricular activities at one university. Prior to this study, little qualitative information was available on this topic or this cohort of students (Jacoby, 1989a). Some of the findings offer potential courses of action and future directions of study for student affairs practitioners, for example encouraging research that targets a broader range of commuter students. At the same time, the findings support the argument that additional resources should be dedicated to supporting specific commuter experiences that focus on academic success, transition issues, career development, and the completion of degrees for commuter students.

Learning more about the needs and concerns of commuter students is a line of study that can inform our understanding of the manner and types of support that colleges and universities should provide to commuter students (Silverman et al., 2009). Scholar-practitioners at other campuses may also use the data from this study to gain insight into the lives and experiences of commuter students at their institutions. This information may inspire new research that endeavors to expand what is currently known about commuter students. The findings from the study also have the potential to prompt campus leaders to reorganize their respective institutional structures to better support all of the students who are attending their college or university. In fact, a goal in conducting a case study was to encourage future research based on the findings revealed through this study.

**Assessment.** The findings from the study highlighted eight primary themes that emerged during the interviews with the student participants. Six of the themes, including pre-college
involvement, delayed involvement, opportunities to become involved, family support/expectation, personal development and life after college, have all appeared in some form of existing student affairs research (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1987; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005; Silverman et al., 2009). However, two of the themes have not appeared in any definitive manner in existing research involving commuter students. The sub-theme, religious obligations, in the theme factors affecting involvement was an unexpected discovery and warrants further research into its effect on commuter student engagement. Another unforeseen finding that emerged during the interviews with the participants which deserves further review is service to others. Astin (1984) speaks of co-curricular engagement as having meaning or purpose, yet nowhere in the current research has service to others been referenced within the literature concerning commuter students. As Schuh (2009) points out, “Stakeholders, many of whom are external to our institutions of higher education, expect and demand accountability on the part of our colleges and universities” (p. 19). As campuses discover more about commuter students, they may be better positioned to provide support and guidance that targets the needs of this growing population (Jacoby, 1989a).

When speaking of the practical measures that can be employed to learn more about commuter students, recognized quantitative assessment tools within the landscape of student engagement research exist, such as National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) the College Student Inventory (CSI) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). All of the assessment instruments noted could be used and serve as a starting point to learn why certain commuter students are drawn toward service-based co-curricular experiences or to what degree religion affects the lives of commuter students outside the classroom setting. Student affairs practitioners
are also often encouraged to design campus or locally based assessment instruments that attempt to explore the patterns of engagement that currently exist among commuter students at their colleges and universities. Such surveys could also include additional questions concerning the roles of community service and religion on commuter student engagement and satisfaction.

Researchers have also used the CCSSE to study the effect of risk factors on student outcomes (Pettitt, 2006). Modifying such an assessment tool to consider the experiences of commuter students with a focus on service to others and religious obligations, could help two- and four-year institutions more clearly define to what extent their commuter students are engaged in relation to the support mechanisms being offered at the internal level. Furthermore, administering the assessment instruments noted would identify programs and services that, while well intentioned, may not meet the needs of the students they are intended to serve.

Self-assessment should also be considered as a measure to gauge the extent to which engagement is occurring locally. Divisions and departments of student affairs have consistently been encouraged to take measure of the needs and concerns of the students in which they serve (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). Understanding the students who are attending today’s colleges and universities should be the first and most important step toward retaining and ultimately supporting students through graduation.

The findings in the study have the capacity to inform the manner in which student affairs scholars and practitioners view commuter students, thus prompting a continued investigation of the needs and concerns of commuter students at their respective campuses. Such research may influence institutional goals, retention strategies, spark debate among campus stakeholders, encourage further involvement among the college’s leadership, and generate greater support for the development of co-curricular programs and services that more closely match the needs of
their students. My hope is that the findings from this study will also prompt new and future directions of qualitative research that considers the whole life experience of commuter students in higher education.

**Institutional Leadership.** This study highlights the idea that some commuter students search for a sense of belonging, seek out support networks, experience feelings of marginalization, and wonder to what extent they really matter to their respective campuses (Wilmes & Quade, 1986; Schlossberg, 1990; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Jacoby, 2000). The study also notes that a number of the participants who endeavored to become involved at the subject university were influenced by the religious obligations in their lives. Many of the participants were also committed to pursuing forms of co-curricular involvement that focused toward service to others. The two new findings from my study can serve as an opportunity for college and university leaders to learn more about the roles that religion and community service play in the lives of commuter students.

When decisions about involvement occur, students may seek to define their return on their involvement in personal, social, and professional terms. For example, a number of the participants outlined a desire to find forms of co-curricular involvement that added meaning to their lives. The data represented in the finding *service to others* spoke directly to that assertion. A number of the student participants also incorporated the idea of pursuing forms of meaningful involvement into the finding defined as *life after college*. With that being said, higher education leaders have the ability to influence the direction that conversation takes and more importantly influence the degree to which commuter students are engaged in life beyond the classroom, retained by the institution, and eventually go on to complete their degrees.
Institutional leadership also has the capacity to affect, both positively and negatively, the course of those concerns through the organizational cultural in which they embody (Tierney, 2011). For example, if commuter students are made to feel they matter to their college or university, that cohort may experience an increased sense of satisfaction with the institution and may begin to immerse themselves in the overall life that exists at their college or university (Rosenburg & McCullough, 1981; Jacoby and Garland, 2004). When college students are satisfied and involved in the overall institutional experience, they may be less likely to leave or drop out of college (Tinto, 1987). The findings from my study support those positions with new data that suggest that some commuter students use religion as a reference point in determining when and how to become involved in co-curricular activities. Another finding from the study noted the idea that many of the participants wanted to pursue forms of co-curricular involvement that were based on service to others.

