The complex lives of community college students pursuing career technical degrees and certificates: An exploration of time prioritization from students' perspectives

by

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A.S., Universal Technical Institute, 1997
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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

Community colleges prepare nontraditional students for a variety of careers. Although the colleges promote flexible class schedules and faculty who understand their students' social and economic statuses, nontraditional students often need help prioritizing their college responsibilities.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine adult nontraditional career and technical education (CTE) students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time. The study addressed three primary research questions: What are the overall responsibilities of nontraditional CTE students seeking careers? How do nontraditional CTE students prioritize college and personal demands? Where and from whom are nontraditional CTE students receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals?

In this qualitative study, participants' lived experiences could be categorically grouped into two categories: participants with dependents and participants without dependents. Using reciprocating determinism and hierarchy of needs theories, this study found nontraditional CTE students with dependents prioritized their college responsibilities last. They had to make lose–lose decisions that negatively impacted their education, family obligations, or education if they could not find empathetic employers or faculty to help them navigate their responsibilities. Based on the findings of this study, different teaching strategies are recommended among subgroups of CTE nontraditional students. This suggests that colleges consider changing how committees evaluate future professors to meet the needs of nontraditional community college students.

Keywords: Nontraditional students, career and technical education, stackable certificates, trades or trade careers, student retention, student success, prioritization, reciprocating determinism.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures ix
List of Tables x
Acknowledgments xi
Dedication xii
Chapter 1 - Introduction 1
Background of the Problem 10
Statement of the Problem 14
Purpose of the Study 16
Research Questions 16
Methodology 17
Theoretical Framework 17
Delimitations and Assumptions 19
Significance of the Study 20
Definitions of Key Terminology 21
Chapter Summary 23
Organization of the Dissertation 23
Chapter 2 - Literature Review 25
Theoretical Framework 26
History of Vocational Education 30
Transitions From Vocational to CTE 33
CTE is Crucial to California's Economy 36
Defining Adult CTE Learners 38
Adult Student Needs 40
Adult Learner Learning Strategies 42
Identified Gaps 44
Chapter 3 - Research Methods 45
Purpose of the Study 45
Theoretical Frameworks 45
Research Design 49

Study Setting 49
Study Participants 53
Instrumentation 56
Data Collection 57
Data Analysis 59
Alignment Table 60
Ethical Considerations 60
Researcher Reflexivity Statement 61
Limitations 62
Study Quality 64
Chapter Summary 65
Chapter 4 - Findings and Analysis 66
Theoretical Frameworks 66
Participant Demographics 67
Field Notes 69
Data Analysis Processes 69
Gathering and Coding Data 70
Theme Development 70
Analyzing Data 72
Summary of the Findings 73
Presentation of Data and Findings 74
Participants With Dependents 74
Participants Without Dependents 76
Findings for RQ1 78
Findings for RQ2 80
Findings for RQ3 85
Summary of Presentation of Data and Findings 101
Chapter Summary 101
Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations 103
Overview of the Problem 103
Purpose of the Study 103

Review of Methodology 104
Discussion of the Findings 104
RQ1 105
RQ2 107
RQ3 108
Discussion of the Themes 109
Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature 110
Implications of Findings 115
Implications for Nontraditional CTE Students 115
Implications for CTE Faculty 116
Implications for Community College Education Policy 118
Implications of Findings to Theory 120
Recommendations for Further Research 122
Conclusion 124
References 126
Appendix A – Alignment of Research Questions to Theoretical Lenses and Interview Questions 140
Appendix B – Recruitment Pamphlet for Participants 142
Appendix C – College Aggregate Core Indicator Information (2021–2022) 143
Appendix D – Degrees and Certificates 144
Appendix E – Interview Protocol for Participants 152
Appendix F – Informed Consent for Participants 154
Appendix G – Participant Information 155
Appendix H – Quirke Analysis and Overlay of Theme Charts 161

List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs 18
Figure 1.2. Bandura's Reciprocal Determinism 48
Figure D1. Public Safety Academy Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year 143
Figure D2. Public Service Program's Age Demographic Per Academic Year 144
Figure D3. Business and Finance Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year 145
Figure D4. Business and Finance Program's Age Demographic Per Academic Year 146
Figure D5. Automobile and Transportation Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year 147
Figure D6. Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year 148
Figure D7. Culinary Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year 149
Figure D8. Building Inspection Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year 150
Figure H1. Example Layout of Main Theme and its Codes 160
Figure H2. Snapshot From Quirkos Coding Panel 161
Figure H3. Theme—External Responsibilities 162
Figure H4. Theme—External Responsibilities Contributed to How Nontraditional CTE Students Prioritized Their Time 163
Figure H5. Overlapping Graph of Theme – Contribution to Prioritization of Time 164
Figure H6. Zoomed in Overlapping Graph of Theme – Contribution to Prioritization of Time 165
Figure H7. Prioritization of External Responsibilities 166
Figure H8. Theme—Students' Definition of Success 167
Figure H9. Theme—Theorical Lens of Reciprocating Determinism Theory 168
Figure H10. Quirkos Analysis for Theme 7 169
Figure H11. Emerging Theme 8 Quirkos Analysis – Improving Nontraditional CTE Student Experiences 170
Figure H12. Theme—Theorical lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs 171
Figure H13. Emerging Themes—Improving Nontraditional CTE Student Experiences 172

