PERSISTING PAST PROBATION: AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS ON ACADEMIC PROBATION. AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The first year, first-semester community college students on academic probation and the factors affecting their academic success have been on the rise. As such, many students who are not making satisfactory academic progress (SAP) are at risk of losing their financial aid and, quite possibly, dropping out of school. The purpose of this study was to investigate how community college students who experience academic probation in their first year make sense/meaning of that experience and transition to become successful. Eight current community college students participated in this study. The researchers utilized an interpretative phenomenological approach to explore their experiences. The participants initially did not have the desire to enter college immediately after graduating high school. They perceived that they were “forced” to do so by family and society. The participants also acknowledged that mental health issues and support for these issues was a significant factor in their placement on academic probation. Additionally, the participants perceived that their institution’s systems did not keep them as informed as they could have been thus exacerbating their placement on academic probation. The findings are relevant for secondary and postsecondary staff and administrators who provide services and help to transition students from high school to college. Additional research is needed to explore the perspectives of students who have successfully overcome academic probation based on their unique and individual characteristics, situations and institutions.

Keywords: Community college students, freshmen or first year students, academic probation, mental health, behavior, persistence, student success, college transition, satisfactory academic progress (SAP), financial aid
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Chapter One: The Research Problem

According to a statistical analysis report conducted in the 2003 – 2004 academic year by The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and published in June 2006, findings suggested “that community colleges are successful in retaining students for 1 year who demonstrate a relatively strong commitment to completing a program of study. Indeed, 83 percent of students classified as more committed maintained strong enrollment continuity over the 1-year period of study,” (p. x). These statistics indicate that community colleges are successfully retaining a large portion of its students after their first year and that these students exhibit a commitment to complete their degree programs.

However, because the mission of a community college is “open access” to students of all backgrounds and varying levels of college readiness, the number of first year students on academic probation in community colleges is on the rise. The combination of cognitive abilities, which are the rate and function of a student’s comprehension, and non-cognitive abilities can negatively affect a student’s behavior and motivation toward their academic responsibilities. Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) identified these abilities, which can be influenced by several environmental systems. Tovar and Simon (2006) noted that “35% of first-time freshmen—with a disproportionate number of Latinos—are on probation after their first semester at a large, urban, public community college” (p. 560) making students more prone to drop out after their first year.

If statistical data suggests that community colleges are successful in retaining students who show a strong commitment to completing an associate’s degree program, and if over a third of first year students attending community colleges are on probation in their first year, making them more likely to drop out, then more must be known about the cause for their attrition and commitment to complete. According to their study, Tovar and Simon (2006) assessed “how
students of different ethnicities differed along reported levels of academic motivation, general coping, and receptivity to support services” (p. 548). However, much of the literature does not identify if these students were able to recover from being placed on academic probation and what this experience meant to them.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this research would be to determine why students attending an urban community college subsequently end up on academic probation within their first year. The study will investigate what being placed on academic probation meant to first year students and how it impacted the decisions these students made to their academic, personal, and professional lives. Further, it will also measure the extent of the students’ knowledge with regard to academic, personal and professional resources available to them. This will assist in understanding the values (perceptions, aspirations, individual characteristics) of first year community college students on academic probation in order to provide insights that might better inform community college practices designed to engage and retain these students.

**Significance of the Problem**

The reason this problem is significant on a local level is that the rate of first-year students on probation within a local, two-year urban community college located in one of the poorest boroughs in New York City, has increased significantly since 1976. According to Donnangelo (1979) in the “Fall 1977, 3,706 of 8,845 students failed to meet retention standards” (p. 549). And that number has continued to increase over the years. Developmental coursework and English as a Second Language contribute significantly to the attrition rate as many of these students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and lack academic preparation and financial resources (Tovar & Simon, 2006).
Donnangelo’s (1978) study demonstrates that there is a significant difference between those students who were non-probationary and failed to meet college retention standards at the end of the Fall 1977 semester and the Spring 1978 semester, as well as a distinct and significant difference between the percentage of students who were unable to meet retention standards at the end of the Fall and the Spring of the following academic year. The results of Donnangelo’s study also indicated that counseling programs are successful in reducing the suspension rate of probationary students (Donnangelo, 1978; Donnangelo, 1976). The restoration or implementation of such counseling programs could prove beneficial in the retention of first-year community college students on probation and increase the completion/graduation rates of these students within these institutions.

The reason this is significant on a general level is that, if successful, implementation of such programs within the programming and curriculum of all other urban community colleges can assist in overall retention of students on academic probation, the reduction of first-year students being placed on probation, and the timely completion of these students’ programs of study. Further, the challenge has been set by the President of the United States to increase the number of degrees earned by college students in the United States to 3 million by 2015 (www.whitehouse.gov). This goal creates a national significance for this research problem, as community colleges would lead the way in graduation rates. The importance of becoming a competitive global economy and creating future jobs for community college graduates depends on getting students past that first obstacle, academic probation. There are also financial consequences that community college students face if they end up on academic probation and that is suspension of federal and state financial aid. Students on academic probation who receive financial aid must maintain good academic standing in order to continue receiving aid. Most
students on academic probation are likely stop attending college if their aid is taken from them, as many cannot afford to make the tuition payments.

**Audience to Benefit**

This research focus would benefit a vast array of people, programs, and organizations. To begin, community college administrators would benefit from this research as they would be able to make informed decisions regarding first-year students on academic probation through understanding how these students perceive being placed on probation, what they know about courses of action to take once on probation, and what they understand about success, and what they consider to be barriers to success. This would also be beneficial in creating programming and required advisement for these students. Finally, the students on academic probation would benefit from this research, as it would not only inform best practices within their community colleges, but would create awareness of the needs, values, and decision-making that students on academic probation which in turn could be used as a warning or early alert system for probation prevention and student retention.

**Research Central Question/Hypothesis and Sub-questions**

**Primary Research Question:**

How do community college students who experience academic probation in their first year make sense/meaning of that experience and transition to become successful?

**Sub-questions:**

1. What are the transformations that these students must make in order to become successful?
2. How do these students make sense of the need to change in order to overcome academic probation?
Possible questions that may be answered during the interview process are:

- How did these students come to attend a community college?
- How do they define “being in good standing”?
- How do they define “academic probation”?
- What has been these students’ academic experience from the beginning until today?
- How did they come to find themselves on academic probation?
- How do these students feel about being on academic probation?

Each of these questions allows for the participant to expand on their background, family and educational experiences as Rubin and Rubin (2012) note, these questions allow me as the researcher to “tour” the participants life (p. 116). Seidman (2007) also emphasizes the importance of focusing on the participant’s life history in the first of the Three-Interview Series (p. 17). These questions begin to answer my research question one component at a time, building up what this experience subsequently means to the participant. The significance of viewing this through my theoretical framework is that the participants will discuss how they came to learn to think for themselves.

**Proposal Organization**

This proposal opened with an in-depth description of the research problem. The description of the problem was accompanied by the significance of this issue on a local, general, and national level. Areas of the research and its deficiencies are described, and the rationale regarding the need for further research for this study is provided. The audience that is likely to benefit from this study is also identified. Listed in this introduction is the primary research question designed to guide the proposed research. Also listed are sub-questions, follow-up questions, and several probing questions, which are subject to change during the interview.
process. Beyond this introduction, the study will discuss the theoretical framework I intend to utilize as a lens for the research, Mezirow’s (1991) Transformative Learning Theory and a detailed explanation on how it would be applied to the proposed study. This will be followed by a well-developed literature review of the topic including literature that defines the subject of this study, what research has been done and any gaps in the research. The research design and methodology selected for this paper will follow with a brief overview of my positionality statement. The proposed study will conclude with my analysis of the research and data. A listing of the references used as well as any journal notes and transcriptions will also be included at the end of this study.

**Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory**

Transformational learning is, in essence, focused on expounding meaning from experience, which then acts “as a guide to action” (Clark & Wilson, 1991). According to Mezirow (1991), “meaning” exists within each one of us and how we interpret that meaning determines our action. The main processes involved in adult learning are meaning making, critical reflection and rational discourse. This proposal will attempt to study first year community college students on academic probation through an in-depth view from the students’ perspective. Engaging and retaining first-year community college students on academic probation through an exploration and understanding of their values, aspirations and individual characteristics.

In what ways can we engage and retain first-year community college students on academic probation? How do first-year community college students on academic probation perceive the purpose and relevance of successfully completing their educations? How do these students recognize and value their role and responsibilities with regard to their degree
completion? How do these students perceive their role within their institution? The results of this study can further identify how educators can help foster the critical reflectivity, thinking and discourse necessary for these students to successfully return to satisfactory academic standing and completion of their individual degree program(s).

Throughout the literature on community college students, various theoretical frameworks with regard to student success and persistence are effectively utilized. The studies within this discipline highlight the theories and the work of such seminal scholars as Tinto, Astin, Bailey, Cabrera, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Nora with regard to student success, persistence, and first generation students. Throughout the various studies thought leaders in the areas of developmental, psychological, sociological, race, and motivational studies such as Ames, Bandura, Brooks-Terry, Bronfenbrenner, Hurtado, and Sedlacek are also spotlighted. Finally, several scholars in the areas of financial aid, remedial work and academic probation were also featured. These researchers include Adelman, Bragg, Olivas, Trombley, Simon, and Tovar, and Wirth. In an attempt to apply an innovative lens to this study, other literature was reviewed for distinctive and diverse frameworks. Of the many theories that were reviewed, Jack Mezirow’s (1991) Transformational Learning Theory was identified as the most appropriate and relevant lens to employ for this study because of the theory’s meaning making, critical reflection and transformative learning components.

Anfara and Mertz (2006) loosely define the understanding and use of a theory as the need to adapt a different view or way of thinking in order to realize or be cognizant of “the theorist’s meaning” (p. xiv). Thus, the theoretical framework a scholar-practitioner selects for a particular study structures every aspect of that research study. This proposed study on first year community college students on academic probation would apply Mezirow’s (1991) Transformational
Learning Theory to understand the meaning making of these students with regard to their education.

The Origins of Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory

Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory has its roots in constructivism, social, developmental, and cognitive psychology, sociology, Habermas’ (1984) theory of communicative action and some of the tenets of critical theory. A critical theorist believes that certain groups, people and places in society are more privileged than others and thus have more power in society and truth is linked to power. This is central to critical theorists along with the logical influence leading to the emancipation from oppression and unjust and adverse conditions that are associated with race, class, gender and sexuality. This particular paradigm is one of extreme measure and seemed born from the culture shock of the scholars of the Frankfurt School. However, Mezirow (1991) postulates that transformative theory should not be viewed from the perspective of the Frankfort School but from Habermas’ distinction between instrumental and communicative learning as well as his description of the optimal circumstances for rational discourse. With regard to the critical-ideological or critical theory, this is closely linked to the human and social sciences and often “forms the conceptual base for qualitative multicultural research” (Ponterotto, p. 130).

Meaning Making and Transformation Theory

Throughout the literature on Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, there an emphasis on making meaning and interpretation. Learning can occur through our particular cultural and social norms, our way of understanding, our language and our personal experience which set the limitations to our future learning. Mezirow utilizes Bowers (1984) five propositions with regard to the cultural context of learning and its relationship to socialization.
Bowers essentially postulates that an individual’s reality is subsequently defined by others (parents, mentors, etc…) which involves the internalization of “definitions, assumptions, and arbitrary typifications taken for granted and communicated by significant others” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 2). However, when the former ways of early learning no longer suffice, individuals discover a need to acquire new perspective to better understand change. Thus transformative adult learning arises from the formative learning of childhood.

Transformation theory, according to Mezirow (1991) is the recognition of the central roles that the individual’s acquired frame of reference, through which meaning is construed and all learning takes place, and by the learning processes that are transformed by these habits of expectation or meaning perspectives. These meaning perspectives develop codes that dictate perception, comprehension and memory. Meaning, as defined by Mezirow, is “an interpretation, and to make meaning is to construe or interpret experience” (p. 4), or an overall understandability. Making meaning is making an interpretation and this is central to the basis of what learning is within Transformative Learning Theory. From the literature, Mezirow defines learning as a process by which use of prior interpretation can be construed into a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an individual’s experience to guide future action (p. 12).

**Habermas’ Theory of Communicative Competence**

Jurgen Habermas’ (1984) theory of communicative competence is argued to be Mezirow’s theoretical base for his Transformative Learning Theory by some researchers (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Dirkx, 1998; Merriam, 2004) is also a major influence on Transformation Theory. These influences established the foundation and the essential building blocks for Mezirow’s (1991) Transformational Learning Theory.
According to Mezirow (1991) Habermas’ theory provides the sociolinguistic context of transformative learning through the emphasis of two major realms of intentional learning. These two domains are the instrumental and the communicative. Important to note is that these two components utilized by Mezirow’s theory differ is significant ways as each requires different modes of “personal learning, with different learning needs and different implications for facilitators of adult learning” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 73). While the distinct features of instrumental learning involve learning to control and manipulate the environment and communicative learning involves the dynamics of learning to understand and be understood by others, differences in the nature of these two domains require different methods of “systematic objective inquiry for each of these types of learning” (p. 73). Each of these domains has its own purpose, problem-solving method, logic and specific way of validity. However, it is significant to state that adult learning requires and involves both of these distinct realms of learning.

**Characteristics of Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory**

The outcomes of this learning theory go beyond just acquiring content knowledge or memorization, it is a distinct process for adults to learn to think for themselves, through true emancipation from sometimes mindless or unquestioning acceptance of what we have to come to know through our life experience, especially those things that our culture, religions, and personalities may predispose us towards. These predispositions are, at most times, without our active or conscious engagement and questioning of “how we know what we know” (Cranton, 1998, p.). Mezirow (2000) states that “learning can occur in one of four ways: by elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming points of view, transforming habits of the mind” (p.17). Frames of references, also known as meaning perspectives, result from how experiences are interpreted and often are representative of cultural
paradigms. According to Mezirow (1991) these meaning perspectives are structured assumptions and expectations which include cultural assumptions often received as repetitive affective experiences outside of conscious awareness that are refined through one’s sense impressions. Habits of the mind are sets of broad based assumptions that act as a filter for one’s experiences; these include: moral consciousness, social norms, learning styles, philosophies including religion, world view, etc., our artistic tastes and personality type and preferences. Sometimes this may be expressed as a “point of view” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18). Transformation in this sense is a process whereby individuals move over time to reformulate structures for making meaning, usually through reconstructing dominant narratives or stories. This makes for a more dependable way to make meaning within experiences, as one is questioning one’s points of view, looking and reflecting on alternate points of view and often creating a new, more reliable and meaningful way of knowing that may be different from old habits of the mind. This would allow individuals to become open to the points of view of others, and to be able to reflect on new points of view and information and often go back and reconstruct what we know. According to Mezirow (2000), these transformations often follow some variation of the following phases of meaning becoming realized:

- A disorienting dilemma or event – loss of job, divorce, marriage, going back to school, or moving to a new culture.
- Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame.
- A critical assessment of assumptions.
- Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared.
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions.
- Planning a course of action.
• Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
• Provisional trying of new roles.
• Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
• A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

According to Cranton (1998), one of the critical aspects to helping effect transformative learning in adults, is the understanding of the importance of supportive relationships in the adult students’ lives. For students who may be experiencing transformative learning, having a safe and supportive system of family, advisors, professors and other significant people may greatly facilitate the student's willingness to move forward with transformative learning.

**Critics of Mezirow’s Theory**

Mezirow’s theory on transformative learning, while ground-breaking in the field of adult development and education, is not without its share of criticism. Many scholars have raised points of contention with Mezirow’s theory, especially in regard to context, rationalization, cognitive maturity with regard to critical reflection, and social and cultural frames of reference (Taylor, 1997; Dirkx, 1998; Merriam, 2004; Clark & Wilson, 1991; Merriam & Clark, 1991).

The issue of context has been at the forefront of the critiques for the last forty or more years. Clark and Wilson (1991) argue that the lack of clear link to context, especially historical, social, cultural, political, and gender, significantly limits and distorts the meaning perspectives. Yet, these scholars still believe Mezirow’s theory to be a landmark one that can be improved upon with the inclusion of other thought leaders with regard to context and decontextualized rationalization.
Merriam (2004) utilized Mezirow’s theory on a few studies herself but finds fault in the conceptual framework when it comes to critical reflection. As stated in her article, Merriam (2004) maintained that in order for transformative learning to take place, one must be able to go through the process of critical reflection and set aside one’s bias, prejudice, and personal ideals to arrive at an understanding through rational discourse. According to Merriam (2004), this elevation into critical reflection and rational discourse “mandates an advanced level of cognitive development” (p. 61). Further, Merriam also postulates that in order for a person to set aside bias, prejudice, and be open to others points of view is to be able to think dialectically which is “a characteristic of mature cognitive development” (p. 61).

Another scholar who has lauded yet criticized Mezirow’s theory on transformative learning is John Dirkx. In his overview on transformative learning theory, Dirkx (1998) states that Mezirow’s work on transformative learning, which is the core of adult development and learning, “has not, to date, resulted in a clearly recognizable pedagogy” (p. 4). This, Dirkx explains, is due to lack of socio-cultural context, the role that imagination plays to transformative learning with regard to guiding the learner into a deeper understanding of themselves, and transformative pedagogy. However, even with this critique, Dirkx (1998) agrees that Mezirow’s theory and views “underscore the importance of meaning and the role of adults in constructing and making meaning within the learning experience” (p. 9).

Taylor (1997) critically reviewed several studies that utilized Mezirow’s theory on transformative learning, which included even his own study (Taylor, 1994). Taylor’s review highlighted the need for a reexamination of several factors in the process of perspective transformation, the theory by which transformative learning came to be. As with other critics (Merriam, 2004; Dirkx, 1998; Clark & Wilson, 1991), the review points to lack of yet significant
influence of context, the fact that the role of critical reflection should be curtailed while the role of other ways of knowing should be expanded and the impetus of the learning process must be explored to provide a better understanding of what represents a “disorienting dilemma” (Taylor, 1997). Given all of these factors, the review established that Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory was much supported among the studies. Taylor’s review concludes that more research needs to be conducted regarding perspective transformation as it relates to transformative learning.