When considering the fact that colleges and universities are made up of students from different backgrounds with varying needs, interests and concerns, it is vital to have institutional leadership that is willing to focus on the needs and concerns of all of its students (Lijima-Hall, 2007). Campus leaders who actively speak about and to commuter students have the ability to enhance their sense and feeling of importance among this cohort experiences during their enrollment at the college or university. Conneely (2010) offers a related point of guidance on collaboration in strategic planning by suggesting that a “strategic planner in higher education is to serve as a consensus builder or linchpin” (p. 54). Silverman et al. (2009) also recommend that any interventions by college and university leaders to support commuter student experience must take into consideration the diverse nature of the cohort that has an eye toward strengthening “the institution’s position to engage these students more actively in campus life and activities” (p.
Effective and thoughtful leadership should serve as a defining component that supports all institutional stakeholders.

**Creating Inclusive Opportunities for Co-curricular Engagement.** Because the study purposefully recruited engaged commuter students, all of the participants highlighted the point of being actively involved in at least one or more co-curricular experiences at the subject university. However, previous research provides evidence that this group does not represent the larger commuter student population; indeed previous research suggests that many commuter students find becoming involved at their colleges or universities difficult (Jacoby, 1989a; Silverman et al., 2009).

Just as commuter students struggle to become more connected, so too do campuses resist changing the way they operate to better support this population (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Hess (2006) and Brint (2006) speak about how instigating change within a system of education can be difficult. While not impossible, change can happen at any level under the right circumstances. Burke (2011) supports this assertion that change is possible in his statement that, “Change can emanate from any unit, function or level within an organization” (p. 16).

The idea that change is possible should serve as a guide to colleges and universities. Even though the participants in this study spoke of the many values associated with becoming involved at the university, they also outlined numerous life role challenges and organizational functions within the university that affected their ability to become more involved (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Finding opportunities for commuter students to become actively involved in the life that exists beyond the classroom has to be addressed in a purposeful manner (Astin, 1984). For example, a number of the student participants spoke of their interest in pursuing forms of co-curricular involvement that focused on service to others or community serviced based initiatives.
That knowledge could inspire the subject university to design and promote service-based experiences that can encourage more commuter students to become involved.

Another point for colleges and universities to take into consideration are the many life issues commuter students encounter every day, as noted in the finding termed factors affecting involvement. For example, students in the study stated that distance to campus, financial considerations, religious obligations, and the need to work all play a role in their ability to become more involved at the subject university. By including commuter students in the conversations about programs and initiatives taking place that pertain to religion, the subject university could potentially influence more commuter students to become involved. Campuses that focus on the fact that commuter students have different needs and constraints than resident students will be better positioned to support this population (Silverman et al., 2009). Jacoby (1989a) highlights the idea that institutions need to move to an equity stage that uses variables such as justice and fairness in decision-making (Ackell, 1986).

A starting point toward improving opportunities for inclusive involvement should consider the manner in which the subject university communicates with and recognizes its commuter students. Over forty years ago, research by Hardy and Williamson (1974) pointed out that higher education needs to improve the way it communicates with commuter students. As a practical example, most of the hard copy and digital materials identified in the study only spoke to certain applied needs (i.e. parking lots, meal-plans, accessing the health center) of the commuter students at the subject university. Missing from the dialogue was any in-depth discussion among the subject university’s mission, goals or strategic plan that focused on the commuter student experience. Commuter students want to feel they matter (Rosenburg & McCullough, 1981). Recognizing their existence online and in print would help to remind
commuter students of their value at the institution. Jacoby (1989a) sees such recognition as a critical element related to enhancing the manner in which commuter students connect with their college or university.

Limitations of the Study

Although the results of the study identified related areas of understanding that are critical to traditional aged commuter students who are actively involved in co-curricular experiences at one private university in New Jersey, its limitations (including sample size, and access to existing literature) indicate the need for additional research.

The first limitation rests on the amount of available literature that addresses the commuter student experience in higher education. Silverman et al. (2009) note that studies regarding commuter student experiences have been inadequate over the past four decades. On the other hand, there has been a great deal of research that has examined undergraduate residential students during the same time frame (Chickering, 1969; Astin, 1984; Tinto; Jacoby, 1989a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Even though there is the occasional mention of commuter students within the literature involving college student engagement, student affairs researchers such as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) note that more research needs be conducted involving non-traditional populations such as commuter students.

The size, variety, and depth of the sample of participants who took part in the study are also limitations (Yin, 2009). I selected ten student participants from one university to take part in this qualitative case study. New research involving more participants may help reinforce the findings of this study and potentially identify additional findings that could help inform what we currently know about commuter student engagement. Furthermore, I selected commuter students who self-identified as being actively involved in co-curricular activities at the subject university.
The research noted in this study has highlighted the fact that many commuter students struggle to become active members of their respective institutions (Silverman et al., 2009). The lack of generalizability of this study to other commuter student populations is another limitation of the study.

The Need for Future Research

Although the results of the study merit consideration, future research could expand the depth of findings while also expanding the number and variety of institutions included in the research (Yin, 2009). The field of student affairs has generally invested little energy in attempting to more fully understand who commuter students are and how institutions of higher education can better support them. With that in mind, it would seem plausible that any new qualitative or quantitative research would be a welcome addition to what higher education knows about commuter students.

Despite what higher education has come to understand about commuter student experiences, Jacoby (2000) suggests that much of the related literature has historically been viewed through the perspective of the student as-resident model. The need for additional research involving commuter students is apparent. Research describing the experiences of commuter students has furthermore been limited by the, “Dominant residential tradition of higher education” (Jacoby & Garland, 2004, p. 62). The opportunity for institutions of higher education to learn more about a population of students that continues to grow every year would seem to make sense, especially when many colleges and universities today are focused solely on making sure that classes are filled and students are matriculating in a timely manner.