List of Tables

Table 1.1. Definitions of Key Terms 22
Table 2.1. Transition From Vocational Education to Career Technical Education Expectations 34
Table 2.2. Median Wage Earnings Before and After Schooling 37
Table 3.1. Fall 2021 College of the Desert Student Characteristics 50
Table 3.2. College of the Desert Career and Technical Education Completion Information for Cohort Year 2018–2019 51
Table 3.3. Comparison Between CCCCO CTE Pathways and Available Pathways at College of the Desert 53
Table 4.1. Overview of Participant Information 69
Table 4.2. Quirkos Query Results – Code Frequency by Dependent Status 72

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Dedication

I first dedicate this dissertation study to my mother, who modeled the definition of "grit." As a single mother, she did her best to raise two children with the most powerful tool she had—love. At the same time, she struggled with work, not having an English vocabulary, and functioning in a society where workforce skills keep advancing. I remember asking her, "What profession would you like me to be a part of?" She replied, "A doctor or an engineer." Madre—I will be both if you keep watching me from the heavens.

I also dedicate this study to another strong woman in my life. My wife, Marisa, has guided and pushed me to continue the path of most resistance. Whenever I get overwhelmed, you tell me, "Only a few more months," and then you fed me an authentic homemade dish or made me a healthy snack. Thank you for your unconditional support toward our two boys, Franky and AJ, and me while I was absent in the office.

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1. Chapter 1 - Introduction

> You see, we may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated. It may even be necessary to encounter the defeat, so that we can know who we are. So that we can see, oh, that happened, and I rose.
>
> —Maya Angelou, *An Interview with Maya Angelou*

The mission of the California Community College system is to provide pathways for students to transfer to universities or to provide opportunities to enter the workforce (California Education Code, 2021). Over 2.1 million students enroll in 116 California community colleges annually with 907,507 specializing in career and technical education (CTE) in 2018–2019 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), making the system the largest provider of workforce training in the United States (California Community College Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], n.d.-b). California's community colleges also serve an incredibly diverse student body, with over half of their students coming from underrepresented groups. Community college alumni outcomes data show earning a degree or certificate can likely lead to higher income (CCCCO, n.d.-a). According to CCCCO (n.d.-a), California "credential holders saw an 8% wage gain for someone who earned a short-term certificate, a 21% increase for a long-term certificate, and a 32% bump increase for an associate degree" (para. 4). For these reasons, improving graduation rates and employment outcomes are a significant matter of educational equity given the diverse, underrepresented student populations in California community colleges.

This research study focused on CTE students. Many CTE students are categorized as adult nontraditional students. According to Choy (2002), the National Center for Education Statistics identifies an adult nontraditional student as a student enrolled in their first semester in a community college with one or more of the following characteristics: (a) is a single parent, (b) is

employed, (c) has delayed college enrollment, (d) has dependent(s), (e) did not receive a high school diploma, or (f) is 20 years old or older. Based on this definition, many CTE students are nontraditional.

In California and the United States, many technical job vacancies do not require applicants to have bachelors' degrees (Connley, 2018). According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, the United States has "over 30 million jobs that pay an average of $55,000 a year and do not require a bachelor's degree" (Carnevale et al., 2017, para. 1). These employment opportunities are well-suited for recent high school graduates or nontraditional age students (i.e., dislocated workers needing to enter the workforce quickly, single parents who cannot commute to a university, or students who do not desire to stay in college for more than 2 years). Additionally, these jobs can serve people who do not have the academic preparation needed or who lack financial resources to go to a university. However, many students are unaware of these careers or where they might obtain necessary credentials and training beyond a high school diploma. To no one's surprise, "Students who can't afford or may not be ready to enter a four-year college after high school graduation often find themselves at a difficult crossroads" (Zingg, 2019, para. 1). The lack of educational resources beyond a high school education limits career and higher education options for non-university-tracked students and puts them at a distinct disadvantage.