**Rationale**

The use and benefit from a framework such as Mezirow’s (1991) Transformational Learning Theory in a research study on community college probationary students would be interesting, informative and innovative. This adult developmental learning theory can be aptly utilized and applied to this study on community college students who were placed on probation within their first year as being placed on probation can be considered “disorienting dilemmas” effecting one’s perspective transformation. When these students are confronted with a new situation (failure/academic probation) which does not fit with their existing meaning perspective and adding knowledge or increasing competencies within the present perspective is not functional, according to the theory, the “learner” experiences a period of disorientation and disequilibrium. To resolve the ensuing discomfort, the learner engages a critical examination of the assumptions that underlie his/her role, priorities, attitudes and beliefs. This process can be acutely threatening to the learner. The resulting pressure and anxiety may act as a catalyst, stimulating the learner to seek a change in meaning perspective. The next step in the transformation process is “perspective taking”. This means seeking the perspective of others who have a more critical awareness of the psychological, social, and cultural assumptions that
shape our histories and experience. As the students become more critically aware of their perspective and are exposed to alternatives, the option to change that perspective becomes a possibility. Tovar and Simon (2006) discuss a similar process, which they refer to as “a Dangerous Opportunity”. From this vantage, the students may then develop a new meaning perspective from which these students can experience subsequent life events. The students are then left with the critical decision whether to embrace this new perspective and sustain the actions it requires. This final step may require the support of others who share the same perspective. Mezirow’s (1991) Transformative Learning Theory provides a structure and process through which to better understand the growth and development of first year community college students on academic probation. However, while this theory is identified as ideal for this study, it should be stated that the researcher finds issue with the contexts involving the term “adult” and meaning schemes of critical reflection. Though the legal age an individual is considered an adult can be considered 17-18 years of age, at most colleges and universities, students are not considered independent until the age of 24 (with regard to financial aid). According to Mezirow’s Theory, the age that one is considered an adult and able to critically reflect on one’s experiences is not exactly defined.

Application of Theory

Mezirow’s (1991) Transformational Learning Theory would be applied to the proposed study on first year community college students on academic probation via a qualitative study, utilizing the methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Because this particular approach involves an in-depth examination on how the participant makes sense or meaning of an experienced phenomenon, the application and utilization of Mezirow’s (1991) Transformational Learning Theory will result in a thorough and robust study that would offer a
plethora of best practices, inform policy and programming. A purposeful, convenience sample will be derived from students who were placed on academic probation in their first year at an urban community college from whom requisite student permission is granted. With regard to ethical and human subject considerations, IRB protocols will be followed. The individual participants, the institution, and the district will be assured of anonymity in the dissertation and any subsequent publication. The central research question would be centered on exploring or uncovering how meaning is reconstructed so much so that these students’ perspective becomes transformed.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Community colleges live by the mission of open access and by this, accept students of various backgrounds, both socially and economically. As a result, most community colleges have a large, unprepared/underprepared, lower-socioeconomic student population. According to an Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Feedback report (2011) on several community colleges, 71% of all undergraduates received Federal PELL grants to cover the expenses of tuition. The fact that these undergraduate students were approved to receive PELL grants establishes that they are financially needy and earn little-to-no income or receive some type of assistance or benefits from the state. The average time for undergraduates attending two-year community colleges to complete their respective programs is four to six years. This is nearly 200 – 300% of the normal time to completion. The significance of these statistics becomes exponentially higher when factoring in the number of students who are placed on academic probation in their first year.

Every year community colleges across the United States enroll large numbers of students from various backgrounds. Many of these first year freshmen students are, for the most part, academically and emotionally unprepared to begin coursework at the postsecondary level and find themselves on academic probation after their first semester (Ellis-O’Quinn, 2012; Tinto, 2012; Cowen & Brawer, 2002; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 1975). Consequently, these students lose their motivation to continue or have issues due to their external locus of control and become at risk of being dismissed from their institution(s). Although a student’s cognitive abilities such as testing and academics can be a huge determining factor of why they are failing, issues from a student’s non-cognitive abilities have been known to negatively affect student persistence (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012; Sommerfeld, 2011; Gore, 2010; Kamphoff et al,
2007; Isaak, Graves & Mayers, 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006). These non-cognitive abilities often include a student’s motivation, adjustment or transition to college life, academic, professional and personal behaviors, and attitudes that are distinctive from the traditional quantitative areas measurements of ability or achievement tests (Sommerfeld, 2011; Gore, 2010; Isaak, Graves & Mayers, 2007).

The literature utilized for this study, while currently limited, defines the characteristics of community college students, students on academic probation, discusses factors that adversely and positively affect these students’ education(s) and presents examples of success programs and resources that can increase their chances of returning to their institutions academically on track in their second year(s).

**Community College Students and Students on Academic Probation**

**Definition of Community College Students**

Enrollment in public two-year community colleges continues to increase each year. The students that apply to and attend these institutions enter less prepared academically than their counterparts at four-year institutions (Ellis-O’Quinn, 2012; Cowen & Brawer, 2002; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Tinto, 1993). This disparity plays a role with regard to the likelihood of community college students being placed on academic probation at some time in their college careers (Hickman, 2011; Mullin, 2011; Steinmann, Miller, & Pope, 2004; Kuh & Love, 2000). It is significant to understand the distinct yet prevalent characteristics that community college students have in contrast to students who attend four-year colleges and universities. These traits can affect community college students’ ability to succeed with their educational goals (Sommerfield, 2011; Gore, 2010; Pike, 2006; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 2005; Zusman, 2005).
According to the literature, community college students can be defined as students who attend college part-time, have part- or full-time jobs, often need to commute to school from distant locations, and can have additional responsibilities outside of the classroom that they must attend to along with their coursework such as caring for family and dealing with financial, emotional, physical and personal issues (Tinto, 2012; Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Tinto, 1993). Given these factors it is important for community colleges to ensure that these students successfully transition and adjust to college by providing strong student support services such as counseling, academic and financial advising, and assisting students in completing their degree programs.

**Definition of Students on Academic Probation**

Characteristics that describe students on academic probation vary among institutions, however, these students have typically been defined as having earned less than a 2.0 grade point average or C grade, and have the distinct characteristics common in most community college students which include: lack of or poor academic preparation, low motivation, poor time management, and poor study skills (Goble, Rosenbaum, Stephan, 2008; Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Tinto, 1993).

Students who are placed on academic probation have been defined as having an external locus of control (Goble, Rosenbaum, Stephan, 2008; Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Tinto, 1993). Thus students who are placed on academic probation believe that outside forces or forces beyond their control determined their educational fate (Zimbardo, 1985; Rotter, 1966). According to the literature, students placed on academic probation have little or no self-esteem, less social
interaction or skills, higher distrust of others, and have less ethical values than students in good academic standing (Isaak, Graves & Mayers, 2006; Trombley, 2001; Coleman & Freedman, 1996; Maxwell 1979). Further, they tend to be less goal-oriented or lack a clear understanding of what their goals are (Isaak, Graves & Mayers, 2006). Thus these students are in jeopardy of failing and/or dropping out completely and often need additional student support assistance and greater clarification with regard to academic, personal, and professional career development goals. Although the literature suggests that younger students are more likely than older students to be placed on probation (James & Graham, 2010; Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey & Jenkins, 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Tinto, 1993), there are circumstances where well-prepared, high achieving older students attain a probationary status due to financial, personal, and work-related responsibilities (Tovar & Simon, 2006; Trombley, 2001; Grimes, 1997). Further, studies have revealed that a majority of students who are placed on academic probation fail to actively seek appropriate measures of intervention and support services in order to improve their circumstances and prevent possible dismissal (James & Graham, 2010; Vander Shee, 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Grimes, 1997).

These distinct factors combined with difficulties inside and outside the classroom, and a student’s external (and internal) locus of control all contribute to, and increase, the placement of community college students on academic probation. These factors include, but are not limited to, parental status, caregiver status, personal illness, family illness, employment, poor academic preparation, and mental health status (James & Graham, 2010; Goble, Rosenbaum, & Stephan, 2008; Trombley, 2001).
Urban Community Colleges and Their Student Populations

As the number of students enrolling in public two-year community colleges continues to increase each year as many as 25% of all students may be on academic probation at some time in their college careers, with numbers even higher for community college students (Tovar & Simon, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Tinto, 1993; Seidman, 1991). While the organization and missions for community college may vary considerably from state to state, there are few commonalities among them such as open access, affordability, and developmental education. Open access within these institutions ensures that students can obtain admission into a community college regardless of their academic preparation or socioeconomic situation. This means that there are distinct characteristics that separate community college students from their counterparts who attend four-year colleges and universities. According to the literature, 40% of students entering community colleges enroll in at least one remedial course (Adelman, 2004). The characteristics of the student population within community colleges, though previously defined, can also fall under the categories of cognitive and non-cognitive factors or abilities (Sommerfeld, 2011; Gore, 2010; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976).

These factors negatively affect community college students’ motivation and behavior to succeed and, thus they persist at lower rates. Given these non-cognitive factors, it is important for two-year institutions to address these issues both academically and socially to ensure a successful transition and adjustment to college. Ensuring that the two-year institutions are providing support services such as counseling, academic advising, financial aid guidance, and tutoring is of utmost necessity (Perna, 2006; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, Goodwin, 1998; Chickering & Gamson, 1991). Having identified the characteristics of
community college students and students on academic probation, the non-cognitive factors that affect these students’ academic success will be discussed.

**Non-Cognitive Abilities or Factors Affecting Students on Probation**

According to Tovar and Simon (2006) there are some common characteristics among probationary and “high risk” (Jones & Watson, 1990, p. 29) or at-risk students; however, these are two distinct categories of students who are not one and the same. Jones and Watson (1990) defined these high-risk students as “historically disadvantaged groups” (p. 28), which include women, minorities, and low-income individuals with low academic skills who are not prepared to enter college. While this may seem to define many students attending community colleges, Tovar and Simon (2006) stated that the distinction becomes apparent in that many students that end up on probation are well-prepared students while other students on academic probation have several responsibilities outside of the classroom but are high achievers.

In his study, Vander Schee (2007) revealed that students who are on academic probation and experiencing difficulties often do not seek appropriate measures of intervention to improve their circumstances especially with regard to increasing their cumulative grade-point average (GPA) in order to prevent academic dismissal. Moreover, he stated that some students not only perform poorly in college due to a lack of ability or academic skills but because of significant nonacademic factors inhibiting a student’s ability to perform to their full potential (Vander Schee, 2007, p. 50).

While non-academic factors, issues in and outside of the classroom, and external locus of control all fall under the umbrella of non-cognitive abilities or factors, it has long been known that issues affecting a student’s environment (mental, personal, and physical) can adversely
affect a student’s academic success (Sommerfield, 2011; Gore, 2010; Pike, 2006; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 2005; Zusman, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Sommerfeld (2011) posited that the need to introduce and identify non-cognitive factors with regard to college readiness was prompted by years of disparity of college acceptance, attendance and completion rates by non-traditional college students “compared to the more traditional college going population (i.e., white, middle to upper-middle class men),” (Sommerfeld, 2011, p. 18).

According to the literature on non-cognitive abilities, one of the most prominent seminal researchers in area of non-cognitive factors and college readiness is William Sedlacek, who theorized that there are eight essential non-cognitive components of college readiness: “positive self-concept regarding academics; realistic self-appraisal; understanding/dealing with racism; long-term goal setting; having an available support person; demonstrated experience and success with leadership; community service; and knowledge acquired in/about a field,” (Sommerfeld, 2011, p 19). Based on these factors, Sedlacek developed the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ), an outcomes tool that has been utilized by multiple studies since its development in 1976 (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976). The non-cognitive factors identified by other research scholar include: student’s knowledge, learning skills, artistic and cultural appreciation, appreciation for diversity, propensity for leadership, interpersonal skills, social and civic responsibilities, overall physical, emotional and psychological health, career orientation or choices, adaptability and life skills, perseverance, and ethical integrity (Sommerfeld, 2011). It is important to note that these factors that adversely or positively affect the success of students placed on academic probation can be both academic and non-academic. Further, according to the literature, research in non-cognitive factors in college success is not always grounded in an overarching theory. Sommerfeld (2011) stated that “most studies explore the utility of a single variable or cluster of
variables in predicting outcomes, resulting in a seemingly limitless list of constructs that have fallen under the ‘non-cognitive’ umbrella,” (p. 19). Understanding the outcomes of the effects of non-cognitive factors can assist in identifying ways in which these factors may affect the motivation and behavior of community college students placed on academic probation.

Jarrell (2004) postulated that if a student experiences a crisis of a personal nature and is enrolled in school; he or she is less likely to have a positive self-concept because of the factors that are causing stress in his or her personal life. Therefore, if the crisis is severe enough, it is much more likely that the student may not perform well academically, thus causing him or her to obtain a probationary student status by the end of the same semester. In this situation there are many self-doubts with regard to external locus of control and “the inability to effectively problem solve, which results in poor academic performance and self-concept,” (Jarrell, 2004).

According to Mezirow’s (1991) Transformational Learning Theory, an adult learning theory, experiencing a severe crisis such as being placed on academic probation can cause a disorienting dilemma which would allow the student to “acquire frame of reference, through which meaning is construed and all learning takes place,” (p. 4).

**Student Success Models**

Historically, community colleges have always had issues with regard to funding that may have affected their ability to offer successful interventions to assist first year students on academic probation. However, research of the literature indicates that there are approaches to improve and increase student success for probationary students. The two categories of interventions this review will be focusing on are intrusive advisement programs and college success courses, resources that are provided by most community colleges. Intrusive advisement,
which is also, referred to as high involvement advising takes an intensive and highly interactive approach to advisement. Most college success courses assist students with acclimating and transitioning to college by increasing a student’s academic, professional and personal skills.

Intrusive Advisement

One of the approaches advisors utilized with intrusive advisement is personally engaging students in order to have them voluntarily disclose information regarding academic issues. These issues include but are not limited to the possibility of probation or dismissal, giving the student responsibility for their actions by constructing a learning contract, providing referrals to various support services within the institution, monitoring grades, establishing goals and concrete plans to reach these goals, and developing strategies to address nonacademic factors to improve academic performance (Sommerfield, 2011; Gore, 2010; Earl, 1988; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976).

In practice, intrusive advisement programs require students to voluntarily agree to the program’s intervention efforts via a structured and signed contract. A coordinating office typically centralizes these programs. The program includes one-on-one meetings with both faculty and staff as needed by the student. In addition, students who experiencing significant academic issues must meet regularly with an advisor who ensures that the student is adhering to the contract with regard to the “use of resources and promoting activities that improve study skills strategies,” (Vander Schee, 2007, p. 543). The unique aspect of this particular success model focuses on the non-cognitive factors that may prevent students on academic probation from realizing their academic goals. In Vander Schee’s (2007) insight-oriented intrusive advisement study, he encouraged students to examine their learning styles, study skills, and time
management. Students were also encouraged to consider their financial, family, and social situations. Vander Schee posited that the advising meetings may sometimes resemble counseling sessions in that students are asked to examine the thoughts and behaviors that may influence their academic performance. However, Vander Schee (2007) articulated that these insight-oriented intrusive advising sessions are not simply counseling but they are also a process that assists students to develop an internal locus of control in order for the students to begin understanding how and why their actions can adversely or positively affect their academic success. Once this pattern has been established, the advisor and student can begin to develop a plan that addresses issues that are specifically distracting the student from reaching and completing his or her educational goals. (Vander Schee, 2007).

Simon, Tovar and Edson (2003) conceptualized and pilot tested their “re-orientation” (p. 553) on probationary students by incorporating and monitoring a student’s academic difficulties through intrusive advisement. Professional counselors in the program delivered this advisement via individual interventions. It was during meetings, the counselors conducted assessments of “personal, academic, career, and financial difficulties described by the student. Interventions deemed necessary by the counselor were mediated by students’ readiness and/or motivation to work toward change” (Simon, Tovar & Edson, 2003, p. 554). The results of their re-orientation efforts indicated statistically significant higher motivation, a favorable attitude toward educators, an increase in verbal confidence, and an increase in receptivity to institutional assistance, personal counseling and social engagement on campus. The researchers suggested that a comprehensive approach to advising, such as insight-oriented intrusive advising, appears to be effective in increasing the academic achievement of students on academic probation (Tutty & Ratliff, 2012; Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2008; Vander Schee 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006;

**College Success Courses**

Another success model utilized to assist students on probation in community colleges are college success courses. These courses, much like Simon, Tovar and Edson’s (2003) re-orientation, assist students on probation to identify issues affecting their academic progress. An evaluative study conducted by Martinez, Kelsey, and Brown (2011) found that the college success course viewed by both counselors and students to be an effective intervention that promoted student success. Students and counselors viewed the course as a beneficial means to improve students’ study skills. The college success courses also assisted students in identifying study skills they found to be most valuable. These included time management, note taking, awareness of campus resources, career exploration, learning style, and, short- and long-term goal setting. Having a counselor as an instructor was viewed by the students as advantageous since they believed counselors, while being professionals and effective instructors, were also approachable about different issues students might discuss, whether academic related to personal issues (Martinez, Kelsey, & Brown, 2011; Vander Schee 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Simon, Tovar & Edson, 2003).