To that end, this study provides the field of student affairs with an opportunity to explore new lines of research that considers the commuter student experience from a number of new
perspectives. A central focus the study considered the experiences of traditionally aged commuter students who self-identified as being actively involved in co-curricular activities at one private university. Future research could expand that line of study to also consider commuter students who are not actively engaged in co-curricular activities. The literature noted in the study has suggested as much and may help to expand what is currently known regarding the broader population of commuter students attending college today (Jacoby, 1989a; Silverman et al., 2009). Learning more about the sub-populations of students within the broader umbrella who are identified as commuters, may help campuses and their leaders to find ways to alleviate the on-going financial, enrollment, and completion related concerns affecting campuses right now (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

A primary focus of the study considered the experiences of a small group of involved commuter students at one private university. The research also referenced the idea that campus leaders sometimes fail to understand the needs and concerns of a growing population of commuter students who currently inhabit many two- and four-year colleges and universities (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Learning more about the vision of campus leaders who are charged with supporting commuter students may be an important line of study that could help to expand what we know about institutional leaders, the decisions they make, and how those decisions affect the lives of commuter students. Another related line of study could consider the experiences of student affairs professionals who work directly with commuter student populations.

This study employed a case study approach involving ten student participants at one private university, which has potentially expanded in some small way, the amount of existing qualitative research that has considered a commuter student experience. Another avenue of
research could build on what has been learned in this study by expanding the number of participants and campuses. The data collected from this line of research could have the potential to further support the findings noted in this study, while opening up the possibility to new themes.

Summary

It should come as no surprise that all students occupy an essential financial role for most institutions, particularly those campuses that are tuition driven (Kuh et al., 2011). In fact, enrolling and retaining students has become a full-time focus for many student affairs professionals (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). Associated with such work is the desire within many colleges and universities to guide their students to successfully complete their degrees in a timely manner. Yet when students become dissatisfied with their institutional experiences or they encounter life related challenges, they run the risk of slowing down, stopping, or dropping out of college altogether (Tinto, 1987; Jacoby, 1989a). When that occurs, it can put a great deal of pressure on the financial well-being of the college or university. Despite the many efforts by campuses to enroll, retain, and support students through graduation, higher education has only considered a small fraction of what we need to know if we want to fully understand who commuter students are and how best to support them.

With that in mind, based on the sparse but important research conducted, including this study, it would make sense that higher education begin to actively seek out ways of better responding to the needs of the growing number of commuter students who attend many of today’s colleges and universities. Commuter students represent over seventy-five percent of all the students who are now enrolling in many two and four year colleges and universities (Horn et al., 1998; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Silverman et al. 2009). They come from all walks of life and
many who enroll express an interest toward becoming immersed in the co-curricular activities that exist beyond the classroom setting (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). However, commuter students sometimes struggle to become involved with such activities (Jacoby, 1989a). The fact that commuter students continue to find it difficult to become fully immersed in the college experience played a defining role in development and direction of this study (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

The overall benefit of having students who are engaged members of their campus community is without question, and has been an important point of study within the field of student affairs over the past four decades (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). At the same time, the return on involvement for commuter students is important and warrants further consideration among campus leaders, as well as continued research by student affairs scholars/practitioners. Even though the participants in this study represent a small sub-group of the much larger population of commuter students who attend the university, their active involvement makes them unique. Colleges and universities who take into consideration the inherent value associated with helping these sub-groups become active, successful, and satisfied members of their campus communities will be better positioned to attract, retain and then see such students move toward the completion of their degrees.
References


Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Can you discuss your level and type of involvement in co-curricular activities during your time in high school?
2. Can you discuss any factors that influenced your ability to become involved in co-curricular activities at the subject university?
3. Can you talk about any responsibilities that affect whether or not you would became involved at the subject university?
4. Can you discuss any factors that influence to what degree you are able to become involved in co-curricular activities at the subject university?
5. Can you talk about the type and level of co-curricular involvement activities that exist at the subject university?
6. What role does time play in influencing your ability to become involved at the subject university?
7. What motivates you to be involved in co-curricular activities at the subject university?
8. How does being involved at the subject university influence any decisions you make for your life after college?
9. How does being involved at the subject university impact the personal and professional interests you have for life after college?
Appendix B: Northeastern University IRB Application

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: November 23, 2015  IRB #: CPS15-11-11
Principal Investigator(s): James Griffin
                         Vaughn Clay III
Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University
Title of Project: Involving the Quiet Majority: A Case Study to Understand C0-Curricular Engagement from the Perspective of Involved Commuter Students Aged 18-22
Participating Sites: Monmouth University approval in file
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: NOVEMBER 22, 2016

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent at the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix C: Monmouth University IRB Application

MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Office of the IRB and IACUC Library, Lower Level 006
400 Cedar Avenue • West Long Branch, NJ • 07764 Phone: 732-263-5726 • Fax: 732-263-5728
E-mail: irb@monmouth.edu

APPROVAL NOTICE

DATE: November 5, 2015

TO: Vaughn Clay
Primary Investigator

FROM: Dr. Janice C. Stapley
IRB Chair, Institutional Review Board

RE: Monmouth University IRB Code #: **FA1548**
Approved by: Exempt Review, 2
Approval Period: November 5, 2015 – November 4, 2018
Title of Project: *Involving the Quiet Majority: A Case Study to Understand Co-Curricular Engagement from the Perspective of Involved Commuter Students Aged 18 to 22*

Please be notified that the Monmouth University Institutional Review Board (MU IRB) has approved the above referenced research project involving the use of human subjects in research. You may begin collecting data. Please read the attached notice regarding research studies. Best wishes for successful completion of your study.

[Approval Signature of the MU IRB Chair]
APPROVAL NOTICE
MU IRB Code # FA1548

PRINCIPLES TO BE FOLLOWED BY PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR(S):
As the Principal Investigator, you have ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the study, the ethical performance of the project, the protection of the rights and welfare of human participants, and strict adherence to any stipulations imposed by the MU IRB. You must abide by the following principles when conducting your research:
1. Perform the project by qualified personnel according to the approved application/protocol.

2. Adhere to ethical codes and applicable policies and procedures of the University, the sponsoring agency, relevant professional organizations and cooperating institutions (if any).