Providing a specific group of students with more access to college resources is an overt example of inequality and inequity. A simplified common analogy used in an education setting to explain equity is a baseball game (Dones, 2021). In this analogy, a step stool is provided to three students of differing heights to see over a wooden fence to view a baseball game. In this example, all three students get the same 1-foot stepstool to stand on. These three students

received the same aid; only 1 of 3 can see over the wooden fence to enjoy the game. The other two cannot see over the wooden fence even when standing on top of the stool, due to their unequal height. The assumption that the students are the same height creates equity issues, and the solution (i.e., a 1-foot stepstool) illustrates how equity is not the same as equality. Although three students were provided equal aid in this example, the equity issue was not solved. To provide equity in this scenario, more assistance is needed for the two students who have a disadvantage due to their height.

Dr. Estela Mara Bensimon of the Center for Urban Education at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California proposed a second analogy explaining the equity problem and proposed an equity framework that describes students' journeys toward achieving their educational goals using three ladders (California Education Learning Lab, 2020). The first ladder represents students with access to more resources and support systems, enabling them to start climbing halfway up the ladder and reach the top more quickly. These students have benefited from advantages established earlier in their lives, such as having educated parents, attending a private school with more personal attention and academic support, or having financial resources to hire tutors. On the other hand, students on the third ladder have to start from below ground level and face many disadvantages, such as attending a school with limited resources, being the first in their family to attend college, or lack of access to technology (e.g., internet), which can hinder their progress. This analogy highlights the difficulties underrepresented students face in achieving their educational goals. One implication of this framework is that faculty members should be aware of the diverse needs of their students and be able to differentiate between their needs when assessing performances. Dr. Bensimon's research suggests faculty must learn how to practice equity to develop an equity-minded lens.

In almost every California community college, students arrive with equity issues related to employment, housing, finances, reading skills, writing skills, and math skills. In attempting to define equity in education, Jordan et al. (2010) stated:

> Equity is not about providing the same education to all students regardless of race, social class, or gender. In fact, because of increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, it is advantageous to define educational equity in terms of knowledge, skills, and worldviews which would enable social mobility. (p. 149)

Concisely, equity is not the same as equality. To support community college CTE nontraditional students who arrive with various levels of education, financial need status, and limited or unequal access to college resources, community college, CTE faculty need to understand where students are in their skill development and make necessary adjustments to better serve them (Watermark Insights, 2022).

Students with only a high school education find it challenging to acquire well-paying jobs that provide financial security. Many of these students find their way to community colleges. Community colleges strive to help students improve their outcomes, achieve job skills needed to become employed, engage in home ownership, earn (i.e., at the minimum) an average family-sustaining income, and develop a working plan for retirement.

In 2017, CCCCO (2020) introduced its *Vision for Success*, a series of outcome goals to be achieved in 5 years. Several of these goals pertained directly to CTE. To measure success among workforce-bound students from CTE programs, colleges must report “the number of students who complete nine or more career education units and the number of students who have attained the regional living wage” (CCCCO, n.d.-c, para. 2). To hold community colleges even more accountable, California implemented a new funding formula that directly ties funding to

student success. For CTE short-term programs, community colleges need to report (a) an increase in the number of awarded certificates, (b) students' salary increments after completing a certificate, and (c) how many CTE students are employed in a related field of study. These outcomes are measured by the CCCCO and are used as evidence of student success, which ultimately drives state funding. This financial incentive makes improving student outcomes extremely critical to the future of CTE programs, which are in constant need of state financial support.

The CCCCO began the Guided Pathways, including career pathways, initiative in 2019 by requiring all its 116 colleges to develop and implement clear pathways for students to easily navigate their way to complete degrees or certificates (CCCCO, 2021). To help CTE students meet their CTE short- and long-term goals, CTE faculty members have been tasked with designing, developing, and deploying new *meta-majors*. To clarify, a meta-major degree in CTE is an associate degree designed to use stackable certificates as the building blocks to complete 40 technical units, leaving only general education electives to complete for an associate degree (Ross, 2019).

A meta-major degree is another outcome of the Guided Pathway framework. Students enrolled in a meta-major degree choose unique specialties in the same industry sector. The benefit of being in a meta-major program is the flexibility to change specialties without losing previously earned credits (Ross, 2019). The CTE student can then complete an additional 20 general education credits to earn an associate degree. Bohn and McConville (2018) explained, "Stackable credential pathways consist of multiple, sequential awards that either allow students to earn successively higher-level credentials ('progressive programs') or build a 'lattice' of

interconnected credentials" (para. 2). In other words, stackable certificates have overlapping coursework that can lead to related or advanced specializations.