According to Stovall (2000) community colleges can help first year students acquire the information, skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed for college success. A student success courses assists students with their integration into both the academic and social communities of the college. “Because many community college students have previously experienced limited academic success, one important goal of the student success course is to help them develop
positive attitudes about learning and confidence in their abilities,” (Stovall, 2000, p. 47). College success courses seek to identify and accommodate the needs of community college students on academic probation with diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is within this environment that students find a safe place to ask questions and discuss issues such as academic fears, familial concerns, and support services (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012; Tutty & Ratliff, 2012; Vander Schee 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Simon, Tovar & Edson, 2003). These success courses can become an anchor in their new environment as these introduce students to institutional resources and co-curricular opportunities. Ultimately, both the students and colleges benefit, as student success courses result in students’ improved academic performance and increase the students’ retention (Tinto, 2002a).

**Student Engagement**

The responsibilities of increasing student success within community colleges and among its students cannot rely solely on just the students or the staff. According to Tinto (2002a) the pathway to increasing student success lies with the efforts of the faculty and in the institution’s ability to create an offer “educational communities that actively engage students in learning,” (p. 1). Thus the remedy in increasing student success is not just about retaining the students but also assisting in their knowledge and engaging them academically. Moreover, students are not the only ones who should be engage in the efforts of creating these educational communities. Tinto (2002a) further posited, that in order for institutions to increase students’ retention, they must “engage faculty and administrators across the campus in a collaborative effort to construct educational settings, classrooms and otherwise, that actively engage students, all students not just some, in learning,” (Tinto, 2002a, p. 1). With regard to student engagement, Kuh (2001)
explained that “the more actively engaged students are – with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they study – the more likely they are to learn and to stay in college until they achieve their academic goals.” (p. 34). Student engagement, Kuh (2001) postulated, is necessary and beneficial with regard to assessment of the institution’s educational best practices, especially the extent to which “an institution’s educational practices are likely to produce successful results – more students across all groups learning at higher levels and achieving their academic goals,” (p. 34). How, then do community colleges “engage” first year community college students on academic probation? These institutions should engage them in the same way they engage at-risk students, first generation students and academically unprepared/underprepared students. Each category of aforementioned student population, at one point in their academic careers, may find themselves on academic probation. In a 2005 Community College Survey on Student Engagement, the following was reflected in the results, “academic advising and career counseling – engagement efforts that encourage students to set and meet goals – can significantly affect student retention and success” (CCSSE, 2005, p. 5). The study further revealed that while a large percentage of CCSSE student respondents cited that academic advising as a significant engagement factor, one third of the participants reported that they rarely, if ever, utilized these services. Further, half of students who participated in this survey admitted, “they rarely or never use career counseling services” (CCSSE, 2005, p. 5). The survey suggests that faculty incorporate these activities into their course requirements in order for students to utilize these services they may not otherwise seek.

Another significant way to engage first year community college students who experience being placed on academic probation is through a peer-mentor system (Ellis-O’Quinn, 2012; Temporado & Ferrari, 2010; Wirth & Parilla, 2008; Tinto, 2012; Tinto, 2002a; Tinto, 1993).
Pairing these students with honor students who active on campus can assist in engaging students on academic probation in actively seeking out the resources they can utilize to succeed (Thomas, 2011; Wirth & Padilla, 2008; Derby, 2006; Ardaiolo, Bender, & Roberts, 2005; Berger & Milem, 1999; Astin, 1984). On September 9, 2010, the presidents of AACC (American Association of Community Colleges) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) wrote to member CEOs and board chairs to ask them to join in a call to action to engage community college institutions to advance 'the completion agenda' to assist in increasing the number of students who complete degrees, certificates, and other credentials with value in the work place. This initiative was then filtered through to all community colleges through the Phi Theta Kappa International Two-Year Honor Society at all campuses (http://www.cccompletioncorps.org/ptk). This peer mentor/student success model is strikingly similar to Wirth and Padilla’s (2008) student success modeling approach their design for their qualitative study. In essence, Wirth and Padilla created a local student success model (LSSM) on a particular campus where they were able to identify what barriers successful students had to overcome in order to be successful, the knowledge that successful students possessed in order to overcome the barriers to success, and the actions that successful students would undertake in order to actually overcome those barriers (Wirth & Padilla, 2008, p. 696). Having interviewed these successful students in small focus groups, the authors were able to identify barriers to student success that stemmed from personal, financial, coursework, learning, institutional and student support. Wirth and Padilla (2008) also asked these students identify their strengths and weaknesses and what these students identified as the necessary actions needed in order to get back on track if the students found themselves on probation or at some kind of academic disadvantage. This strategy is yet another way community colleges can assist first year students
who experience academic probation succeed in completing their respective programs. By incorporating a peer mentor or local student success model to engage students in identifying the non-cognitive factors that may be hindering their growth and success in their courses, community colleges can effectively increase these students’ chances of achieving their academic goals.

According to Wirth (2006), the literature regarding student success is quite complex and unique in that it embodies student goals, persistence, and satisfaction. However, the literature also identified common “barriers to success” (p. 75) themes among students such as time management in order to balance study, work, and family responsibilities. By this statement, it can be assumed that literature with regard to student success can be expanded to include persistence, student retention, student development, student satisfaction as well as the cognitive and non-cognitive factors that negatively or positively affect them. With regard to issues of student retention, Tinto (2005) postulated that regardless of all of the research conducted to date, only a minimal amount has been dedicated to the creating models for student persistence that would assist in the creation of best practices, policies, programming and a set of guidelines for colleges and universities to follow in order to increase and enhance student success.

Without constructing models to assist in increasing student persistence community colleges cannot improve the current situations encountered by first year community college students who experience academic probation. Tinto (1999) further explained that many institutions are not taking student retention seriously, treating it like any other issue under the umbrella of enrollment management, adding a course rather than address the need to increase retention especially of freshman and first year students. “Need to address the issue of student retention, in particular that of new students? Add a freshman seminar or perhaps a freshmen-
mentoring program,” (Tinto, 1999, p. 1). This results in segmented and depersonalized faculty and student experiences that are increasingly broken further into smaller pieces “more narrow and specialized; their learning further partitioned into smaller disconnected segments” (Tinto, 1999, p. 1).

If community colleges plan to hold true to their mission of open access then these institutions must create, implement and assess the outcomes of student success models that can increase student retention, decrease the number of first year students who experience academic probation, and find innovative ways to fund these models or programs. Schuh (2005) examined the institutional costs of students who drop out, fail, or do not persist. These costs associated with dropping out, are significant and extremely substantial, resulting in an increase in lower socioeconomic status and “an inability to repay debt,” (Schuh, 2005, p. 288). The costs do not stop there; Schuh (2005) stated that although the research is scarce, community college institutions incur a significant cost when students drop out and do not successfully complete/graduate from their degree programs. The direct costs lie within student recruitment, financial aid, lost tuition income and other lost income. Some the indirect institutional costs affect faculty, staff, and other long-term potential institution costs such as technology upgrades and campus expansion. However, these very institutions must begin to take responsibility and commit to serving their students by offering effective programs that can assist in retaining these students and helping them graduate. Tinto (2002a) posited that one of the most evident attributes of having these programs is the development of “enduring commitment (p. 6) that these institutions impart onto the students that they serve. These institutions must continually reflect on how their actions serve to further the success, satisfaction, and welfare of their students rather than focus solely on institutional interests. “Like healthy and caring communities generally,
effective retention programs direct their energies to helping students further their own needs and interests,” (Tinto, 2002a, p. 6). He went on to state that no program or process could substitute this kind of commitment. Further, it cannot be easily measured when it occurs. The programming and commitment to the students attending community colleges cannot be the sole responsibility of one particular office, department, or program but of every area within the institution. From admissions to registration to advisement, teaching and tutoring, commitment to assist students must be integrated all the way through each degree program to eventual completion and transfer. The faculty, administrators, and staff must all be held accountable for the students attending their courses and develop relationships with them so that students can be inspired by them thus enabling these students to envision and ignite their own commitment to their education. “The presence of a strong commitment to students results in an identifiable ethos of caring which permeates the character of institutional life. Student centered institutions are, in their everyday life, tangibly different from those institutions which place student welfare second to other goals,” (Tinto, 2002a, p. 6). Thus, colleges and universities must instill throughout their institutions an intrinsic and strong focus on students and a commitment to putting the students’ needs, interests and welfare first.

**Limitations**

Although the results for intrusive advisement are positive, there are limitations that hinder the progress and success of this particular intervention. With regard to Vander Schee’s insight-oriented intrusive advisement intervention discussed in this review, the limitations include student motivation, attrition, lack of ability to randomly assign students to comparison groups, small group sizes, and unequal group sizes. Also, in each study, the subjects were from a single institution. Motivation also may have played a role in with regard to the self-selection of
students within the three groups since students were allowed to decide on how many meetings
they would attend. According to the data collected, there were indications that students who
were very motivated took the most advantage of the program and those students who were least
motivated chose to disregard the initial call to participate. Furthermore, the data indicated that
when accompanied with the advising meetings, motivated students exhibited a more adaptive
help-seeking behavior, thus “these efforts may have contributed to their positive academic

Because both motivation and help-seeking behavior were not measured, conclusions from
this study are limited. Another limiting factor to this study was attrition as some students
withdrew from the institution during the semester. This study conducted a minimum of three
insight-oriented intrusive advising meetings, in which cognitive and non-cognitive factors were
addressed and correlated to the improvement of the academic performance of students on
academic probation as reflected in the students’ GPA in the semester. With regard to Simon,
Tovar’s and Edson’s “re-orientation”, their use of Schlossberg’s and Hirsch’s models are not
commonly used by student affairs professionals, counselors and academic advisors however they
would benefit from the application of these models in their work with probationary students.
Assisting these students in their return to good academic standing via such interventions will
positively impact their long-term careers while increasing the probationary students’ success and
educational experiences (Vander Schee 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Braxton, Hirschy, &

The literature is also significantly limited with regard to exploring the lived experiences
of community college students who have successfully overcome being placed on academic
probation. Arcand and LeBlanc (2012) were two of the few scholars who conducted a profile study exploring the lived experiences of students on academic probation.

Conclusion

After reviewing a significant amount of the scholarly literature on students on academic probation, the research speaks to the many factors that affect all students falling into this particular category. Although advisement, success courses, and other success models such as peer mentoring have been effective with regard to increasing retention of probationary students; community colleges hesitate to implement these models. According to the literature, the costs for the implementation of success courses and faculty/staff advisement factor into the equation and are reasons why these institutions cannot move forward with these suggested improvements (Ellis-O’Quinn, 2012; Sommerfeld, 2011; Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Tinto, 1993). However, while the literature (both qualitative and quantitative) on community college students and success models is vast and by no means exhaustive, research with regard to the experiences and perceptions of the students who are placed on academic probation is minimal and limited. To accurately identify and understand how students who experience being placed on academic probation perceive success and make meaning of their experience while on academic probation, institutions must begin a dialogue with them in addition to implementing success models and interventions that can increase a probationary student’s behavior and motivation to complete their education.
Chapter 3 – Research Design

The purpose of the proposed research study is to explore the distinct values of first year community college students in relation to their experiences while on academic probation and how they persisted to achieve success. Further, the results of this research will provide insights that may inform community college best practices designed to engage and retain probationary, students in their first academic year.

Research Question

The research question that will guide this study is: How do community college students who experience academic probation in their first year make sense/meaning of that experience and transition to become successful? This research question will allow for exploration of the lived experiences of community college students, who have experience being placed on academic probation in their first year and how they made meaning of that experience, specifically in terms of their transition from probationary student to their current status as a successful student. The secondary goal of this research is collecting data on successful students who were previously placed on probation and what are the resources and tactics they engaged in to overcome this academic misstep. This research is driven by Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (1991) which explores making meaning, interpretation and learning as it occurs through an individual’s particular cultural and social norms and their way of understanding, their language and their personal experience. Transformation theory, according to Mezirow (1991) is the recognition of the central roles that the individual’s acquired frame of reference, through which meaning is construed and all learning takes place, and by the learning processes that are transformed by these habits of expectation or meaning perspectives.
Qualitative Research Approach

This study will utilize a qualitative research approach, a form of social inquiry (also called naturalistic inquiry) that focuses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live (Holloway, 1997; Malterud, 2001). A number of different approaches exist under the umbrella of this type of research, however, most of these approaches have the same goal and that is to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures. Qualitative approaches are typically utilized to explore the behavior, perspectives and experiences of the people they study. Qualitative research aims to get a better understanding through first-hand experience, truthful reporting, and quotations of actual conversations. This type of research enables the researcher to better understand how the participants derive meaning from their surroundings, and how their meaning influences their behavior. Thus qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of the particular participants of this study.

In simple terms, qualitative research allows the researcher to obtain information about the “human” side of an issue.

Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent. Although findings from qualitative data can often be extended to people with characteristics similar to those in the study population, gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon typically takes precedence over eliciting data that can be generalized to specific populations. In this sense, qualitative research differs slightly from scientific research in general.
The three most common qualitative methods of collecting data are participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. Participant observation is appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviors in their usual contexts. In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored. Focus groups are effective in eliciting data on the cultural norms of a group and in generating broad overviews of issues of concern to the cultural groups or subgroups represented. The types of data these three methods generate are field notes, audio (and sometimes video) recordings, and transcripts. Each method mentioned can be utilized however, participant observation and in-depth interviews are particularly suited for obtaining the specific type of data needed for this study.

This study will utilize a qualitative method via an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) in order to focus on the meaning that the participants make of the experience of academic probation. Further, within this particular approach, the researcher recognizes that the bracketing of personal biases may be an impossible feat. The purpose of the research topic discussed in this paper is to understand the values (perceptions, aspirations, individual characteristics) of first year community college students on academic probation in order to provide insights that might inform community college practices designed to engage and retain these students. Using a qualitative research process would be extremely fundamental with regard to the population that will be interviewed for this research study: Community college students who have successfully overcome being placed on academic probation in their first year.

The intended approach of IPA allows the researcher to look at participants that would all have experience with the “phenomenon” of academic probation, further, this approach would describe and analyze the meanings made, knowledge of and actions taken by the participants
regarding their distinct situation. In this approach the major role of the researcher is to be an observer who would “explore real life,” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97).

Developed by Jonathan Smith, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is a relatively recent qualitative approach created specifically within the discipline of psychology. While this approach is phenomenological, its roots originated with the philosopher, Edmund Husserl, and his attempts to construct a philosophical science of consciousness. At the same time, it is connected to philosophers Giddens, Comte, Heidegger and Gadamer because of the various hermeneutics as well as the theories of interpretation involved within this approach.

This study will utilize an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, as this particular method’s aim is “to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world,” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 54). This qualitative study will focus on the meaning that the participants made of their individual experience of academic probation. The purpose of this study is to better understand the values (perceptions, aspirations, individual characteristics) of community college students who experience academic probation in their first year. Due to its flexibility, IPA allows for both phenomenological and dynamic perspectives as it focuses on the lived experiences of the study’s participants as it pertains to a specific phenomenon and how the participants perceive it. Concurrently, the research itself is dynamic as well as it allows the researcher to play an active role in the study as he or she attempts to get close the participant’s personal world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Participants

While there is no right or accurate number when it comes to sample size, Smith et al, (2009), recommend that in order to commit to a detailed interpretative account of the cases, the
sample size when conducting a study using an IPA approach should be very small. The researcher will interview eight (8) community college students who were placed on academic probation in their first year and are now successful. Further, Smith et al, (2009), purport that the sample within an IPA approach should be purposefully selected, as the participants would offer detailed insight in a particular experience. Finally, the sample should be homogenous in that the “research question would be meaningful,” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 50). The reason the researcher has chosen to interview eight (8) participants is that this sample size would adhere to the sample size recommended by Smith et al (2009) and allow the researcher to consider one participant at a time without becoming overwhelmed. Further, this number of will represent about 1% of the population of students on academic probation that are approved their appeals. The local, urban community college approves approximately 800 – 1100 academic appeals per semester. Mason (2010) postulates that with regard to sample size in qualitative data, that more information does not necessarily mean more data as “one occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Frequencies are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic,” (p. 2). Further, because qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not making generalized hypothesis statements, “one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic,” (Mason, 2010, p. 2). The participants who are interviewed will receive $20 gift cards to Barnes and Noble Bookstore and those who fill out the qualitative questionnaire will receive a $5 gift card to Dunkin Donuts as an incentive (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2012).

**Recruitment and Access**

Participants to the study will be selected from a local, urban community college. A letter
of intent describing the details of the study will be sent to the Office of the President at the selected community college. Once an approval is received from the Office of the President, Institution Review Board protocols will then be followed at both Northeastern University and the local, urban community college. In order to assure homogeneity within the sample, the populations targeted for this study are community college students who have experienced academic probation in their first year of study and who are now successful and in their second year (and beyond) of study. The reason that this specific population of students is being chosen for this study is that they were able to successfully overcome academic probation and continue their education. Also, because this population is in its second (or more) year of study, they can accurately discuss the process of academic probation and any appeal process that would have been necessary for them to make Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) and be reinstated any financial aid to pay for coursework. Other types of homogeneity that may be achieved through the research include differences or commonalities in meaning making with regard to the participants’ gender, age, ethnicity and possibly grade point average (GPA). As the participants of this study may be considered a vulnerable population (The Belmont Report, 1979), in order to ensure their protection, maintain ethical conduct and to avoid coercion, a short form will be sent out to students who are no longer on academic probation and are currently successful. The following examples are determinants of “success”: 1) The student maintains a GPA of 2.0 or better; 2) The student participates on campus via a club/organization; 3) The student participates in an honors program/society; 4) The student has been awarded a scholarship; 5) The student has received acceptance to a four-year institution. The researcher will then contact the students who return the short form affirming that they would like to take part in the study. After fully disclosing the students with information regarding the study, the researcher will ask if the student
is in their second year of study. The researcher will interview the first eight (8) students who affirm that they are in their second (or more) year of study and had experienced and persisted past academic probation in their first year of study. The remaining students who have experienced academic probation and are now successful who affirm that they would like to take part in the study via the short form, will be allowed the opportunity to fill out a questionnaire/survey and informed consent will be asked for from these individuals and/or from their parent or their legal guardian.