3. Do not implement changes in the approved study or consent form without prior MU IRB approval by completing an Addendum* (except in a life-threatening emergency, if necessary to safeguard the well-being of human subjects).

4. If written consent is required, obtain the legally effective written informed consent from human subjects or their legally responsible representative using only the currently approved MU IRB consent form. Store informed consents, and data in a secure place for a minimum of three (3) years.

5. Promptly report all undesirable and unintended, although not necessarily unexpected adverse reactions or events, that are the result of therapy or other intervention, within five (5) working days of occurrence. All fatal or life-threatening events or events requiring hospitalization must be reported to the MU IRB in writing within 48 hours after discovery.

6. Submit the Continuing Review Form* one year from date of Approval Notice to the Office of the IRB or upon completion of the study, whichever comes first.
http://www.monmouth.edu/Continuing-Review-Closeout-Form.aspx

7. Retain required records for a minimum of three (3) years.

*Please note, all the necessary forms are located at the Monmouth University IRB webpage: http://www.monmouth.edu/university/IRB.aspx
Appendix D: Recruitment Email

Recruitment Email

Call for Study Participants!

Are you a commuter student who lives at home/permanent address, aged 18 to 22 who is involved in co-curricular activities/experiences at Monmouth University?

I am recruiting participants to take part in a study that I am conducting related to my doctoral research at Northeastern University. The study will seek to learn more about commuter students who are actively involved in co-curricular activities, experiences and/or opportunities at Monmouth University. The study will last 1-2 hours and participants will be compensated for their involvement in the study with a $10 Dunkin Donut gift card. Participation is entirely voluntary. To learn more about being considered for this study, contact Vaughn Clay, Doctor of Education student by calling 732-539-7602 or sending an email to me at clayll.v@neu.edu.
Appendix E: Recruitment Poster

Recruitment Poster

Do you commute from home, are between the ages of 18 to 22 and are involved in co-curricular activities at Monmouth University?

Take Part in a Research Study!

I am completing doctoral research at Northeastern University and am recruiting participants for a study that will seek to learn more commuter student engagement. The study will last 1 to 2 hours and participants will be compensated for their involvement. Participation is entirely voluntary. Contact Vaughn Clay, Doctoral Student to learn more about becoming a participant in this study. Call 732-263-5651 or email me at vclay@monmouth.edu.

Call 732-263-5651 or email me at vclay@monmouth.edu.
Appendix F: Northeastern University Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this study because you are a commuter student, between the ages of 18 to 22, who has indicated that you are involved in co-curricular activities (i.e. clubs/organizations, student leadership opportunities) at Monmouth University.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research to learn more about the lived experiences of commuter students, aged 18 to 22, who are actively involved in co-curricular experiences at the subject university. The data that is collected during the study may provide student affairs scholars and practitioners with more insight into the lives of this group of students. That knowledge may help colleges and universities to identify programs and services that more fully support the needs of this population of students.
Will I benefit by being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the idea that you will be able to share your life experiences may provide a sense of satisfaction and potentially help student affairs scholars and practitioners learn more about the commuter student experience.

Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be strictly confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this study. Each of the participants will be given pseudonym to protect their identity.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

If your participation in this research causes you to feel uncomfortable in any way, or if the research prompts you to consider personal matters about which you are concerned, we will encourage you to take advantage of the confidential counseling services offered at Monmouth University. You can contact a counselor at 732-571-7517.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student.
Appendix G: Monmouth University Informed Consent Form

MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY I.R.B.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR:
INvolving the QUIet MajoritY: A CASE STUDY TO UNDERSTAND CO-Curricular ENGAGEMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INVOLVED COMMuter STUDENTS AGED 18 TO 22

Researcher’s Name, Phone Number, and E-mail address: Vaughn Clay III, 732-539-7602, claylll.v@neu.edu
Supervisor’s Name, Phone Number, and E-mail address: Dr. James Griffin, jam.griffin@neu.edu

I am engaged in a research study to more fully understand the influence of co-curricular engagement upon commuter students aged 18 to 22. The purpose of this research is to identify any themes or patterns of behavior that may exist among commuter students who are aged 18 to 22 and who are involved in co-curricular activities at Monmouth University. To help gain further insights into this topic, I will ask you to a series of semi-structured interview questions that will be digitally recorded by the researcher.

The data you provide and anything you say or do during the session will be held in the strictest confidence. By University regulations, this informed consent statement will be filed separately from your response, so no one will know that the answers/responses you provide are yours. The study involves no foreseeable risks or anticipated harm from participating in the study. However, it is possible that participating in this study may make some people uncomfortable by attempting to respond to the questions that will be asked during the interview process.

You can ask questions about the research study or about being a participant at any time or by calling me at 732-539-7602 or via e-mail at claylll.v@neu.edu. In addition, for any research questions, please contact Deborah Smith of the Monmouth University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by phone at (732) 263-5726 or via e-mail at irb@monmouth.edu. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You may refuse or discontinue participation at any time without consequence or prejudice.

If your participation in this research has caused you to feel uncomfortable in any way, or if the research prompted you to consider personal matters about which you are concerned, we encourage you to take advantage of the confidential counseling services offered at Monmouth University. You can contact a counselor at 732-571-7517.

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to participate in this study.

Consent

I have read the above information and I fully understand the nature of my participation. I understand that my involvement in this study will be confidential, and that if a summary of the results is used for educational or publication purposes, my individual results will not be identified. I also understand that I have the right to terminate my participation at any time during the study. Lastly, I understand the risks of participating in the study, including the self-consciousness I may feel while participating. Lastly, I certify that I am over 18 years of age.