**Procedures**

**Data Collection:**

This study intends to obtain data through a number of ways. The research for this study will consist of researcher observations, a qualitative questionnaire and individual semi-structured interviews, which allow for triangulation of participants’ heuristic knowledge, their individual experiences and how the participants’ made sense of those experiences. Each interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. Smith and Osborne (2003) postulate that interviews within an IPA approach should last a considerable amount of time without rushing, using minimal probes and asking one question at a time. This allows the participant to focus on and answer each question individually and allows for the researcher to engage the participant while monitoring the effect of the interview on the participant. The researcher will transcribe the interviews and review the findings with participants via email and in person, if possible, to aid in validity. However, Smith et al (2009) recommend that semi-structured interviews are the best and most utilized way to obtain data within an IPA approach. The purpose of the interviews is to gain an in-depth and detailed account of experiences encountered by the participants placed on academic probation as well as to understand the meaning they make of their experiences and perceptions of academic
probation as it pertains to degree attainment. The student’s questions, which will be included in Appendix I of the study, will be instituted along with personalize probes to each individual in order to have each person elaborate on their particular perspective and experiences (Seidman, 2006). The questions are specific, open-ended and carefully worded to reduce any potential or perceived harm.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis will follow the six step process listed in the Smith et al. (2009) text which allows a simple guideline for first-time researchers and can be loosely followed by more experienced researcher utilizing IPA. Each step is designed to have the researcher pay close scrutiny to each case individually before engaging in the identification of themes and connections across all cases. The first four steps call for data analysis of each case to be completely processed individually which would allow for a robust analysis of each individual participant’s narrative before moving into the next narrative. In Step Five, the researcher must write and assess each individual before moving into Step Six which delves into identification of overarching themes. This process is both iterative and inductive (Larkin & Thompson, 2011) and entrusts the researcher to be reflective of and deliberate with the data. After the data have been analyzed, the researcher will deductively investigate overarching themes and examine them in relation to Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (1991) to identify how the findings of this research correspond with the existing theory and if there are inconsistencies.

Step One: The first step of the data analysis process will call for the researcher to become familiarized with the data. The authors strongly suggest reading and re-reading the written interview transcripts as well as listening to the audio recording of the interview while concurrently attempting to set aside personal biases or prejudices. According to Smith, et al
(2009), becoming immersed in the data in this manner allows the researcher to develop an overall interview structure, gain a better understanding on how the narratives bring structure to the interview and offer a detailed and more robust look into the participant’s world.

**Step Two:** The second step will engage in initial noting as well as line-by-line analysis and coding of the data. This step will allow the researcher examine the content and language use, with an open mind, on a very exploratory level. As the researcher engages with the written and recorded transcripts, the notes will dissected into three discrete processes: In the first process, the researcher will compose descriptive accounts of the participant’s interview, documenting initial codes that embodies the words of the participant; The second process will have the researcher exploring the use of language by each participant in order to better understand how the participants explain and express themselves; Finally, the researcher will engage the data in a more heuristic or questioning and conceptual way which will likely have the researcher adjust the focus on the participant’s overall understanding the topics, ideas and issues that are being discussed, this process will lead the researcher into the third step. The level of analysis at this particular step is more precise and time consuming than all other steps.

**Step Three:** The third step involves the developing of emergent themes, which requires the researcher to comprehensively analyze the exploratory comments. This step is significant, as engaging the data through the first two steps will allow it to grow substantially. The researcher will, at this point, begin the task of steering through the data while reducing its comprehensive detail and yet maintain the data’s complexity. This will involve the identification of patterns and overlapping ideas and connections made through the first two steps. This step requires the researcher to break down the participant’s experiences detailed within the transcript into distinct chunks to identify the emergent themes. It is within this step that the researcher will begin to
include more personal interpretation while still capturing the essence of the participant’s words and thoughts. These first three steps and analysis process will be repeated for each individual participant transcript. The researcher will strive to maintain a clear perspective for each analysis keeping any assumptions and personal beliefs from each individual analysis.

**Step Four:** The fourth step requires the researcher to search for connections across the developed emergent themes. This step will allow the researcher to map how the theme fit together. The researcher will create a list of all themes in chronological order or in by their positive and negative presentation in order to efficiently group then identify connections and patterns among all themes developing “super-ordinate themes” (Smith et al., 2010).

**Step Five:** The fifth step has the researcher move to the next case. The authors strongly suggest that the researcher thoroughly review and write up each case as a single case study before moving to the final step.

**Step Six:** In this final step, the researcher must ascertain and identify distinct patterns across cases. The researcher intends to follow each of the steps for each of the eight cases in this study. Thus through the steps identified in Smith, Flowers, and Larkin’s text (2009), the researcher hopes to make meaning of the “how, why and what” each participant understands regarding the concerns of their experience while on academic probation.

Smith and Osborne (2003) postulate that during the analysis of the interviews in a study using an IPA approach, the research must engage in an “Interpretative relationship with the transcript,” (p. 66). According to Smith et al, (2009), the authors recommend that a researcher review the transcripts, making initial notes. The researcher should then look for themes in the first case then connect the emergent themes identified while trying to make sense of the connection between themes. The researcher should then move onto the next case, repeating the
procedure and looking for themes and patterns across each case. Saldana (2009) similarly suggests that one should “jot down any preliminary words or phrases for codes on the notes, transcripts or documents themselves,” (p. 20).

The researcher of this study intends to employ these six steps while engaging in a manual technique via hard copy forms and pencil making notations throughout the transcribed documents in preparation for electronic coding. The electronic coding program that will be utilized for this study initially will be Microsoft WORD then a review of the following transcription programs to assist with coding: MaxQDA and NVivo9. For the purposes of this dissertation the researcher may utilize two types of coding techniques, In Vivo and Descriptive Coding. Utilizing In Vivo Coding will allow the researcher to choose quotes or key words from within the raw data to use as codes for the data. Descriptive Coding will allow the researcher to use phrases that describe the content of the data as a code. The researcher may also utilize a “splitter method” (Saldana, 2013, p. 23) where upon the data is split into smaller codes. The researcher of this study intends to follow the procedures that Smith et al (2009) recommend such as the inclusion of transcript extracts, initial notes, themes, journal notes, and quotes to support themes identified. The researcher intends to present a clear and detailed narrative account for each of the eight participants that will be interviewed for this study.

Protection of Human Subjects:

Participants to the study will be informed of the research, asked for informed consent and would be assured of complete anonymity and any indication of the school would be omitted. All personal, professional, emotional limitations will be identified and referenced to in order to maintain the neutrality and validity of the research. As the participants of this study may be considered a vulnerable population (The Belmont Report, 1979), in order to ensure their
protection and maintain ethical conduct, the participants will be offered the opportunity to choose to engage in this study via a short form. The short form will be distributed to students who experienced academic probation and are now successful. The researcher would make certain to fully disclose the information regarding the study, allow them the opportunity to choose to participate to the extent that they are able, and obtain informed consent from these individuals themselves or from their parent or their legal guardian. Participants who voluntarily return the form will then be informed of the research, its benefits, and asked for informed consent. The researcher will conduct observations and individual interviews to allow for triangulation of participants’ heuristic knowledge and its impact on transformational learning (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2012). The researcher will also review transcribed data and check findings with participants to aid in validity. IRB protocols would be followed and approval will be obtained through open communication with the committee involved, submission of interview questions with identified variations, and submission of full qualitative survey.

**Trustworthiness:**

In order to maintain this study’s trustworthiness, the researcher will engage in four of the eight validation strategies suggested by Creswell (2013). As the researcher will conduct one-on-one in-depth interviews with the participants as well as observations, one of the participant observation strategies that will be utilized is prolonged engagement and persistent observation. This will assist the researcher in building trust with participants, understanding their culture and allow for the audit of any incorrect or unclear information. After each individual interview, the researcher will corroborate evidence from the student, notes taken during observations, and documents such as a journal kept by the participant. This would allow for triangulation of student’s heuristic knowledge and its impact on transformational learning. The researcher will
also verify findings and interpretations are accurate and fair with participants via a processing called member checking (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2012) to aid in validity. Any feedback received by the participant will then be used to make adjustments to the codes as appropriate and will be included into the final narrative. Another method the researcher will engage in reflective journaling. Shaw (2010) advises that researchers utilizing the IPA methodology keep a reflective diary to write up notes, themes, and extracts that the researchers identifies at each stage of analysis. This will assist the researcher on trustworthiness and analytical decision-making in the later stages of analysis. It also serves an “audit trail” for the researcher demonstrating how the data was derived, interpreted and presented. Finally, as there is no absolute way to keep one’s bias out of the research completely, the researcher will utilize language that reduces personal bias throughout the study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2012).

Data storage:

The data that will be derived electronically via voice and video recorders will be stored both in a password protected USB drives and computer files. The data that are originally written and transcribed manually will be stored in password protected WORD documents, computer files and a transcription program. Any and all printed and written data such as notes or participant’s journals/diaries will be stored in a locked file where only the researcher will have access. The written data will be destroyed once it is reviewed with the participants and transcribed electronically. Further, all electronically derived data will be deleted and/or destroyed. Confidentiality will be ensured as all personal information will be removed and a pseudonym will be utilized for each participant. Thus, assuring the participant’s complete anonymity including any indication of the name and location of the institution.
Summary

This research study will explore the experiences of community college students who were placed on academic probation in their first year and how they persevered to achieve success. The qualitative method that will be utilized for this study will be Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) in order to focus on the meaning that the participants make of the experience of academic probation. All IPA procedures will be followed with regard to the collecting of data and analysis process in an inductive manner. Each participant case will be analyzed individually. Any and all deductive references to Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory will be formed and listed after all the data has been completely analyzed. As the role of the researcher with IPA involves the input of “self”, precautions will be taken to ensure the control and bracketing of personal biases.
Chapter 4 – Findings and Analysis

The purpose of the proposed research study was to explore the distinct values and perceptions of community college students in relation to their experiences while on academic probation in their first year of college and how they had persisted to achieve success. The analysis of the interview data yielded three superordinate themes and six corresponding nested themes. The superordinate themes and nested themes were: 1) college readiness (1.1 transitioning from high school to college, 1.2 self-efficacy/mental maturity); 2) mental health awareness (2.1 seeking/asking for help, 2.2 support from others); 3) being/staying informed (3.1 knowledge of campus resources and programs, and 3.2 participating on campus). Superordinate themes and nested themes were identified as those recurring in at least seven of the eight participants’ interview data. Table 1 provides a listing of super-ordinate themes and subthemes that materialized through the analysis process, as well as the recurrence of each theme across participants.

Table 1 Identification of Recurring Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Chris</th>
<th>Stacy</th>
<th>Pati</th>
<th>Gloria</th>
<th>Lily</th>
<th>Yve</th>
<th>Rob</th>
<th>Raquel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) College Readiness</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Transitioning from High School to College</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Self-Efficacy/Mental Maturity</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Mental Health Awareness</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Seeking/Asking for Help</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Support from Others</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Student Engagement</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Knowledge of Campus Resources and Programs</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Participating on Campus</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
College Readiness

Students entering community college often face many challenges with regard to acclimating to a new environment and understanding of the policies and systems within that environment. Many enter these institutions academically and emotionally unprepared. The first superordinate theme that emerged in this study focused on the participants’ conflict with the transition from high school “mentality” to college “mentality” and the learning that takes placed from the first discrete environment to the next. Further, understanding the distinct differences between the two environments. College readiness in this case refers to how prepared each participant perceived themselves to be as they began their educational journeys at the college level and how this perception shaped the course of that journey. The researcher identified two specific spheres of convergence among the participants related to college readiness. The participants perceived their transition to college both “forced” or against their wishes at the time they were graduating high school and a continuation of the high school experience with regard to their study habits at the time of being placed on academic probation. Each of these nested themes played a significant role in the decisions the participants made. Further, the participants believed that they did not understand or care about of the importance of college and that the lack of caring had much to do with their level of self-efficacy/mental maturity. Thus, the two nested themes discussed here are transitioning from high school to college – self-efficacy/mental maturity.

Transitioning from High School to College

Each of the participants viewed the transition from high school to college as an absolute and necessary continuation of their high school education or as many of the participants referred to as “the obvious next step”. The participants each indicated that it was obligatory that they continue their education and attend college immediately following the completion of their high
school studies. When asked about her experience when entering college, Pati stated that “it was what was expected” of her once she graduated high school. She explained that her parents were adamant about her going to college:

Everybody’s like, oh, you gotta go to college and I just remember that when I had graduated from high school, I wanted to take a semester- I really wanted to take a gap year. But I was willing to dial back and take a semester off, and I didn't take that semester off because of my parents.

The idea of being “forced” to attend college against her better judgment is evident in Pati’s statement. The expectations place upon her by her parents may have very likely played a role in Pati’s placement on academic probation. Rob and Stacy had a strong disinterest in even attending college after high school. Rob admitted that he even took a semester off before starting college and still “did not feel prepared to start (college) at all.” After graduating high school in 2013, Rob skipped the first semester and started a year later. Rob’s complete disinterest in attending college seemed to stem from lack of preparation to take on the responsibilities of college. Having come from another country, Rob was a second language learner and very soft spoken. While Rob did not perceive himself to be ready to enter college, he did so to appease his mother who wanted him to continue his studies. Each of the participants expressed that they believed they were not ready to enter college and did so under the pressure of their family.

Stacy spoke adamantly about her desire not to attend college. When asked about her decision to attend college, she stated that she “didn't really want to go to college to begin with” and “didn't really care.” She admitted that she was just going to school at that point for her
mother. Stacy angrily went on to explain the main reason why did not want to attend college was a matter of principle and finance, stating the following:

Like, after high school, I got my diploma, I said I wasn't going to college because I'm not paying. That's it. I'm not going to pay. It's just, another financial institute, you know what I'm saying? Like a bank or something…like, this is my first semester followed by financial aid, so like, am I really going to spend money on school. I just did 12 years of school for free. And now they’re making me pay and that really put me off.

Stacy’s statement blames her mother for forcing her to attend college while at the same time indicates that she uses perceives having to pay for college as a “scam” and one of the main reasons that she did not want to attend. Stacy’s use of excuses and blame gaming elicits images of a petulant, spoiled teenager trying to put the blame of her failures on everyone and/or everything else, which perfectly describes someone who still holds a “high school” mentality.

Chris, Pati, Lily and Gloria each spoke about the transition from high school to college as being what was expected from both family and friends. Each of the participants expressed that they felt pressured to begin attend college immediately following their completion of their high school education and that college was the next step in life. When asked about his decision to attend college after high school, Chris stated that he “wasn't ecstatic about college” and considered it the next step similar to the transition to high school after graduating from junior high school, “it just seemed like college is up next.”

For each of the participants, the lack of desire to attend college immediately after high school had a negative effect on their ability to transition to college life. A majority of the
participants perceived that they were “forced” to attend by their families and had no true choice in the matter of attending college immediately after graduating high school. Further, a large percentage of the participants indicated that if they had “taken a break” after high school prior to attending college, they may not have ended up being placed on academic probation.

**Self-Efficacy/Mental Maturity**

Of the eight participants for this study, all of them appeared to make sense of their lack of “mental maturity” needed at the time they entered college. When asked about factors that affected them being placed on academic probation, seven of the participants stated that they were still in “high school mentality” or that they did not feel that they were “mentally mature” enough to care about attending college or being placed on academic probation at the time. A majority of the participants also perceived that after entering college they lacked confidence in their own ability to achieve intended results. Yve, one of the older, non-traditional participants, spoke at length about her significant lack of care or mental maturity with regard to the entire college experience. She explained how her purpose, at the time, was to obtain the financial aid funds in order to spend it on frivolous purchases.

Before when I came here I had 0 GPA and that's because I was in other schools and I always unofficially withdrew, just never passed freshman stage. So, I was still a freshman, you know, when I came here. I just would not come to school at all...I never was an academic problem as far as, um, not able to do the work or anything like that, because I've always been good academically, you know. It was just my thinking. It was my thinking. I was like, oh, I'm going to stay at home and spend the money and…Yeah, I
was just, um, when I got that big check, I would just stop going to school. I would just stop, and my thinking was off key, I think. I just didn’t care.

Yve’s admission that she would attend college just to “get a check” aligns with the fact that she was not yet mature enough or prepared to attend college. Yve went on to admit that she did not feel that she was not “mystically” prepared for college. This sense-making implied by this participant indicates that she was not prepared in a spiritual or psychological sense and that she was unable to keep long-term commitments or “delay gratification”. This further indicates that Yve was significantly lacking with regard to her mental maturity. The theme of “not caring” or lack of “mental maturity” converges throughout each of the candidate’s responses regarding their feeling of being placed on academic probation. Pati identified her experience similarly stating how she was always told college was going to be different from high school but that “being young and naïve you're just like, "Oh, I'm fine!" And then like you get to college…and fail then you’re not fine.” Pati explained that she had never experienced academic failure or probation due to the fact that she had always been a “top academic student” in high school. This gave her a false sense of confidence when she entered the college, as she did not immediately adjust to her new academic surroundings.

Prior to coming here, I was a really good student. But I don't, you know, I didn’t know how to study. I was just one of those students because I felt so comfortable at school, that me paying attention in class and engaging and taking notes was usually it was more than enough. So I didn't really ever have to go over the material. And when I started struggling because I didn't know how to...Study. I didn't have the discipline to go home and sit and read my textbooks.
Pati’s description regarding her belief in her ability to succeed in college because she was top student in high school suggests there was lack of self-efficacy. Further, her inability to respond to her collegiate environment in an appropriate manner exhibits her lack of mental maturity.

Chris discussed many of the same points that Pati mentioned, stating that he believed that he could eventually “catch up” to his grades much like he did in high school.

I think what happens is, if you're not very familiar with a course, attendance is, like, extremely important and I think I got used to, maybe high school, where you can miss a course, miss a class here and there and you'll come in and you'll be caught up to date and so if you're not familiar with a course, once I missed one to two classes, I really set myself even further back and then at that point.

In Chris’ case, he explained that he thought he would be able to continue in the course and do well if he applied himself to study a bit before his exams. He now understands that he was wrong in his way of thinking. He stated, “it really is not until you take the exam and you see the grades that you realize you didn't know that much.” When asked what makes him a successful student today, Chris acknowledged that he had to, in a sense, “grow up”. He admitted to being more “present” in his academics, placing more importance on completing his coursework with good grades and eventually attaining his degree. In answering the question, this participant was able to make sense of his academic probation in that as he grew older and understood the importance and need for higher education. Chris explained:

“I just felt it and I don't know if that's maturity. I don't know... Something clicked. I mean, I think one part of it is I understood the importance of the degree and maybe my
first time around I didn't think of a degree so it took a lot of menial, low-end jobs working for me to recognize, okay, I need a degree if I want to get out of this situation.”

Chris’ acknowledgement understanding the importance of a degree and where a degree could take him professionally is, in itself, a sign of maturity. While many of the participants discussed their lack of care/mental maturity, Stacy also spoke on this topic stating that she had “just stopped going and honestly did not care.” Stacy was one of the few participants that had been previously expelled due to her academics. She admitted to being “a little bummed” about the experience but didn't really care because she was “just going to school at that point for my mom.” The tone that Stacy used was accusatory, placing the blame of her failures onto her mother. Stacy’s inability to view her own fault with regard to her failure, placement on academic probation, or even her expulsion strongly illustrates her lack of mental maturity.

Lily, like many of the other participants, stated that she felt her placement on academic probation because she was still in “high school phase where it's like, as long as you get the work done, take the notes, you'll be fine.” This idea was echoed by Gloria who admitted that she “wasn't prepared for college altogether” at the time of being placed on academic probation. When asked to describe how she felt about being placed on academic probation, Raquel, one of the last of the study participants, acknowledged that she felt that she was “still young and thought I was still in high school” and that she perceived that everyone considered her a “dropout or whatever”.

**Conclusion**

As students transition from high school to college, they cultivate their identity and their place within their given environments. As students who enter community college, the
participants’ journey through this transition was unique as each of them had experienced and
overcome academic probation.

The participants attempted to transition between the high school and college
environments however; this was made more challenging, in part, that the participants did not perceive themselves to be prepared for college. The participants also felt forced by their families to attend college immediately after graduating from high school rather than taking a break.

Further, they did not perceive themselves to have the mental maturity to attend college as many did not even care to go to class. Also, while many of participants thought themselves to be academically strong students in high school, this did not translate to college. In a very authentic sense, many of these participants had to “grow up” in order to realize the significance of their academic situation and decide whether or not they wanted to succeed. Hand in hand with the sub theme of “mental maturity”, came another concern regarding mental health awareness. Understanding one’s mental abilities and the extent, to which one must seek assistance and identify support, can have detrimental effect on success.

Mental Health Awareness

Community college students who encounter and overcome academic probation may have issues or concerns regarding their mental health and wellness. The first superordinate theme of this study captured the participants struggle as they were “forced” to transition from high school to college physically and mentally. The second subordinate theme identified in this study focuses on the participants’ awareness of their mental health while simultaneously trying to engage in life and commit to their studies. The researcher was able to identify two specific areas of convergence among a majority of the participant that were in direct relation to mental health
awareness. Under this theme, many of the participants illustrated the learning that took place as they came to make sense of their experience during their particular mental health crisis and how they came to understand the significant need to seek help. They desired understanding and awareness, both cognitive and affective, while making sense of their own state of mind in order to seek assistance. The participants also sought the understanding and awareness, specifically from their families, but also from college administration regarding the state of their mental health. The two nested themes that represent these particular areas of convergence across all participants were *seeking/asking for help* and *getting support from others*. Each of these nested themes played a significant role in the decisions the participants made during their placement on academic probation.

**Seeking/Asking for Help**

Most of the participants articulated in various ways that it would have been desirable to reflect upon their situation and have had a better understanding of what they may have been going through emotionally/psychologically while attending college. This became more apparent as the participants were placed on academic probation. Pati’s awareness of her mental health and depression shaped her perceptions about actively seeking and asking for help. Upon entering college, Pati had already been diagnosed with severe anxiety and depression and was taking medication to help control it. The combination of not being as aware of her mental health along with the confidence she had in her academic abilities, led to Pati’s encounter with academic probation.
In response to a question about her perception of what negatively affected academic success, Pati articulated that she encountered a variety of affect due to her diagnoses and refused to seek out assistance. She explained:

Depression is something that I've been battling for a very, very long time now. And I did realize actually when I was at college there was a lot of swinging, a lot of mood swings. I couldn't focus. I was irritable. I was burnt out. And because I had been battling depression for so long and I had started, you know, doing so well, it almost…I didn't want to talk about it because I'm like, "Oh my God, like, the last 10 years of medication and therapy have all come to nothing." But like I said, I kind of had to reconcile, like, it's okay to not be okay.

This acknowledgement demonstrates the significance that adverse effects of mental health issues can have on a student’s academics. Further, this acknowledgement came from a participant who was more aware of her mental health issues than the other participants in this study while at the same time was sense-making about the acceptance of not “being okay”. The impact of being unaware of the state of one’s mental health can have on a student’s educational journey can be devastating. These distinct effects were observed, in particularly, with Study Participant, Raquel.

In Raquel’s case, as disclosed by her, coming from a Dominican household, the women are the providers above all else. When she found herself on academic probation, her mother was disappointed. It was at this that she began to experience mental health issues. Raquel worked full-time during the time she was placed on academic probation because she was expected to provide for the single parent household. She was also expected to clean and cook when she was
not working or in school. Raquel explained that her mother “has always been like really hard on me because I was female…she kind of knew it was going to be hard for me, so she was hard on me from the get.” In juxtaposition to how the other participants perceived support, Raquel’s mother’s treatment, while not the typical support one expects to receive, was what Raquel needed to push herself to do better.

When I started doing good, um, there were so many outside factors, like I had like … I was going through depression, and really bad. So bad some days I didn’t want to even get up, but like I…after I started doing good, like my mom saw me being enrolled, like she was really, “Get up.” Like her support may not be as like, you know, nice and tender…but it was support.

Raquel perceived her mother’s harsh, cold “get up and keep going” attitude to be her mother’s way of showing that she wanted Raquel to succeed. Raquel’s sense-making of this experience allowed her to continue to succeed and eventually do well with her coursework.

For most of the other participants, being placed on academic probation was a “wake up call” to understanding that they may have issues that need to be addressed with regard to mental health. Gloria spoke at length about the realization that she came to after being placed on academic probation. She explained that this disorienting event made her take her mental health issues seriously. After being place on probation, Gloria realized that she was in an abusive relationship in which she chose to end and focused on her mental health and her well-being in general. When asked about how she made sense of her experience on academic probation, Gloria stated:
I had been pregnant and now not knowing that this child wasn't coming to fruition and just trying to find balance in my life at that point. Um, so instead of me going to a school and letting them know that I was having issues, I just kinda took a step back and, um, just tried to find a way to make sense of everything that was going on at that moment. It was a wake-up call for me, and it kinda let me know that I needed to take care of myself at that point and that if I didn't take care of myself I was never gonna fully be at the mindset to ever go back to school at that point.

In articulating that she had to make sense of events happening in her life at the time of being placed on academic probation, Gloria choice to take a “step back and take care” of herself was her first step toward being aware of her mental health and seeking help for it.

In the case with Yve, she perceived that she had mental health issues that caused her to fail regardless of how much she wanted to succeed. She also admitted to being in a negative relationship at the time she was placed on academic probation. In her words, Yve explained the following:

Yeah, uh, it was just that I had a... I think had an, um, uh imbalance. You know what I mean? Because, like I wanted, I always wanted to graduate from school, and, I seen a graduation one time at Washington Square Park, the NYU students. And I always wanted that for myself but, but um, my logic was just, I was just not doing the right things for me. You know what I mean? Because I had a boyfriend he was taking care of everything. I really, really wasn't an independent thinker. I was really co-dependent, more so than now, extremely co-dependent. And, today I just want to be all about me.
Throughout her interview, Yve would admit to starting at a new college when she perceived herself to be ready only to stop attending once she received her financial aid check which she would spend on herself. Yve’s self-defeating behavior and co-dependency made it extremely difficult for her to see a reason to succeed in her academic. She also lacked the support of family or friends at this time, which exacerbated her situation. When asked about what she thought helped her become successful, Yve acknowledged that she actively sought help and support for her mental health issues. Further, that seeking help truly helped her to engage on campus in a variety of ways. Yve sought the assistance at the college’s Personal Counseling Office, and participated in therapy because of her personal issues. Yve explained that the staff in the Counseling Office helped in bringing these issues to her attention. The staff had encouraged her to seek out other activities to participate in such as joining a club. Yve took her sessions with the Counseling Office seriously and after realizing that there wasn’t a club for her interest, the Spanish language, she went on to create one. Engaging at her college in this way increase Yve’s motivation to continue to do well in her courses.

The three other participants each briefly touched upon or admitted to experiencing depression during their experience of being placed on academic probation. Chris, Rob, and Lily each spoke about having experienced mild depression at various times throughout their tenure on academic probation and expressed how, through seeking help and support from friends and family, they were able to overcome, some, if not all, of the effects that depression had placed upon them and their academics.

**Getting Support from Others**
The second sub theme identified, almost concurrently, along with seeking/asking for help was the idea of gaining acceptance and support from others. Each of the eight participants expressed either disappointment or a sense resigned expectation in the lack strong support they needed from family, friends and constituents within their institution. For many of the participants, the idea that their families would support them through mental health issues or illness was highly unlikely. In Chris’ case, when asked about the support he received from family he gave a chuckle and stated that his parents’ support was “nonexistent”. Many of the participants resigned themselves to the idea that they would never gain full support or understanding from some family members. However, gaining acceptance and support from their institution was just as vitally important. Chris went on to state why he perceived he ended up on academic probation:

I think as a low ... lower-class, Latino student, I think I struggled with identifying with people so I kept to myself a lot, so in many instances, I didn't go to class just because I wanted to be by myself, so personal issues kind of crept in as to why I didn't go to class and then, because I didn't go to class, really rolled over into me doing poorly in class.

These “personal issues” that Chris experienced are what many of the participants in this study allude to when discussing mental health awareness. Because Chris could not rely on support from his family, he perceives this to be one of the reasons why he was placed on academic probation.

Raquel, who comes from a household where women are expected to be the breadwinners and keep the home in order, stated that while her mother’s strong “push” was a type of support, her mother’s behavior was still not the strong support she required. As Raquel explained, she
found her support in an unlikely place, in the middle of a crowded hall at the college where she had been having a very loud argument with her father on her cell phone. This was also a breaking point for her. While Raquel did not state what the argument was about, she explained that two Public Safety Officers approached her to ask about her situation. Because these officers had overheard her conversation, and realized that Raquel was hesitant to discuss her personal matter, they explained that she could speak with a female officer in their office. Raquel explained that, “Because they were guys, it was a little bit uncomfortable. And they were like, “Come. We have somebody that you can talk to.” There was … There’s actually a detective who deals with all that, all, everything that was going on with me. She was great. I had no idea this was here.” The officer Raquel spoke with is one who is experienced in dealing with domestic violence and rape crisis. Situations of this nature are not identified in the research regarding academic probation, student persistence and student success. In Raquel’s case, she required support from not only the Public Safety Officer with whom she spoke with, but from the personal counseling services within the college as well as the academic support services of her advisor and support services with regard to tutoring. While Raquel did not disclose the situation that brought her to these particular services of the college, it can be determined that the severity of her situation coupled with making sense of her mental health awareness and her placement on academic probation are not typical. In response to Raquel’s sense-making of her situations, she needed to take several moments to compose herself enough to eventually respond.

In Chris’ case, the lack of support from family and lack of engagement from his institution, along with his lack in self-efficacy believing he would eventually “catch up” to the work and pass, contributed his being placed on academic probation. According to Chris, his
parents had full confidence that he would succeed and never truly engaged themselves into their son’s academic journey. When asked about support from family, Chris stated the following:

I didn't tell anyone the first two times it happened. Um, my parents asked me how I was doing and I said, "Oh, I'm doing well." My parents were, at that time in particular, so self-involved with each other that there was no emphasis, like in high school it was like, let me see your report card. So, if I told my parents I was doing fine, they didn't press on it. They were going through their own nonsense so they didn't ask. I think, I mean, considering where my parents' education level was at, I think they felt like I had this all in the basket, like I could self-navigate my way through this.

Lack of support from his parents made Chris less likely to ask for help when he finally realized he was in deeper trouble than he first originally perceived. Chris further expressed that his institution did not offer the kind of the support he needed at the time of his being placed on academic probation. After meeting with his advisor, Chris explained that the encounter felt, “like, it was more of a lecture”. When asked to elaborate on this encounter, Chris stated:

It was more of like, you know, I really don't want to see you here again with these same grades, you know, it's kind of like when you start getting to that dichotomy and you kind of like brush them off and you really don't get into, like, dialogues. I wish I had more dialogue, whether it was a professional or someone else from the school, I think that would have been very useful and I would say I didn't understand the importance of, like, someone in the family getting a degree, like being, like, a first-generation college student. I think I took that for granted.
In this statement, Chris eludes to feelings of dismissal and disregard. More discourse and
dialogue, perhaps from a peer mentor or personal counselor would have played more of a role in
assisting him during probation.

Three of the last four participants each articulated that they would have liked to have
someone to talk to about problems that were occurring either at home or within their
relationships but that they did not know who to go to with regard to this. Stacy was the only
participant who stated that she did not perceive her mental health as an issue that contributed to
her being place on academic probation. She also did not see the need to seek help from anyone
other than her family whom she explained, were fully supportive of her.

**Conclusion**

As community college students who were placed on academic probation, the participants
in this study found that they were experiencing more than just academic issues, they were also
making sense of what was going on with their mental health.

For a majority of the participants becoming aware of their mental health issues while on
academic probation was problematic, as the participants did not perceive that they had the strong
support they believed they needed from their own families to succeed in college. Some
participants also believe that the college did not offer sufficient support beyond academic and
advisement.

Further, some of the participants who did not seek help admitted that they did not know
where they could find help or if help was even available. Also, while many of participants were
able to admit to encountering mental health issues that may have adversely affected their
academics, some found that they could not ask for help from family or get the support that they required from others or the college. Seeking out and receiving support was vital to these participants’ success in overcoming academic probation. Other vital forms of support are engaging the students on campus through the many resources and programs offered and through participating in a variety of activities on campus.

**Student Engagement**

Students entering community college for the first time are significantly dependent on the communication and engagement they receive from the institution in order to keep them informed and on track to success. Engaging the student from the time of acceptance into the institution throughout their tenure and even after graduation has been shown to help students stay motivated to succeed. For a majority of the participants in this study, not being privy to or knowledgeable in the many financial, academic and extra-curricular resources put them at a disadvantage and played a part in their placement on academic probation. The first two superordinate themes identified in this study discussed the participants’ emotional struggles and how these encountered issues negatively affected their academic journeys. The third and final theme identified in this study focuses on the lack of student engagement on both the part of the college and the part of the participants. The researcher was able to establish two specific areas where this theme converges among a majority of the participants. Under this theme, many of the participants discussed the plethora of advantages that they perceived they might have missed out on due to their lack of knowledge regarding resources and programs at the college. The participants also perceived that participating on campus has had a strong, positive affect on their motivation and
success. The two sub themes that represent this particular area of convergence across most of the participants were *knowledge of campus resources and programs* and *participating on campus*.

**Knowledge of Campus Resources and Programs**

A majority of the participants expressed their desire to have had more engagement with their institution. In particular, seven of the eight participants articulated that they did not about the many useful resources or programs that were available to them as students of the college. For study participant, Raquel, who had been struggling financially throughout her tenure at the college, she spoke at length about some of the financial resources that she could not utilize because she had obtained knowledge of their existence too late to partake of them. When asked about the advice she would offer to a student on academic probation today, Raquel stated that she would inform the student to “find out about everything going on here because we’re never actually informed.” Many of the programs that are made to assist the students entering community college are dependent on the number of credits one has earned, whether or not a student is receiving financial aid and if the student had applied prior to enrolling into the college. For many of these programs that partially or fully pay for tuition, books and transportation such as College Opportunity to Prepare for Employment (COPE), the Accelerated Studies Associate Program (ASAP) or College Discovery (CD), a student must apply prior to entering the college or in their first semester. If they do not, then they become ineligible which is a substantial loss for students who may not have received the information on these programs in time to apply. Raquel explained that students should always look for the resources available and try even if they may not qualify because “we’re coming from these high schools that aren’t the best, and then we’re coming to…to community colleges that aren’t helping us.”
Chris explained the cost of not being informed when he was placed on academic probation. One of the administrative effects of being placed on academic probation is that a student can no longer utilize their financial aid. If that student is dependent on loans, like Chris was, and takes the suggestion of “taking a break” from their advisor, that advice could cost them if their loans default. Chris reflected on this as he spoke about being informed. He explained “I wish I understood was the fact that once I was thrown out of school, that I had to start paying my loans immediately... That is something I had not even predicted, especially when you're coming from that much debt.” Having to pay his loans for a certain period of time before he could become eligible for financial aid once again hindered Chris’ ability to achieve academic success sooner. Becoming knowledgeable with the resource of financial aid and what happens to it if a student ends up on academic probation or expulsion is absolutely essential to a student’s success in college.