Participant’s Signature

Researcher’s signature after reading the consent statement

Printed Name

Printed Name

Date

Date
### Appendix H: Example Transcript from the Study

**Participant:** Brandon  
**Date:** December 11, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you discuss your level and type of involvement in co-curricular activities during your time in high school?</td>
<td>R: I was pretty involved, I was on the SGA. MSA (Muslim Student Association) Amnesty International. Any sports? Ahh, I played volleyball freshmen year, but I broke my arm so…. What motivated you to become involved in high school? R: it was just fun. What made it fun? R: Meeting new people, doing things that I liked. Can you talk about the impact that being involved or not involved had on you? R: Ahh, it definitely made me a more comfortable person when I talked to other people. I used to be very shy. And now that I’ve met a lot of people, I am more comfortable out of my comfort zone. Ahh, I am a more outgoing person. I would say… Do you think that would be the central thing that you got out of being involved? R: yeah… Can you talk about any support (emotional, financial, etc.) you may or may not have received from? R: Hmm, what do you mean by support? Any support where they were saying great job or…. R: Oh yeah definitely! It was like on SGA they would give out awards and stuff, so when I would get one they would say great job and they would encourage me to better and do more. How did your family respond to you being involved? R: they were supportive of it. Sometimes I would come home late and my mom would sometimes be like you have to get home more earlier cuz it’s effecting your grades and stuff. How may/may not being involved in high school influenced your decision to go to college? R: I definitely wanted a school that had a lot of clubs and MU has a lot of clubs. I am involved with a lot of clubs too. Umm, and I wanted a school like that I felt comfortable speaking my mind. Doing whatever I want. Rather than staying closed and like, you know what I mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can you discuss any factors that influenced your ability to become involved in co-curricular activities at the Monmouth university?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>R:</strong> Umm, I guess being kind of a minority, I mean I am a Muslim. I am a first generation American and I kind...especially in these days with all the bigotry and hate, ignorance. It kind of motivates me to show people like that I know that we’re not like some people who are doing horrible things around the world. So that is definitely a motivation to somewhat change the perception that people have, by meeting people that they usually don’t meet every day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How has personal motivation effected the degree to which you are now involved at MU?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R:</strong> Umm I would say I pretty dedicated to what I want to do. And I’m a more outgoing person in a way, so I definitely like being involved and I motivate myself to get involved and like do things that I usually don’t do. So...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How has commuting impacted getting involved?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R:</strong> ummm my parents definitely want me home earlier. They don’t want me staying out late. Especially cuz like route 18 there’s like deers and stuff and my parents don’t feel comfortable with me walking in very late. So that’s definitely a factor.</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Did that happen in HS or was there a difference?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>R:</strong> Oh well the HS was like 5 minutes away, so I could even walk. So wasn’t really. But Monmouth is like far., so...</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sure..</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does distance from home to campus influence to what degree you are involved?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>R:</strong> umm there’s some clubs that have like things on the weekends and stuff and I’m busy with family or like other mandatory things I have to do. So I can’t make things on-campus cuz they are either too far or the commute is too long. Or I have just other things to do. Back in my commute.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Could you talk about the degree to which friends/family/mentors have impacted your decision to become involved in C-CA at MU?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>R:</strong> ahhh definitely my sisters cuz they go to Rutger’s and they are very involved. So I would say I don’t want to be that slacker in the family (smiling) that doesn’t do anything. I kind of want to exceed what my sisters did. So...</td>
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Can you talk about any responsibilities that affect whether or not you would became involved at MU?
R: ahhh well my dad has a business and he wants me to be working there at least..I mean ideally he wants about 15 hours a week, I usually give him about 7 (laughs). So his business, I definitely have to consider it when making my schedule. I have to see how many hours of the day. Or what day of the week I could leave. Like for example I have Thursdays off. That’s when I dedicate my time to the office. So that’s definitely a factor.

So that probably answers my next question, 7 to 15 hours per week on average or more?
R: It’s sometimes different. Sometimes I have to do my work, sometimes I have an exam. Or like other work. So it really varies, so like I only have one class on Monday. So if I have a lot of work, I might not go for that long. I’ll go for 2 to 3 hours. But somedays I’ll get my work over like done over the weekend.

What do you think the average number of hours you work is?
R: 7 to 10 per week.

Can you talk about any financial responsibilities that play a role in your ability to get involved at MU?
R: Thankfully no.

No? OK.

Do you have any family obligations that would influence your becoming involved?
R: well back in middle...early HS I, well my parents wouldn’t let me get a dog. So we got 2 cats instead. And they are my responsibility. In a way, it’s actually a lot of work to clean up after them. They have their own room. Like we have to close them at night, into their rooms and they make a mess. And they’re somewhat of it takes time out of the day to take care of them.

Are there any responsibilities not already highlighted that have impacted your ability to become involved?
R: Ahhh religious obligations. As a Muslim we are required to pray 5 times a day. So taking that time out of stuff that I am doing throughout the day and making a schedule. Making my schedule for prayer.

Do you think you have a strict adherence to your religion?
R: Moderately…I a way, I try to be as much as I can, but it’s tough.
Can you discuss any factors that influence to what degree you are able to become involved in co-curricular activities at the MU?

R: Sorry can you repeat that?

Sure, before we talked about responsibilities you had to do. Are there factors that you don’t have any control over that would influence the degree to which you are involved?

R: my health. I mean I don’t have any health problems and thankfully I haven’t gotten sick, yet. But if I got sick, I can’t really control that.

Can you talk about the type and level of co-curricular involvement activities that exist at the MU?

R: There literally are everything, sports, religious, ahh business. Monmouth pretty much has everything covered.

How would you characterize involvement related opportunities that are available for commuter students at MU?

R: What do you mean exactly?

Ahh…well what kind of activities do you think are available for commuters students?

R; Commuters can pretty much do everything that residents…it just depends on the commuter student. How motivated or willing they are to commit to something that’s outside of class.

How would you describe the manner in which MU makes it possible to commuter students to become involved in CCA?

R: One thing that I noticed was being part of SGA every Wednesday, 2:45 til around 3:45 or whenever the meeting ends. Other clubs that I am part of also hold their meetings. So it’s kind of hard to be involved. I don’t think that’s a commuter problem. I think that’s kind of an SGA problem. Not that there’s a problem with SGA. It’s kind of hard to be involved with other clubs while also being committed to the SGA. Cuz times conflict.