For Gloria, the importance of advisement and speaking with professor at every possible opportunity was at the top of her campus resources list. The program that a student follows as per their advisor becomes “like your bible” according to Gloria. Having this map or “bible” made it easier for Gloria where she was going and what to do. She also stated that most of her professors had a “open-class policy, open-door policy” which it her more likely to succeed as a student. It was these resources along, with tutoring and personal counseling that allowed Gloria to make sense of her path to succeed after overcoming academic probation.

Unlike many of the other participants, Lily explained that being trained in and understanding the technological resources were significant to her. Within the institution, there are several systems (Email, OSESS – Advisement/Grades System, Blackboard and CUNYFirst –
Registration and everything else) utilized by the campus that run the gambit from admissions through to degree audits for graduation. According to Lily, while students aren’t really trained well in navigating these systems, the most important one – email – is not given the weight or significance it should be given at the start of a student’s educational journey. With regard to her email, Lily explained that she was not told at all “to be on top of checking it. I wasn't advised on how to check it. I assume it was just something that I was just supposed to know, or I should've learned in, you know, freshmen, the orientation class.” She went on to talk about the importance of being notified and how the college did not make the notification of being placed on academic probation apparent or important:

I don't understand why I didn't get more than just a little notification. Because I mean now, like I get notifications for everything. Now. But then, it was just like, you know. And it was hard to find. Like I just, I found it from trying to learn OSESS better, and I clicked on a tab and the tab took me to like, these little notifications and it was like all the way at the bottom under all events. Like if this is really important, why is it just a little notification?

In this participant’s case, not having a full understanding of and ability to properly navigate these institutional systems can be a significant roadblock to student success.

**Participating on Campus**

One of the final sub themes identified among the participants was the desire to participate or, in essence, be a part of their college campus. Of the eight participants in this study, seven expressed strong, positive assertions regarding campus participation. Out of the seven
participants, five confirmed that they participate in one or more ways on their campus and that
these activities assisted in their success.

Study participants, Gloria, Pati, Chris, Yve and Stacy, each spoke positively about their
participation on campus. Gloria explained that she started participate after joining an honor
society on her campus. She described her experience of becoming “very active in Phi Theta
Kappa” which allowed her to “branch out into being at the IOC which is being able to participate
with all the other organizations and clubs on campus, and I was able to see college for more than
just academics.” Phi Theta Kappa is the international honor society of two-year colleges and
academic programs, particularly community colleges and junior colleges. The IOC is the
acronym for the Inter-Organizational Council, a body at the college that oversees all clubs and
organizations. Gloria’s sense-making of her participation on campus allows her to understand
college is more than just attending classes, taking exams and attaining a degree. Participation
gives more meaning to the college experience.

Both Pati and Chris disclose similar experiences regarding their individual participation
at the college. Chris explained that just becoming part of a club enriched his college experience
and helped him become a more successful student. For Chris, becoming President of the
Criminal Justice Club “opened the door to so many other opportunities. I eventually joined our
honor society once I found out I qualified for it and was president of the honor society for three
semesters and that definitely was not something I did before.” In comparing his engagement on
campus now to when he was on academic probation, Chris explains how he feels “weird” about
attaining academic success now and did not quite understand what it meant to when he began
getting letters about being on the President’s List or being in the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society
but that “motivated me even more. It made me realize, like, I was, like, on the right path. It also made me not feel so insecure and, and so stupid.” Chris went on to explain his insight regarding the way in which he is treated by his peers and faculty now as opposed to how he was treated when he was on academic probation:

You know, I knew I had good grades and people took me serious whereas before, I think people spoke down to you more once they saw your GPA. You really had no authority to speak up for yourself because the grades didn't reflect that so it's more of like, well, what do you know about yourself? You have a 1.5. Whereas now, when I have a 3.8, 3.9, and 4.0, people just take you more seriously and are more willing to help you when you are, when you are struggling rather than just say, go get a tutor.

Being able to be taken seriously for Chris was an important step in his motivation to succeed. One can imply from Chris’ aforementioned tone that being on academic probation and having low grades make students on academic probation feel invisible with any standing or having any voice.

Pati explained her similar experience with participation and success. She stated that once she began obtaining good grades she was able to identify that she was capable of engaging and doing well with a variety of other tasks. Pati disclosed that she began working in the Office of Student Life and made the decision to run for and become an Executive Officer in the Student Government Association. She explained that she started participating in Phi Theta Kappa but that her greatest legacy was participating in the building of the first Safe Space Program at the college. In terms of her extracurricular activities and her success as a student, Pati stated:
I was in Phi Theta Kappa, I became secretary and vice president and then I became the president and then, um ... In the meantime, that I was in Phi Theta Kappa, I started working on the Safe Space program which we now have here which is still successfully going. Yay! And it's like, oh, these are all things, like, maybe besides being a student, and I think it was just very, like, reaffirming. That's what I think.

For Gloria, Chris and Pati, their participation on campus allowed them to engage in activities where they could, not only challenge themselves, but also assist other students at the college. It also motivated them to continue to become successful students with regard to their academics as their peers and faculty take them much more seriously.

Yve explained that she became more active on campus at the suggestion of her personal counselor. After having sought out therapy in the Office of Personal Counseling, Yve’s counselor told her that she should engage in areas on campus and suggested she join a club. When asked about her participation, Yve stated:

So I joined a few clubs and then, after Spanish, I'm like, "Who can I practice with when there's nobody to practice with? Like, no, we need a club here!" And I just seen an opening and I just took it and started the Spanish Club, you know. Yeah I think it's excellent and that's what they say employers want to see, and you know, they want to see that you're just doing more.

Yve’s excitement and pride in her accomplishment of created a club is apparent in the excerpt above. Being a participant in her college through this club and allowing others to participate not only contributes to Yve’s success but to other students of the college as well.
In Stacy’s case, she was able to build relationships with her peers through participation on campus as a Peer Mentor. Stacy stated that her engagement makes her more successful as a student because the peer mentors are “like a team. They let me know, like, they're part of my team. They want to see me succeed.” And while Stacy indicated that she is not a part of any club on campus yet, she has a great interest to join the Dance Club.

The final three study participants each stated that they do not participate on campus however, two of them, Raquel and Lily, expressed that they would participate if there were more programs available on the weekends.

**Conclusion**

Two of the many ways students become engaged and successful on a college campus is by being knowledgeable of the resources and programs available at their institution and by participating in one of the college’s clubs, organizations and in events presented by particular departments or programs. Many resources and/or programs generally made available to the campus community were not marketed in a way that could be easily accessed or understood by a majority of these study participants, thus became missed opportunities. Having access to these resources or programs can assist in student success and completion, especially in the case where a program or resources can assist financially. Further, without appropriate knowledge of the systems utilized by the college in which students must navigate, much of the information that these participants may need to succeed will fall through the cracks of these systems.
Participating on campus is one of the many ways students get to develop relationships with their peers and faculty, engage in extra- and co-curricular activities and become involved with clubs and groups of particular interests and academic. In essence, participating on campus can assist students in becoming successful. However, this task is made especially difficult at a community college where many of the students attending more than likely work, take care or children or parents, or have obligations otherwise that do not allow them the time to engage on their campus.

Those study participants who were able to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities experienced increased success by their engagement on campus. However, more programming and activities should be made available on evening and weekend for students who cannot attend events or join clubs during weekdays due to work and personal obligations.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how community college students who experience academic probation in their first year make sense/meaning of that experience and transition to become successful. A careful analysis of the interview data yielded several insights into how the participant had experiences, and made sense of, their own transition journeys.

The participants perceived that they were not prepared for college after graduating high school. They believed that they were not ready academically to enter college at the time they were placed on academic probation. Further, they perceived themselves to have been forced by their families to attend college immediately after graduating from high school rather than taking a break. Further, the participants perceived that experiencing academic probation made them come to the realization that college was very different from high school. Studying and
completing assignments in college required a more serious and mature attitude and way of thinking.

The participants perceived that they did not have the mental maturity to attend college. They did not understand the significance of a degree or why they should achieve one. While many of participants thought themselves to be academically strong students, the participants found that they did not themselves to be not as equipped to succeed in their courses. Many of the participants perceived that they had to “grow up” in order to understand the importance of their academic situation to understand why achieving good grades and attaining a degree was important to them in order to become successful.

The participants also perceived that they had experienced more than just academic issues during the time of their placement on academic probation. They found that they were experiencing many mental health issues. A majority of the participants perceived that they did not fully accept or understand that they were experiencing mental health issues while on academic probation. While a few of the participants understood that they needed to reconcile their academics with their mental health issues or illnesses, many of the participants had to make sense of their mental health issues before understanding how it affected their academics. The participants also did not perceive that they had the support they needed from their own families with regard to the mental health issues. Some participants also perceived that the college did not offer adequate or appropriate support beyond academic and advisement. Some participants had voiced concerns that they did not know where they could even find help for their mental health issues. Many of the participants perceived that they experienced depression and a host of other mental health issues that negatively affected their success. These participants admitted that they
had to ultimately seek out help in order to deal with these issues but also found that they needed support, not just from their families but also from their peers, faculty and the college. Many of the participants were able to make sense of and reconcile their mental health issues once they were able to find the appropriate help and support they needed, allowing them to continue to be successful.

A majority of the participants perceived that there was a lack of student engagement on both the part of the institution and on their own part as a student. The participants were concerned that they were not knowledgeable of the resources and programs available at their institution and that they perceived that they had missed out on opportunities that might have been available to them at the time of their placement on academic probation. The participants perceived that access to these resources or programs could have aided in their success. The participants were also concerned that they did not perceive themselves to be knowledgeable of the systems utilized by the college.

The majority of participants perceived that participating on campus helped them to develop valuable relationships with their peers and faculty, allowed them to engage in extra- and co-curricular activities and become involved with clubs and groups of particular interests and academic. The participants who were able to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities perceived that they had increased success by their engagement on campus. A majority of the participants perceived that participating on the campus motivated their success and pushed them to become role models, as they perceived themselves to be taken more seriously as a successful student. Many of the participants also concluded that gaining a better understanding of the college technological systems, which include email, Blackboard, and a variety of other
registration and grading systems, helped them stay on top of their academic and aware of campus social and academic events.

In the next chapter, a summary of each of these findings will be thoroughly discussed along with their implications for practice and future research.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to investigate what being placed on academic probation meant to community college students and how it impacted the decisions these students made to their academic, personal, and professional lives. This study also measured the extent of the students’ knowledge with regard to academic, personal and professional resources available to them. This study applied Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (1991) for its theoretical framework, which explores making meaning, interpretation and learning as it occurs through an individual’s particular cultural and social norms, and their way of understanding, their language and their personal experience. This study also utilized a qualitative research approach, which focused on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live (Holloway, 1997; Malterud, 2001). While a variety of diverse approaches exist under the umbrella of this type of research, most of these approaches have the same goal and that is to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures. Using a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore the behavior, perspectives and experiences of each of the eight participants in this study. Allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding through first-hand experiences, truthful reporting, and quotations of the participants’ actual conversations led to the identification of several findings. The analysis of the interview data from this study yielded three superordinate themes. The superordinate themes identified in this study were: 1) college readiness 2) mental health awareness; 3) being/staying informed. Superordinate themes and nested themes were identified as those recurring in at least seven of the eight participants’ interview data.

This chapter explained the purpose of this research study, offered a description of the theoretical lens and approach the researcher utilized, and an explanation of how the use of the
lens and approach led to the study’s findings. A full list of the superordinate themes was also given. This chapter will continue with a presentation of each of the findings identified within this study and how each finding is positioned in the current literature. After the findings are presented, the researcher will discuss the implications of these findings for the practice setting, provide specific examples of how these findings can be used in the practice setting, and suggest areas of future investigations that this research study proposes. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of community college students who were placed on academic probation in their first year, how they made sense of these experiences in order to become academically successful.

**College Readiness**

For the participants in this study, the perception of college readiness or how prepared they perceived themselves to be upon entering community college when they were placed on academic probation was significantly lacking. They perceived that they were required to attend college by parents, friends and the concept that college was the next step in their educational journey. The phenomenon of transitioning from high school to college occurred in the vestiges of adolescence and, for the majority of these participants, they had already arrived at adulthood at the time they were interviewed. While the participants’ believed that their transition from high school to college occurred due, in part, to parental “force” as well as the pressure of the strong social view that college was the next absolute step in their academic life, they also admitted that they had no concrete idea of the importance or meaning of earning a degree. This demonstrated a lack of college readiness that was more emotional rather than the traditional “academically unprepared” college readiness that many freshman students experience. Much of the current literature on college readiness is from the perspective of how students who graduate from high
schools in lower socio-economic areas are not academically prepared for college; this was not the case with regard to these participants (Barnett, 2011; VanKim, Laska, Ehlinger, Lust, & Story, 2010; Fike & Fike, 2008). While there is an abundance of literature that discuss internal and external locus of control that can be applied to what negatively influences these participants experiences, such as the fact that these participants were respecting their parents’ wishes (external locus of control), the participants also faced the dilemma of being emotional unprepared for college (internal locus of control); there is a gap in the up-to-date literature that speaks to the lack of “emotional” college readiness with regard to community college students in their first year (Kyllonen et al., 2014; Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2006; Fazey, & Fazey, 2001). Current literature in psychology defines locus of control as the degree to which people believe that they have control over the outcome of events in their lives, as opposed to external forces beyond their control (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008; Findley & Cooper, 1983). This theory has since become an aspect of personality studies concluding that people who have a strong internal locus of control believe events in their life derive primarily from their own actions while others with a strong external locus of control tend to praise or blame external factors such as the teacher or the exam (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008; Findley & Cooper, 1983; Rotter, 1966). Because students who are placed on academic probation have been defined in the literature as having a strong external locus of control (Goble, Rosenbaum, Stephan, 2008; Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Tinto, 1993), they believe that forces beyond their control have already determined the fate of their educational journeys (Zimbardo, 1985; Rotter, 1966). This theory resonates with the participants in this study, as they believed they had no control over the decision on attending college immediately after high school.
In his work on adult transformational learning theory, Mezirow (1995) posited that in order for learning to occur there is a distinct process for adults to learn to think for themselves, through true emancipation from sometimes mindless or unquestioning acceptance of what we have to come to know through our life experience, especially those things that our culture, religions, and personalities may predispose us towards. According to Mezirow (2000), these transformations often follow some variation of phases of meaning, which become realized. One particular phase is a disorienting dilemma which is described by Mezirow as an event that can be the cause for a physical or emotional occurrence in one’s life. While Mezirow lists a variety of “dilemmas”, the one that resonates with this study and its participants is going back to school (either as an older student changing a career or as a freshman out of high school). This is then followed by a variation of phases, which include self-examination or a type of taking stock of oneself in order to then critically reflect on who you are. This particular development or transformation, mentally from child to adult, adds to the state of emotional readiness the participants perceived themselves to be lacking at the time they were placed on probation. However, these disorienting dilemmas and periods of transformation and growth are not a one-time occurrence. They can occur repeatedly throughout a person’s lifetime.

In order to engage in this study, the participants had to have been placed on academic probation in their first year at community college making thus the majority of the participants were between the ages of 17 – 23 at the time of their placement on academic probation. Thus the participants’ stage of life and identity development was also a factor that influenced their transition. Similarly, in his work on identity development, Erik Erikson (1968) described this stage of life, or rather in the case of this study, first year college students, to be the abandonment of childhood or adolescence and the beginning of adulthood. Erikson (1968) posited that one
moves through various stages of identity development and that development itself occurs when one reaches a psychological or “emotional” crisis. Erikson assumes that a crisis occurs at each stage of development. For Erikson (1963), these crises are of a psychosocial nature because they involve the psychological needs of the individual conflicting with the needs of society. The transition to college can be regarded as a disorienting dilemma or a time of crisis for students as they transition from one environment to the next while, at the same time, perceiving this transition to be an expected social norm and requirement. As the students’ experience this dilemma/crisis, they are also in the mists of developing a sense of self and trying to understand the need and importance of their role within this new environment.

While transitioning from high school to college is symbolic of the move from childhood to adulthood for most students, for community college students in particular, it is also the time where they still question themselves and their ability to succeed in that transition independently. This represents a challenge to community college students who perceive themselves to be at an academic disadvantage as a result of their inability to gain admission into a four-year college. Adelman (1999) determined that the strongest predictor of college matriculation and degree attainment is a rigorous high school curriculum; however, studies consistently show that underserved students, especially in low socio-economic communities, all too often do not complete a curriculum that affords college preparation and thus often take remedial level reading, writing, and math courses (Barbatis, 2010; Isaak, Graves & Mayers, 2006; Twigg, 2005; Trombley, 2001). For some of the participants in this study who may have perceived themselves as stellar students prior to entering community college, they found themselves at a loss when they were placed on academic probation. According to the literature, there are cases where well-prepared, high achieving students find themselves on academic probation due to issues with
financial, personal, and work-related responsibilities (James & Graham, 2010; Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey & Jenkins, 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Tinto, 1993).

For a small percentage of the participants in this study, the issues of work and financial responsibilities were perceived to be, in part, the blame for their circumstances. For the other participants who already perceive themselves to be at an “academic disadvantage”, being placed on academic probation in their first year of college was defeating. Specific to transitioning from high school to college, the participants in the current study expressed that, upon entering college, they continued to cling to their high school behavior and mindset. They also expressed the lack of desire to enter college immediately after graduating high school. Many of them wanted to take a break after high school but acquiesced to their family’ wishes. The aforementioned research suggests that several factors can contribute to "emotional" college readiness; these include students’ ability to adapt to new environments, handle negative emotions in constructive ways, and forge healthy relationships. According to this literature, the more prepared a student is for the emotional challenges of college and for the anxieties that might come with it, such as changing study habits, making friends, and dealing with increased independence; the better and more successful that student’s college experience is. For those students who feel less emotionally prepared than their peers, they tend to earn lower grades. This aptly applies to the participants in this study. According to the literature, students placed on academic probation are defined as the following: having little or no self-esteem, less social interaction or skills, higher distrust of others, and have less ethical values than students in good academic standing (Isaak, Graves & Mayers, 2006; Trombley, 2001; Coleman & Freedman, 1996). The research on students who are placed on academic probation also states that these students tend to be less goal-oriented or lack a clear understanding of what their goals are (Isaak, Graves & Mayers, 2006). Thus these
students are in jeopardy of failing and/or dropping out completely and often need additional student support assistance and greater clarification with regard to academic, personal, and professional career development goals. With regard to the participants in this study, the research is in direct alignment with how these participants perceived themselves and how they believed others, such as parents, professors and the college, perceived them.

As for the participants’ desire to “take a break” before college, while this lack of enthusiasm to enter college is not uncommon, there is little to no literature that addresses the lack of interest/care that students may have in pursuing a college degree immediately following high school with regard to this topic. As for the lack of “emotional readiness” to enter college, some literature in the area of psychology and sociology apply to these participants (Kyllonen et al., 2014; Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2006; Fazey, & Fazey, 2001).

Although the participants’ adjustment to the transition from high school to college could be partly attributed to their psychosocial development, the role of self-efficacy/mental maturity was also important. Introduced by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is the concept that refers to the perceptions an individual has with regard to their capacity to control the behaviors required to accomplish specific goals. The way this concept differs from locus of control is that it relates to the competence in defined situations and activities rather than more general perceptions about control. Bandura has also emphasized differences between self-efficacy and self-esteem, using examples where low self-efficacy (for instance, in salsa dancing) are less likely to result in low self-esteem because competence in that particular area may not be very significant to an individual. Self-efficacy is defined as the levels of confidence individuals have in their ability to execute a course of action or attain specific performance outcomes (Bandura, 1997). He hypothesized that self-efficacy affects an individual’s choice of activities, effort, and persistence.
As such, students placed on academic probation may be negatively affected by self-doubt regarding their academic and motivational ability (Kyllonen et al., 2014; Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2006; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994). It is very likely that the participants in this study had a degree of perceived self-efficacy that increased or decreased through academic or professional accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social influences, and emotional stimulation (e.g., stress, anxiety). Bandura’s theory lends itself well to the perception these participants had regarding their lack of confidence in their ability to attain specific performance outcomes or lack of care to obtain a degree (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002).

The participants in this study also expressed that they did not acknowledge the significance of higher education or the importance of earning a degree. While the literature on community college student success and persistence touches on the transition and adjustment students faced upon entering college, the researcher found little to no data with regards to students understanding of the importance of attaining a degree. In a study conducted by Amey and Long (1998), the researchers compared underprepared students and concluded that differences in outcomes for the students who were either successful or unsuccessful were related to “actions taken by the students and/or the institution while the student was in attendance” (p. 5). Because the responsibility for success is placed on the students while attending college, this self-regulating behavior may assist in gauging college readiness. In yet another study conducted by Smith and Commander (1997), after having observed student behavior within the classroom, the researchers concluded that many students, both in regular and developmental classes, failed to understand college culture. This can be said of the participants in this study where many of them admitted that they failed to understand the importance of obtaining a degree even though furthering one’s education after high school education is increasingly seen as a vitally important
part of a person’s life, both for participation and success in the knowledge economy (Kyllonen et al., 2014; Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994). For the majority of community college students, attending and graduating from college may be viewed as a rite of passage for better social mobility and success (professionally, financially and personally) in our society (Ishitani, 2003b; Cabrera, & La Nasa, 2001), however, the existing research on students placed on academic probation reveals that they do not academically succeed in college compared with students who do not experience academic probation and first generation students who likely have college-educated parents (Kyllonen et al., 2014; Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005). The majority participants in the study were second generation and had other family members who had attended college, indicating that the findings do not concur with the research. Further, students who are placed on academic probation are more likely to depart from their educational pursuits than their counterparts over time (Ishitani, 2003b; Cabrera, & La Nasa, 2001). While the literature regarding these statements may be accurate for a majority of community college students on academic probation, this is not the case with the participants in this study. Each of the participants were no longer on academic probation and many were preparing to graduate and transfer to their four-year institutions at the time of their interview. In his work on student persistence, Tinto (1993) theorized on the influence that student integration has on persistence. He further posited that student integration occurs on two dimensions, the academic and the social. Students must connect to the intellectual life of the college for academic integration to occur while social integration occurs when students develop connections and relationships outside of the classroom. For the participants in this study, once they were able to integrate themselves to the college and its culture, they were better able to succeed.
The participants in this study posited that they were not mature mentally/emotionally for college at the time they were placed on academic probation. In psychology, emotional maturity, also referred to as emotional intelligence, is the ability to control your emotions and respond to the environment in an appropriate manner (Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, 2011; Mayer, et al, 2011). This particular ability is generally one that is learned rather than instinctive. Emotional maturity also encompasses having an awareness of correct behavior and knowing when to act, as well as having average intellectual capacity as per the circumstances and the societal culture one lives in. While the findings in this study concur with the literature on emotional intelligence and adult learning, it also offers a better understanding of the mindset of students who are placed on academic probation. For the participants in this study, they essentially had to “grow up” emotionally/mentally while experiencing the outcomes of their time on academic probation.

Adult development and maturity theories, such as Mezirow’s (1991) Transformative Learning Theory, include the purpose in life concept, in which maturity emphasizes a clear comprehension of one’s “life purpose, directedness, and intentionality, which contributes to the feeling that life is meaningful” (Ryff, 1989). Thus, having mental maturity allows for meaning making in all aspects of life. The status of maturity is distinguished by relying less on others such as parents and overseeing one’s own decision-making acts. Although emotional maturity is specifically grounded in the autonomy of one's decision-making ability, these outcomes are deeply embedded in not only cognition, but also in lifelong processes of emotional, social and moral development.

There are a variety of theorists that have provided frameworks for recognizing the indicators of maturity. Mezirow’s (1991) theory utilized in this study is but one of the theories. Erikson’s (1968) theory regarding the stages of psychosocial development characterizes the evolution into adult maturity, with each maturational stage represented by a certain kind of psychosocial
conflict. In particular, the "Identity" stage is defined as being mainly concerned with issues of self/role exploration and self/role confusion. These theories have shaped the investigation of adolescent development and reflect the limitations of cognition prior to adulthood. It is important to note that while Erikson’s theory address specific ages where identity and roles change, Mezirow’s theory does not indicate the age where maturity transpires. Thus, indicating that maturity can be realized at any age beyond childhood. This is significant as a percentage of students who attend community colleges are nontraditional with regard to age. The literature on college readiness literature suggests that having a solid sense of identity and positive self-image are important emotional assets for students from at-risk and lower socioeconomic populations, which are more likely to be represented in community colleges (Isaak, Graves & Mayers, 2006; Trombley, 2001). In particular, the research strongly supports the importance of high expectations among these students (Lippman, Atienza, Rivers, and Keith, 2008, p. iii). Thus dropping or stopping out may be a way to minimize cognitive dissonance, if community college students, perhaps emboldened with a strong sense of identity and an enhanced self-concept, have unrealistic expectations about their preparation for college work. This aptly applies to a few participants who were top students in high school.

All of the participants in this study recognized that they were not, in many ways, prepared to enter college. Many of the participants believed they didn’t understand what the significance of earning a college degree meant. They discussed the need to take a break before entering college. The participants also shared stories of how they perceived entering college after high school was a mandatory life step by, not only their family but by society. The participants’ responses demonstrated the influence that their parents and society had on them as they entered college. Several participants in this study found it difficult to adjust or transition to
college as they perceived themselves to be emotional unprepared and immature. This perception resulted in the participants lack of engagement which ultimately added to their negative experiences in the college. The lack of emotional maturity/intelligence, engagement and identity, and understanding the importance of education were significant barriers to their success.

**Mental Health Awareness**

Of the eight participants in this study, all of them perceived themselves to have had mental health issues or perceived that they should have be more conscious of their mental health before and during the time they were placed on academic probation. Some of the participants admitted to entering college with a variety of mental health issues which they perceived intensified their academic probation experiences. For the participants in this study, who already discerned themselves to be “failures” due to their placement on academic probation, they expressed the significance of seeking/asking support from their institution. These participants also stressed the need to have the support of their immediate family and friends. This indicated that, for the participants in this study, having a lack of mental health awareness and dealing mental health issues prior to being placed on and during academic probation was the most prevalent and dangerous theme that was identified in this study.

For many first time college students, the stress of entering college and adapting to new ways of studying, making friends or becoming increasing more independent can adversely affect them from an emotional point of view. For the participants in this study, this was exacerbated by the fact that some were in abusive relationships or were already suffering from anxiety and depression and one or more other mental health diagnoses. According to Zivin et al. (2009), a lack of student awareness and/or unwillingness to utilize campus mental health resources
suggests that, although many students have knowledge of mental health problems and their causes, they are not prepared or do not want to apply the knowledge when they encounter a mental health issue. Some of the participants in this study acknowledged that they did not actively seek out counseling services before or at the time of their placement on academic probation.

Within the theme of mental health awareness, the participants in this study understood that there was an absolute need to seek/ask for help. For many of the participants, they were able to connect to an administrator on their campus for assistance. Some of the participants also found assistance through the services offered via the public safety officers who service the campus. However, there are still a small percentage of participants that deals with these issues on their own. The participants expressed the need for students who experience mental health issues to actively seek or ask for help on their campuses. However, they also believed that the campus must make students in crisis more aware of the personal counseling services offered at the college. While most community colleges do offer some sort of personal counseling, the lack of psychiatric care is worrisome since many community college students are at an increased risk for depression, anxiety disorders and other mental health problems compared with their traditional university student counterparts. Two-year college students are more likely than university students to be employed or supporting family members while they attend school, these particular types of stressors that can take their toll on these students’ mental health (Perna, 2006; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Chaney et al., 1998). The lack of services for these students is also troubling because commuter students are particularly vulnerable to having their problems go unnoticed on campus.
For students facing mental health issues, *support from others* can have a significantly positive effect on their personal and academic lives. The participants in this study wanted support from their families and friends. They wanted their parents to understand what they were going through emotionally and to support them through this experience. The participants also wanted acceptance and support from their campus. For most of the participants in this study, they were able to gain initial support from family, friends, loved ones and their institution however, they strongly expressed that students who encounter academic probation in their first year should *seek/ask for help* and have the support of others. Potential resources for this kind of support for students facing mental health problems in any college setting are the personal counseling office and office of health services, as well as staff such as advisors, and faculty (Dobmeier et al., 2011). Students who choose to participate in counseling services are reported to have higher levels of self-confidence and more positive overall daily functioning compared to students who did not follow through with counseling (Lucas, 2012). Students who used their college’s counseling center also had a higher retention rate (75%) compared to the overall student population (68%) (Bishop, 2010). The literature strongly indicates that mental health issues can negatively affect community college students’ motivation and behavior to succeed and, thus they persist at lower rates (Barnett, 2011; VanKim, Laska, Ehlinger, Lust, & Story, 2010). It is important for two-year institutions to address these issues both academically and socially to provide a successful transition and adjustment to college. Ensuring that the two-year institutions are providing support services such as counseling, academic advising, financial aid guidance, and tutoring is of utmost necessity (Perna, 2006; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, Goodwin, 1998; Chickering & Gamson, 1991).
It is important to recognize that the participants who entered the college already experiencing mental health issues, continued to actively seek out services through a variety of resources, not just the Personal Counseling Office. The participants’ acknowledgement of the need for support from family and friends may seem obvious to most, however, for some of the participants, it was a difficult and, at times, impossible task to accomplish. Further, those participants who did not actively seek out services on campus and did not perceive that they could receive familial support found it extremely difficult to engage in their studies, work obligations or in everyday tasks. At the time of their interview, most of the participants had engaged campus resources and obtained support from family and friends. However, a few still bear their pain and continue to progress.

**Student Engagement/Being and Staying Informed**

The participants in this study expressed the need for students to *being/staying informed* prior to entering community college and during their tenure. According to the participants, they perceived that if they had been informed or given knowledge of campus resources and programs that they could have utilized at their college campus, they would have been less likely to be placed on academic probation. Further, prior to being placed on academic probation, the participants indicated that they would have liked to have been informed of the fact that they were at risk of being placed on academic probation. For many of the participants, navigating the multiple student systems at the college was cumbersome and difficult to understand thus important information, such as notifications regarding probation, were not easily accessed by the participants. The participants in this study wanted to be informed about any and all resources at the college but found that the college itself did not provide adequate information. Further, the college’s systems to disseminate information were convoluted and difficult to navigate. The
findings demonstrate that a lack of information or barriers to obtaining information, on the part of the institution, hinder student success.

The participants noted that as they began participating at the college, they became more successful academically and were able to easily integrate on a social level. The findings of this study directly oppose the literature, which suggests that a majority of students who are placed on academic probation fail to actively seek appropriate measures of intervention and support services in order to improve their circumstances and prevent possible dismissal (James & Graham, 2010; Vander Shee, 2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Grimes, 1997).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how community college students who experience academic probation in their first year make sense/meaning of that experience and transition to become successful. A careful analysis of the interview data and current literature with regard to much of the data identified in this study yielded several key conclusions.

Most participants in this study acknowledged that the support and educational information that their parents and family provided was limited before and during their college experience; however, most participants acknowledged that, while limited, overall, their parents and family did support them through their time on academic probation and as they continued to pursue their education. The findings in this study determined that having a strong support system at home was critical to participants’ academic success throughout their probation and degree attainment. Further, the findings in this study demonstrated that the familial support of students who experience academic probation in their first year does influence degree attainment for this population in a positive manner. Most participants in the research study described having a lack
of understanding of the importance of attaining a college degree before entering college, and they also acknowledged that their academic performance during academic probation does not accurately reflect their overall academic ability. However, since experiencing academic probation, many participants stated that they now acknowledge that they are more driven to achieve academic, personal, and professional success. The findings in this study confirm that community college students placed on academic probation in their first year experience academic weaknesses and yet, are motivated to overcome such obstacles and succeed in their academics in order to create more opportunities for themselves. The findings in this study also confirm that community college students are motivated to earn a college degree because of the desire to find an impactful and worthwhile profession, gain financial security, and be able to provide for their families.

Many participants described their lack of emotional maturity and academic discipline, and reported that upon entering college, they did not possess a basic understanding of the expectations of college or the importance of earning a degree and how to obtain resources that would benefit them in an academically demanding environment. Many participants admitted that they should have developed better relationships with faculty and staff, and utilized more of the college’s resources while attending classes. The findings in this study confirm that most community college students placed on academic probation in their first year experience a lack of academic and emotional preparedness before entering college and attempt to compensate for these shortcomings by not properly engaging on and with their college campus in their efforts to improve their maturity, academic discipline, and skills set or abilities.

Most of the participants in this study, acknowledged that being placed on academic probation made them come to the realization that college was very different from high school.
The typical tasks of studying and completing assignments in college required a more serious and mature attitude and way of thinking in the community college setting. The findings in this study demonstrate that the participants had to come to understand why achieving good grades and attaining a degree was important to them in order to become successful.

Next, many of the participants in this study acknowledged that they had experienced depression and a host of other mental health issues that negatively affected their success. Many participants in this study described overcoming these issues by seeking out and developing mature relationships with faculty and staff; gaining awareness and access to appropriate resources and services, such as personal counseling and tutoring, that would contribute to their success and assist them in gaining support. These participants admitted that they had to ultimately seek out help in order to deal with these issues but also found that they needed support, not just from their families but also from their peers, faculty and the college. The findings in this study established that many of the participants were able to make sense of and reconcile their mental health issues once they were able to find the appropriate help and support they needed, allowing them to continue to be successful.

Finally, a majority of the participants in this study recognized that participating on the campus motivated their success and pushed them to become role models, as they perceived themselves to be taken more seriously as a successful student. The findings in this study evidenced that the participants became more successful and found an identity and purpose at the college when they began to participate on campus. Many of the participants also concluded that gaining a better understanding of the college technological systems, which include email, Blackboard, and a variety of other registration and grading systems, helped them stay on top of their academic and aware of campus social and academic events. The findings in this study
established that once the participants gained the appropriate knowledge and understanding of the college’s technological systems, the participants’ successes, both academically and technologically, increased. The majority of the findings in this study support the findings in many of the studies and research on students who are placed on academic probation. The findings in this study with regard to college readiness contradicted the studies that found students on academic probation to be academically unprepared to enter college. While the participants did eventually suffer academically, thus ending up on probation, it was their emotional readiness to enter college that hindered them. This was made more distinct as the participants perceived entering college was not within their locus of control. The participants’ viewpoints regarding emotional readiness and having no power in the decision to enter college are where the findings of this study concur with studies on both emotional intelligence and locus of control. These findings also support the studies that found high achieving, well prepared students can also end up on academic probation. With regard to the findings regarding “taking a break” prior to entering college and lack of recognizing the importance of earning a degree, the findings in this study actually expand on the research as there was little to no literature on these topics. This study expands the findings on mental health awareness studies with regard to community college students and adds to the findings regarding the significance of support from family and the institution. The findings in this study add to current research on student success and participation on campus. The participants in this study found that they were more engaged and more successful once they began to participate in various ways on the campus. Finally, the findings regarding being and/or staying informed contradicted the findings of other studies on this topic. The participants in this study actively sought information and resources as opposed to the studies found on this topic. Overall, the findings in this study add to and expand the findings
in the studies regarding community college students placed on academic probation, particularly those students who persist past probation and successfully complete their degree programs. In the next section of this chapter, recommendations for practice and future research will be discussed.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The responsibilities of a scholar-practitioner are to recognize problems within and throughout their work, examine these problems closely and search for solution that would provide an impact in practice utilizing knowledge grounded in theory and research (McClintock, 2003). Benham (1996) views the scholar-practitioner’s work as a “problem-solving approach to scholarly practice” thus the perception of the duties of a scholar practitioner are learning about or recognizing problems, examining them closely, and identifying productive solutions through new lenses. One of the goals that the researcher had for this study was to provide new insight into how students who experience academic probation in the first year succeed, so that the findings could influence current practice with regard to the policies and process of academic probation in order to create programming to support the retention of these students. Many recommendations are introduced here, which can assist in improving practices at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. Several stakeholders may benefit from the research findings, including academically at risk students, students’ families, secondary educators and administrators, faculty members, and higher education administrators.