Can you talk about what motivated you to become involved at MU?

R: Ahhh, I just find it to be fun. I just find pleasure out of it. It just fulfills like…I just like being involved.

How would you characterize the degree to which you are involved at MU?

R: Let’s see. Definitely more than some students. Especially as a commuter. I think I’m definitely involved. But not as much as I want, cuz I’m still kind of adjusting to how to handle work, with school work, with work and then with other commitments.

You sounded like you might be comparing like other commuter students in a way. How would you characterize other commuter students?

R: Well there are other commuter students who just come and just leave. Then there some like me and some other friends who stay, hang out here, study, go out to eat and take part in extra-curricular life.
What role does time play in influencing your ability to become involved at MU?
R: It’s pretty much everything. Cuz it’s so limited. You can’t, it depends on how you manage it.

In what way to do you manage time?
R: umm, I would definitely like a day before, usually plan out how much time I’m going to spend on something and like I usually give myself a timeframe on each activity and sometimes I will exceed it. Sometimes if I have extra time, soo..

Would you say that you’re very formal in the way that you manage your time or is it informal?
R: probably formal.

So how do you specifically do that?
R: Like I usually have a scheduled. Like I would show you. But it’s in my bag. Like I have a whole excel sheet and I labeled every hour, like every class and what I am going to do and like I have everything planned out. And sometimes I have blank spaces where I fill in stuff. So usually I’m pretty good at time, managing it.

How would you define the amount of time you have in relation to becoming involved or not involved?
R: ummm, what do you mean by that?

How much time you do you typically devote or how much time do you have to get involved?
R: Ohhhhh, I usually have an hour or 2…

Like per day, per week?
R: Umm, it really depends on the day. Cuz every day is different from my schedule. Like Friday’s I’m literally packed. I have 4 classes and some other things. And on Mondays, I’m usually completely free or I have work, or I don’t do anything at all. So it really just depends on the day.

How does being a commuter student and time impact your ability to become involved?
R: Ummm…can you repeat the question?

Sure. How does being a commuter student and time impact your ability to become involved?
R: ummm, I wanna I mean definitely travel time and the traffic contributes to it. But it really doesn’t take that much time out of the day. But ….

You mentioned in HS, you were like right down the street. You could walk to HS and now your drive 20 to 25 minutes. What kind of adjustment has been for you?
R: Well my parents actually…my parents would never let me take out the car or go anywhere. So I definitely got more freedom from that. I don’t know.

Can you talk about any instances where time and commuting
### What motivated you to be involved in co-curricular activities at MU?

R: Umm just my passion to meet new people. Have fun, I don’t see what other things, like it’s an opportunity that’s completely open. It’s kind of stupid for me not to get involved.

### How has commuting impacted the degree to which you are motivated to get involved at MU?

R: Well I live at home, so sometimes getting out of bed and leaving my room is kind of tough. So I would say, like the comfort of my home and going all the way like 25 miles down here is kind of tough sometimes. I would definitely say that.

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Influenced your decision not to pursue a CCA at MU?  
R: Well sometimes I oversleep and I’m usually late to stuff. I try to limit myself. Cuz I don’t want to undermine my class, cuz my classes are the most important thing. So that it will definitely have an impact. So being late or sleeping in, like the plans not going like I thought they would.
How does being involved at MU influence any decisions you make for your life after college?
R: Umm, can you repeat that? Sorry.

Sure. How does being involved at MU influence any decisions you make for your life after college?
R: Ohhhh, being involved, like is like building my resume and being involved and like just having a position in like in the Monmouth community is really important. Like when I first started, college oh I need to get really involved to build the resume. Not only to build the resume but to fulfill my personal motivation. But like definitely building a resume in having something on my resume motivated me to.

Can you talk about any instance where you pursued a form of CC involvement at MU because it would enhance a personal or professional decision for your life after MU?
R: Ohh the SGA.

How so?
R: well I always wanted to study political science and I want to go to law school. My parents kind of pushed me away from liberal arts degrees. Cuz they saw like they read stuff online it makes them against it. So SGA definitely, because it looks good for law school…not just for law school, but it looks good to have a leadership position on the SG.

Can you talk about being a commuter student in relation to the decisions that will impact your life once you leave MU?
R: umm, I mean it gives us a taste of commuting to work and so I at least will have that kind of like experience that the resident students won’t have. That definitely contributes, like we have the experience of commuting, managing our time and going to school.

Are there any form of CCI that you purposefully pursue, you know for ahh for professional or personal interests?
R: SGA

How does being involved at MU impact the personal and professional interests you have for life after college?
R: Well I’m definitely into politics and human rights and stuff like that. So I put myself, I got involved in SGA because it’s kind of related to politics. But not really, but somewhat. It gives you a taste of how government works and I am involved in students advocating for a global education and clubs like that that promote human rights. And things…

Social justice?
R: Social justice and activism. That definitely interests me.
Appendix I: Institutional Documents

A destination point for all students, the center has a top-tier fitness center, a four lane bowling center, and a 200-meter, six-lane competitive track. All facilities are open for students, faculty, and staff seeking to challenge their everyday wellness.

The building also houses the University’s Hall of Fame and the University Store, as well as providing meeting and lounge space for students, classes, and small group work spaces.

The arena boasts 4,100 first-class seats for basketball games, concerts, or shows. The center-hung video scoreboard can be lowered to screen movies. The Blue/White Club, which overlooks both the basketball arena and the Monmouth stadium, is a great sightline for alumni, friends, and students.

OFF-CAMPUS AND COMMUTER SERVICES (OCCS)

OCCS is the first place students should go to when they want to begin searching for off-campus housing or if they are trying to find services or programs that will enhance their campus experiences as commuter students. OCCS has a number of resources that will help students understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants who live in the local communities. Furthermore, commuter students can access information that will help them get more involved, understand campus policies, locate extracurricular activities, and navigate the campus more effectively. OCCS is located on the second floor of the Rebecca Stafford Student Center in room 202E and is part of the Division of Student Life. For more information, call 732-263-5651, send e-mail to OCCS@monmouth.edu, or visit the Web site at: www.monmouth.edu/commuter.