The participants perceived that they were not emotionally prepared for college. They further reported that they felt forced to attend college due to parental pressure and the strong social view that postsecondary education is the next step in their educational journey. The participants also expressed that they did not understand the significance that earning a degree
meant. Their reasons for their lack of desire to attend college call into question how effective it would be to provide such information in high school. The participants ultimately came to understand the importance of obtaining a degree, but only after encountering some difficulties achieving their goals in college. In order to increase the possibility that students who encounter academic probation in their first year will understand the consequences of their actions, it is important for them to receive related information at multiple points in time. As an administrator of the campus charged with the planning and execution of Freshman Orientation sessions, the researcher can develop a presentation that discusses each of these issues. This can be presented at various points of contact with the newly incoming students. The presentation of such information will allow students to become better informed as they learn and develop throughout their transition and acclimation to college. The experience of college and academic probation changes students, and educators must be willing to reach out to them at more than one point throughout that their first and second semesters.

High school students who apply to and plan on attending a community college would benefit from learning more about the importance of Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) and the consequences of failing a course or courses while they are still in high school. Essential information would be 1) general differences between a failing GPA in high school and in college, 2) typical requirements to maintain satisfactory academic progress, and 3) information about majors, degree programs and the impact of academic performance in college classes and on their financial aid. Secondary college advisors and/or guidance counselors have an opportunity to provide this information as part of college planning process. Community college admissions personnel would benefit from providing pamphlets or brochures regarding the SAP and the consequences of not maintaining good academic standing. As an administrator of the college, the
researcher can request permission from our Associate Dean to offer materials both in a presentation to admissions staff and First Year Seminar (FYS) faculty/instructors and to create a brochure to hand out to faculty, staff and students. While the best way to deliver the necessary information would be via a “bridge” or “gap” program or collaboration between local area high schools and the college, presenting alongside the admissions personnel during college tour visits can be very effective as well. As an administrator of the college, one of the best ways the researcher can take measures to accomplish this at the institution is through an admissions and advisement committee after presenting the concept to the Vice President of Student Success and receiving approval to put this concept into practice. This would allow college administrators in the areas of advisement and financial aid to engage with students, school counselors and the parents. In the results of her study regarding a collaboration between a local area high school and a community college to decrease math remediation, Berry (2003) discovered that pulling together faculty from the college and high schools allowed them to better understand the obstacles students faced when entering college level algebra course. Further, the faculty members were better able to understand why there was a gap to begin with. According to the results of this study, since high schools and the college utilize different criteria for a variety of issues such as success and grading, presentations to high school students, their parents and teachers would offer all members involved greater insight to the issues students faced upon entering the college as well as increase the students’ knowledge. The college should work with the financial aid and advisement offices to build a small group that would visit local area high schools monthly to present on SAP and the issues of academic probation to students, high school administrators and parents. The researcher’s role in this will be to start the small group in order to begin the
discussion of the needs and to assist in the presentation. The presentation would also be conducted in both English and Spanish for Second Language Learners.

With regard to what should be done once the students are already attending the college and experience academic probation, the results of this study suggest that the college should create a “re-orientation” program for students placed on probation. The program would work to effectively assist students on academic probation get back on track to completion and out of probation within no more than two semesters. In order for this particular program to come to fruition, the researcher will present her research and findings to the Associate Dean of Academic and Student Success with the assistance of the Student Success Coaches (advisement), Financial Aid, Career and Transfer, and the Office of Student Life in order to make a proposal/recommendation for this program. The program would include mandatory meetings with Success Coaches and peer mentors and would include a minimum amount of tutoring hours to be completed. Students would also need to attend four workshops on the following:

1. Time Management
2. Financial Aid
3. Leadership
4. Career Development

Tovar and Simon’s (2006) study effectively applied a “re-orientation” program and intrusive/developmental advisement through the lens of the Schlossberg’s transition theory which provided an intervention which addressed not only information about how to overcome probation but also addressed the academic and psychosocial components which led to probation. This study sought to assess the impact that students’ readiness/commitment to college, academic motivation, general coping, and receptivity to institutional assistance had on probationary
students. The authors discuss the various in-class and out-of-class factors that influence student success of diverse first-year, first-semester students on academic probation. They further developed and instituted a “re-orientation” program for probationary students to assist these students in understanding how these factors, along with their perception, impact their academic and student success.

The results of this study, especially with regard to student motivation, familial support, coping methods, and receptiveness to student support services, affirm that there are cognitive and non-cognitive issues that affect student success. Based on these findings of the current study, the researcher recommends the need for the college to continue to provide a supportive environment for at-risk students via academic and student support services to account for students’ academic preparation, background (e.g., race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, first-generation status), employment and commuting issues, personal problems, and motivation levels in designing support services and academic programs. Currently, the institution does not have a system or program in place to work with the students who finds themselves on academic probation thus the students may end up academically dismissed. While it is possible that some probationary students will succeed without support services, many others will simply give up, perform poorly, or disappear altogether from colleges without effective intervention. The college should invest in the building of a mandatory set of workshops with Student Success Coaches who are trained to utilize student development and counseling theories in their interventions for probationary students. After obtaining approval from the Vice President of Student Success and the Associate Dean of First Year Seminar, the researcher will work with the SAP committee and FYS Director to create the workshops so that all staff within the area of Student Success can present to students who have recently attained probationary status are in need of this particular expertise even more
than the information of how to return to good academic standing. They need to first understand why they ended up on academic probation in order to successfully overcome it. The core issue is more than a lack of knowledge that they need to change in order to succeed. What they need is support, more and clearer goal directedness based on greater self-understanding, and the motivation to change. SAP and its issues should also be taught and/or discussed in all First Year Seminar (FYS) courses and given as an assignment in the course so students can seek out what SAP is and how it adversely effects their educational goals. This can be presented to the Associate Dean for FYS as a proposed topic in the FYS syllabus/curriculum.

The participants in this study perceived that they encountered or entered the college with a host of mental health issues in which they needed to come to terms with. The participants also desired understanding and support for both the institution and others such as family and friends. As evidenced by the findings in this study, the researcher strongly recommends community college leaders plan to start education about signs, risk factors, and services for mental health problems during freshmen orientation, continuing it with follow-up workshops and publications from the Personal Counseling Office during freshmen year and through to graduation. As an administrator of the institution, the researcher can initiate these presentations through outreach with each of these offices to assist in the design and support of these workshops, moreover, the researcher can also conduct these workshops if necessary, however, any workshop should be conducted in tandem with the Office of Personal Counseling. The college should promote and support students who recognize and seek help for mental health issues or concerns. The college should sponsor and campaign focus groups/workshops that include dialogue that make receiving counseling services less of a social taboo. According to the literature, risks for mental health problems such as depression, disruptive family situations, stress regarding academic
performance, issues on sexual identity, violence on campus, and pre-existing severe and
persistent mental illness were identified as contributors to mental health problems on community
college campuses (Francis & Abbassi, 2010). Further, conflicted and/or abusive relationships
(Dusselier et al., 2005) were also discovered as sources of anxiety among students with mental
health issues. The literature also affirms that community college students were more likely to
face mental health problems and to struggle academically (Barnett, 2011; Francis & Abbassi,
2010). Community college students were more likely to face adverse health outcomes and
chronic disease, (Barnett, 2011; VanKim, Laska, Ehlinger, Lust, & Story, 2010) resulting in
nearly half of all first-year students to drop out of community colleges, a factor contributing to
and resulting from student mental health problems (Walters, 2003).

Community Colleges should develop strategies to educate their students about mental
health awareness, risk factors, and services for anxiety, depression, and physical/mental abuse, as
well as for other major mood disorders. It is recommended that the following practices be
implemented and evaluated with community college students to strengthen their awareness of
mental health problems and resources. The practices, some of which have been identified in
previous literature (Bishop, 2010; Walters, 2003) can be seamlessly integrated into a college
setting via Freshmen and Transfer Student orientations conducted by the researcher and other
college orientation leaders along with peer mentors and personal counseling office staff. From
this collaborative measure, the researcher, staff and peer mentors can begin a series of workshops
on how to recognize signs and risk factors for mental health problems and how to help oneself or
a friend suffering from mental illness. These workshops should include the following:

- Community colleges should provide information on and tours of the college’s
  personal counseling office during freshmen and transfer student orientations.
• Engage student success coaches and advisors in presenting to students how to ask for help for oneself or a friend with a mental health problem.

• Offer mental health training to faculty and staff, including public safety officers, on recognizing behavioral signs of mental health problems that should include the policies and procedures for seeking help for at-risk students and how to refer a student to the personal counseling office.

• Develop and create awareness of off-campus mental health resources available to students.

• Develop and engage junior and senior students as peer mentors to help conduct workshops as role models.

• Discussed in all First Year Seminar (FYS) courses and include a presentation by the personal counseling office staff.

Finally, the participants in this study perceived that students should be and stay informed regarding activities and issues happening in and around the college. The participants perceived that many of the events or even the information regarding their academic probation was difficult to receive as there are a variety of systems that they must sign into in order to be fully informed. The researcher and peer mentors can engage the students at freshman and transfer student orientations regarding the system by which the students receive important and current information. The researcher would also need to disseminate the information in a variety of ways such as hard copy newsletters/newspapers, emails, social media, posters, text messages, etc. It should also be an independent topic engaged in the FYS courses. The importance of being and staying informed should be emphasized as various points in time throughout the first two semesters.
Recommendations for Future Research

One of the limitations often identified in existing literature on community college students who experience academic probation is that the perspectives from the successful students, the ones who overcome academic probation, are not represented. The current study adds to the literature on academic probation from community college students who have successfully overcome probationary status and have continued their education. Based on the conclusions and recommendations for practice identified by the researcher of this study, future research should further explore the experiences of community college students placed on academic probation who have successfully overcome probation as well as the resources they found to be helpful in getting them back on track. It would also be helpful to identify students who were academically dismissed due to being placed on academic probation in order to better understand their perceptions and experiences. This may also provide insight into the effectiveness of institutional resources made available to these students.

Another limitation identified in this particular study were the survey results. Due to the limitations that were placed on the researcher regarding outreach at this particular campus, the survey that was distributed/emailed to students on academic probation did not produce a sufficient sample. While the results positively correlated to the findings in this study, less than 1% of the students participated in the survey. Any future research should include a student survey on academic probation and a survey to those who provide support services for these students such as advisors, faculty, financial aid administrators, etc. The survey should be expanded and repeated at least twice a year so that administrators can stay current on issues that adversely affect students placed on academic probation.
Additional research should be conducted to better understand the perspectives of the families and/or support of these students. A study that includes students and their support system whether it is their family members or close friends and loved ones as well as student success coaches/advisors would offer valuable insight regarding what these students are experiencing and how informed they are on institutional resources. Because mental health issues were prevalent throughout the current study, research regarding mental health awareness and student supports services as well as the students’ perceptions and experiences utilizing these services should be conducted as well as evaluated in order to gain insight on whether these resources need to be improved or increased.

The current study should be replicated with different student populations, such as veterans, disability students, formerly incarcerated students, and Second Language Learners. Another population of students that may have different, yet insightful experiences is honors students who were formerly on academic probation and are now successful. The study should also be conducted at rural and residential community colleges as well as four-year institutions. Further research can also be conducted to examine the transition and probationary experiences of students of varying demographics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. This would most certainly add depth and insight to the current literature.
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Appendix A – IRB approval

Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action

Date: August 30, 2016
IRB #: CPS16-07-07

Principal Investigator(s): Joseph McNabb
Yvonne Frago-Davila

Department: Doctor of Education
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: An Exploration of the Experiences and Perceptions of Community College Students on Academic Probation and their Understanding of this Experience

Participating Sites: CUNY approval forthcoming

Informed Consent:
One (1) unsigned consent for surveys
One (1) signed consent for interviews

DIHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

Approval Expiration Date: AUGUST 29, 2017

Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. 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 as 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

Nad C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B – Recruitment email

Dear Students,

My name is Yvonne Erazo and I am also a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am researching the experiences and perceptions of community college students who were placed on academic probation in their first year and are now in their second year, no longer on academic probation and are on a successful path towards graduation. By “first year” I mean students who earned less than 30 college credits earned towards their degree. By “second year” I mean students who have earned 30 or more college credits earned towards their degree. My intent is to learn more about what actions and resources were taken by students who were successful in overcoming academic probation and to share this information with faculty, staff, and administrators that provide support to students.

If you choose to volunteer for this study, I will be interviewing you about your academic, personal, and institutional experiences. The expected time commitment is between two and three hours over the course of three interactions (two in person, one either in person or via email). You will be offered a $20 gift card for participating. Participation is entirely voluntary. Though I work for this institution, you are under no obligation to volunteer. If you do not send in the card or email my student email address to volunteer, you will not be contacted again regarding this research.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email me at Erazo.y@husky.neu.edu and include the information listed below. I will provide you with additional details about the study.

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<td>Email:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone Number:</td>
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<td>Preferred days and times to meet (including weekends):</td>
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Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Regards,
Yvonne Erazo
Appendix C – Informed consent

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

**Title:** Persisting past probation: An exploration of the experiences and perceptions of community college students on academic probation

**Principal Investigator (PI):** Dr. Joseph McNabb, Northeastern University

**Student Researcher:** Yvonne Erazo, Northeastern University

**Purpose:** We are inviting you to take part in a research study. The study will explore how community college students placed on academic probation in their first year made sense of this experience in order to successfully overcome probation. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a student who was on academic probation in your first year (earned less than 30 college credits towards degree), are now in your second year (earned 30 or more credits towards degree) and because you successfully overcame academic probation (are maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 or higher). This study will involve three points of contact with the researcher, two in person and one either in person or via email. The first point of contact will be an initial meeting with the researcher (approximately 30 minutes). The second point of contact will be an in-depth interview with the researcher (approximately 45-90 minutes). The third point of contact will be a follow up conversation with the researcher. You can elect to hold this meeting in person (approximately 30 minutes) or you can respond to the researcher via email (time varies). The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.

The purpose of this study is to understand what being placed on academic probation means to community college first year students and expanding the body of knowledge about the community college student probationary experience with regard to barriers, institutional resources and student services support.

**Procedure:** If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in individual interviews. As noted above, we will have three points of contact: two in person and one either in person or via email. For in person interviews, you may select a location that is convenient and comfortable for you. All interviews conducted in person will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. Any information you provide in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which you may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

**Risks:** The primary risk associated with this study is the discomfort you may feel discussing your academic struggles. The researcher will respect your boundaries during the interviews and allow you to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher will provide you with resources for seeking additional guidance relative to your situation if needed.

**Benefits:** There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for what it is like to be a first year community college student on academic probation, particularly when the
knowledge base of the student is limited with regards to resources to assist them through this process. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators with the intention of strengthening support services for students on academic probation.

Confidentiality: Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, and conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and field of study will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for seven years and then destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate and you may withdraw at any time. You are not obligated to answer all questions that are asked of you during interviews. You may indicate your desire to skip a question by stating, “pass.”

Will I be paid for my participation?
You will be offered a $20 gift card for your participation.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
You will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.

Contact Person: Please contact Yvonne Erazo, the student researcher by cell phone at (646) 228-8292 or via email at Erazo.y@husky.neu.edu or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Joseph McNabb who is overseeing my research at j.mcnabb@neu.edu if you have any questions about this study.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I agree to take part in this research.

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of the person agreeing to take part    Date
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<th>Printed name of person above</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yvonne Erazo, Student Researcher</td>
<td>Date</td>
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Appendix E – Interview protocol

Interview questions:

1. **Can you describe your experience of failing a course or courses?**
   *Possible prompts: What were your first thoughts/reactions? Did you know what the consequences would be?*

2. **What did being placed on academic probation mean to you?**
   *Possible prompts: What was your reaction? What were the circumstances that placed you on academic probation? Were they academic, professional (work-related), or personal?*

3. **What was your family’s reaction to your academic probation?**
   *Possible prompts: How did you explain the circumstances of your probation? Did your family initially support you during your probation?*

4. **How do you personally define success?**
   *Possible Prompts: Is it more about good academics or your level of satisfaction or happiness with regard to your efforts? What makes you a successful student now?*

5. **At what point during your academic probation did you decide to make the change towards success?**
   *Possible prompts: What initiated this decision?*

6. **Do you participate on campus?**
   Possible prompts: In what capacity? Are you an honors student or part of an honor society? How does it make you feel to be an honor student?

7. **What would you say is the most important contributing factor to you overcoming probation?**
   *Possible prompts: Did you seek out tutoring? Did you speak to your Professor? Did you speak with your Academic Advisor?*

8. **Can you tell me about some of your positive experiences while on academic probation?**
   *Possible prompts: Did you build any academic, personal or professional relationships? Did you learn something new?*

9. **If you could change something about your academic probation experience, what would it be?**
   *Possible prompts: What resources or support would you have sought out?*

10. **What information would you have like to have known prior to being placed on academic probation?**
Possible prompts: Was there an appeal process? Could you have appealed the academic probation decision? Did you receive fair warning the semester prior to being placed on academic probation?

11. What advice/suggestions would you offer to a student on academic probation today?  
Possible prompts: What resources would you adamantly suggest the student use? Who would you send them to regarding how to successfully persist past probation?