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

The Office of the Registrar supports the students, faculty, staff and alumni of Monmouth University in all matters pertaining to academic records, including registration, grading/transcripts, and degree completion. We promote the use of user-friendly technology to aid students and faculty in course scheduling, curriculum tracking, and academic planning. Our office utilizes a web-based document management system, and much of the business conducted in our office is via electronic forms (e-FORMS) which provides an easy and convenient way to streamline the review and processing of student/advisor requests.

Our office ensures the adherence to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Information on FERPA can be found in the University Policy section of this handbook, as well as in our online Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs.

The Registrar’s office is located in Room 208, of Wilson Hall, and we are open Monday-Friday from 8:45 a.m. – 5 p.m. Please allow us to assist you by visiting us, or calling 732-571-3477. You may also correspond by e-mail (using your Monmouth e-mail account, please) at registrar@monmouth.edu.

PUBLICITY

Students and student organizations can receive news and photographic coverage of their events and advice on pre-event publicity. First, student organizations should clear an event with the director of Student Activities. Any contact with newspapers, television, or radio stations by student groups must be made through the appropriate office on campus.

Arrangements should be made for news releases at least three weeks before the date of the event.
Appendix J: Digital Materials

Campus Resources for Commuter Students

Our commuter students are an important and vital part of the Monmouth University community. There are approximately 4,000 students who commute to Monmouth every semester, and OCCS understands that not all commuter students are the same.

OCCS also understands that you lead a hectic life, balancing classes, working, traveling to and from campus, dealing with family obligations, trying to fit in a social life, and whatever else may come up.

While OCCS realizes that commuter students tend to be independent and self-sufficient, there may come a time when you need some assistance. You may have some questions regarding:

- getting involved in student activities (university/student-activities.aspx)
- meal plans (http://www.monmouth.edu/university/dining-information.aspx)
- on-campus jobs (university/student-employment-office.aspx)
- academic assistance (university/academic-success-services.aspx)
- the Health Center (Campus_life/health_services/default.aspx)
- parking on campus (https://parkinganddriving.muhld.edu)
- campus safety (resources/mudp/default.aspx)
- personal counseling (university/counseling/counseling-services.aspx)
- commuter student e-mail accounts (http://www.monmouth.edu/Campus_Technology.aspx)
- computer labs (resources/campus_technology/labs.aspx)
- inclement weather and class delays/cancellations (resources/MUPD/weather_emerg.aspx)
- frequently asked questions (Campus_life/OCCS/commuteFAQ.aspx)
- New Jersey Commuter Resources (http://www.njcommuter.com)

While the above list should address many of the issues that commuter students have, you are encouraged to contact OCCS directly by calling 732-965-5651 or sending e-mail to occs@monmouth.edu (mailto:occs@monmouth.edu) with any questions that you may have.

The Office of Off-Campus and Commuter Services is located on the 2nd floor of the Rebecca Stafford Student Center in room 202E and is open Monday through Friday, 8:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Campus Resources for Commuter Students

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- on-campus jobs (http://www.monmouth.edu/university/student-employment-office.aspx)
- academic assistance (http://www.monmouth.edu/university/academic-success-services.aspx)
- the Health Center (http://www.monmouth.edu/campus_life/health_services/default.aspx)
- parking on campus (https://mupd/parkinganddriving/)
- campus safety (https://mupd/ default.aspx)
- personal counseling (http://www.monmouth.edu/university/counseling/counseling-services.aspx)
- commuter student e-mail accounts (http://www.monmouth.edu/campus_technology.aspx)
- computer labs (http://resources/campus_labs.aspx)
- inclement weather and class delays/cancellations (http://resources/MUPD/weather_emerg.aspx)
- frequently asked questions (http://www.monmouth.edu/campus_life/FAQ)
- New Jersey Commuter Resources (http://www.njcommuter.com/)

While the above list should address many of the issues that commuter students have, you are encouraged to contact OCCS directly by calling 732-263-5561 or sending e-mail to ocss@monmouth.edu (mailto:ocss@monmouth.edu) with any questions that you may have.

The Office of Off-Campus and Commuter Services is located on the 2nd floor of the Rebecca Stafford Student Center in room 202E and is open Monday through Friday, 8:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Commuter Student Mentors

The Office of Off-Campus and Commuter Services (OCCS) Commuter Mentor Program will connect incoming (fall term) first-year commuter students with their Monmouth University counterparts who are upperclassmen. These seasoned guides will help the incoming first-year commuter students by assisting them in making the transition to life at college, while also helping them navigate the many different programs and resources that can be found at Monmouth University. The Commuter Student Mentors will employ a variety of approaches (digital, social media, one on one, group activities) to help the new commuter students make a connection to life at Monmouth University.

To learn more about the CSM position, feel free to access the following links noted below. PLEASE NOTE: The application process for CSM candidates for the 2015/2016 academic year has closed.

- Commuter Student Mentor Responsibilities/Benefits ([/uploadedFiles/Content/University/student-life/student-services/off-campus-and-commuter-services/campus-resources/Commuter Mentor Job Description-1.pdf])
- Commuter Student Mentor Recommendation Form ([/uploadedFiles/Content/University/student-life/student-services/off-campus-and-commuter-services/campus-resources/Commuter Mentor recommendation form-1.pdf])
- Apply to become a Commuter Student Mentor ([https://www.surveymonkey.com/r7CDKVDX](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r7CDKVDX])

**Why you should participate as a first-year commuter student**

- Connect with a Commuter Mentor.
- Meet new people.
- Become involved on campus.
- Receive helpful information and get questions answered about being a student at Monmouth University.

All new first-year commuter students who participate in New Student Orientation during summer 2015 will be assigned a Commuter Student Mentor. Incoming first-year commuter students will get to meet the mentors during the respective New Student Orientation session that they attend. The Commuter Student Mentors will then follow-up with their mentees in August via e-mail. While mentee participation is not mandatory, it is strongly encouraged.
Carpooling to Monmouth

Trying to guess what the cost of gasoline is going to be from one week to the next is kind of like picking winning lottery numbers.

Yet we have to drive to campus, go to work, or both every week. As more of your hard earned money goes into your gas tank, now may be the perfect time to think about sharing a ride to and from campus every week. Sharing a ride with someone is also a great way to help make our planet just a little more green (http://350.org/).

In recent years, OCCS has surveyed commuter students to determine, among other things, how far they travel to and from campus. Did you know that 21% indicated they live 11 to 20 miles from campus and 35% noted that they live more than 21 miles from campus? That is a lot of driving every week.

While it may not be possible to carpool everyday, even doing so once a week could save you some real money over the course of the month. How much could you be saving every week if you carpooled, one-two-three, or more days a week?

Take a moment and calculate (http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/rideshare/costcalc.shtml) how much it costs to drive your car to and from campus every week. You may be surprised to learn how much you spend on gas every month.

To learn more about carpooling and commuting in New Jersey, check out NJ Commuter.com (http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/).

Additional carpooling resources
- Meadowlink Carpool Brochure (http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/rideshare/costcalc.shtml)
- Meadowlink Emergency Ride Home Program (http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/rideshare/costcalc.shtml)

Carpool Etiquette

Cost sharing $$$

Decide how you will split the costs before you start carpooling. The big one is usually fuel, which you can determine based on the mileage of the vehicle and actual trip distance shared. Toll costs are also good to split. If you do not drive at all, consider maintenance, parking costs and increase in insurance premium that the driver may have to bear as well. Licensing and depreciation are other costs usually not significant enough—but get these clarified before you start carpooling.
NJ Transit Student Discount Program

Attention Monmouth University Students

Take advantage of the NJ Transit Student Discount monthly discount pass and save 25%.

Do you need to take a bus, rail, or light rail to campus on a regular basis? NJ Transit has continued the popular student discount pass program. If you are currently enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student, then you are eligible to sign up.

Get started!

Go to the Monmouth University WebAdvisor (https://webadvisor.monmouth.edu/WebAdvisor/TOKENIDX=1548355312) page and log in. Located in the "other" section is a link to the NJ Transit Discount program. Fill out the secured online enrollment information (student pin, user ID, etc.) and you will then be taken to NJ Transit’s "Quik-Tik" page.

Please Note: NJ Transit has informed participating colleges and universities that students will be required to pay a non-refundable $3 processing fee each month, in addition to the fare for the pass.

Do you have a question about the Quick-Tik program? Call 865-QUIK-TIX.
Commuter Students: Frequently Asked Questions

- Am I permitted to have parking decals for more than one vehicle? (/campus_life/occs/commuterFAQ.asp#q1)
- If I lock my keys in my car or need to have my car battery jumped, will the University help me? (/campus_life/occs/commuterFAQ.asp#q2)
- If I have an evening class and would like an escort back to my vehicle, will the University help me? (/campus_life/occs/commuterFAQ.asp#q3)
- Who should I speak to if I have a question related to my classes or my academic major? (/campus_life/occs/commuterFAQ.asp#q4)
- How can I find out what clubs and activities exist on campus? (/campus_life/occs/commuterFAQ.asp#q5)
- Can I get a meal plan as a commuter student? (/campus_life/occs/commuterFAQ.asp#q6)
- Is there someplace on campus I can go to if I am feeling sick? (/campus_life/occs/commuterFAQ.asp#q7)

- Am I permitted to have parking decals for more than one vehicle? However, only one vehicle is permitted on campus at any given time.
- If I lock my keys in my car or need to have my battery jumped, will the University help me? Yes. The Monmouth University Police Department will permit a student to apply for up to two decals for vehicles that they drive.
- If I have an evening class and would like an escort back to my vehicle, will the University help me? Yes. The MU Police Department is happy to provide students with an escort to their vehicle. Just contact the police department by calling 732-571-4444.
- Who should I speak to if I have a question related to my classes or my academic major? If you are currently taking a course and you have a question, you should start with the professor. He or she should be able to provide
you with the answers that you need. If you have a question related
your major, you should make an appointment to speak to your
visor. If you don't have an advisor, you should contact the CSS,
located on the first floor of the Student Center, for more information.
They can be reached by calling 732-571-3487.

○ How can I find out what clubs and activities exist on campus?
A listing of clubs and activities (/campus_life/activities/clubs.asp) is
kept current on the Monmouth Web site. You can also look in the
Student Handbook (/student_handbook/default.asp). If you still have
questions about getting involved, take a moment to talk to the Office
of Student Activities, located on the second floor of the Student
Center. They can be reached by calling 732-571-3596.
Another way to find out what's happening on campus is by picking
up a copy of The Outlook, the student-run newspaper, which is
printed once a week during the academic semesters. Students can
also check the bulletin boards located in the Student Center
for further club and event information.

○ Can I get a meal plan as a commuter student?
Yes. Gourmet Dining (/http://www.monmouthdining.com/) offers a
variety of meal plans options (/http://www.monmouth.edu/university
/dining-information.aspx) for commuter students. Commuter
students may purchase a meal-plan by logging into Monmouth
University's WebAdvisor (/https://webadvisor.monmouth.edu
/WebAdvisor/2013/WebAdvisor?TYPE=M&PID=CORE-WEBOE&
TOKENID=5336334976) and accessing the meal-plan form found
in the Residential Life section.

○ Is there someplace on campus I can go to if I am feeling sick?
Yes. Monmouth students can and should use the Health Center
(/campus_life/health_services/default.asp) whenever they are feeling
ill. The Health Center is located next to the Library, located on the
north side of campus. For more information call 732-571-3464.