For example, a student studying air conditioning residential technology can complete three basic courses and then enter the workforce. Students can prepare for a career in the heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration commercial sector of the industry if they subsequently take an additional three or more advanced courses. The heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration commercial sector continuously requires additional training due to sophisticated technologies and automatics controls integrated with building energy management systems. Another example would be students who enroll in the fundamentals of automobile repair program, earn a certificate, and then pursue a brake specialist certification or smog certification. The initial certificate allows students to learn fundamental skills needed to quickly begin employment. Subsequently, students can choose to stack one or more additional specialty certificates to explore other areas of interest without beginning a new program of study, thus avoiding prerequisite coursework.

By design, stackable certificates allow students to have multiple on- and off-ramps in CTE programs, depending on their employment needs. According to Haviland and Robbins (2021), "The career pathways movement is conceptualizing pathways not only as on-ramps to first jobs, but rather developing roadmaps to help students build careers over the course of years and even decades, upgrading skills and upgrading jobs along the way" (p. 5). While CTE students take elective technical courses, they can find a niche or specific area of interest in their industry, allowing them to choose where to take the off-ramp and enter the workforce.

Through the lens of Guided Pathways, these programs are clearly defined with steps to simplify course selections. Courses are grouped together based on the specialty or career sector.

CTE students have elective courses to choose from, but these courses are specific to the pathway chosen, removing the chances of students randomly taking courses for the sake of taking them. The Guided Pathway framework has also provided faculty with clear, detailed direction on how to design stackable certificates. The Guided Pathway framework also includes direction on designing programs with on-ramps into a CTE program beginning at the high school level, mapping out courses to take while attending college, and highlighting specific career options once students earn specialist or general certificates.

The Guided Pathway's overall goal is to graduate more students quickly by reducing the frustration experienced by students who take a wide range of courses without a clear plan and then struggle to find their way to completion. The traditional hands-off community college culture of "let students explore" (Lipka, 2019, p. 30) has led to students taking numerous elective courses and failing to graduate.

As an example, in contrast to the traditional 16-week semester, Guided Pathways at College of the Desert include 8-week quarters, which expediently streamlines a student's journey through college and before financial aid runs out. Although Guided Pathways help students select only the courses needed for their career pathway, not all faculty agree on the restriction of classes or electives (Sun & Cai, 2017).

Many educators disagree with the concept of restricting students' options or mapping out electives based solely on a chosen major. According to Sun and Cai (2017), "The purpose of higher education is not only to cultivate top talents in a professional field but also to educate people, train all-round development people and cultivate people with high moral character and broad mind" (p. 195). Some faculty believe if CTE programs remove the course-selection freedoms students previously had, exploring electives not related to the major, the student will

become trained like a programmed robot. Such CTE robots can only perform a specific function and cannot think for themselves if changes are required during the task (J. P. Romero, personal communication, October 20, 2019). Other faculty believe CTE training pathways do not belong in community college, and it should be the employer's responsibility to identify and train students on specific skills needed on the jobsite. However, these same faculty value developing students' minds for academic advancement in subjects such as innovation, entrepreneurship, and self-discovery. Gauthier (2021) conducted a study on non-CTE faculty perceptions of community colleges and CTE and shared:

> Data indicated that CTE stigmatization is prevalent among community college faculty, contributing to campus-wide implicit stigmatization of these programs. While stigmatization is a natural phenomenon that, at times, takes place in the human unconscious (Barreto, 2015; Bos et al., 2013; Gauthier, 2021), the data revealed that the participants were able to bracket their stigma and agreed that CTE must include the habits of mind and expose students to soft skills. (p. 56)

The survey results suggested non-CTE faculty perceived CTE programs as less than the traditional buffet sample curriculum, where students are left to explore courses to develop intellectually and find their way. Non-CTE faculty perceived CTE students as not gaining the intellectual behavior to perform when dilemmas or uncertainties arise (Gauthier, 2021). In California's community colleges, a substantial number of curricula and delivery patterns have been repackaged through a Guided Pathways initiative to provide CTE students with a clear road map to completion. Before the Guided Pathways initiative, students were encouraged to take any elective available. According to the General Facts found on the California Community College website, 384,377 course sections were available in 2016–2017, with many being standalone

courses providing students the freedom to take as many as they like (Levesque, 2018). This freedom to explore is a college structure known as “cafeteria-style colleges” (Levesque, 2018, para. 27), which is often perceived to be a root cause of students running out of time, financial aid, and personal funds to complete their programs. Guided Pathways was implemented to help students navigate better through the courses available. However, for CTE programs, data are lacking to support whether these curricular changes and delivery of courses are enough to help CTE students succeed (Bailey, 2015).

To capture postgraduation information, the California community colleges measure the effects of obtaining a career technical degree or a CTE certificate via the Career & Technical Education Employment Outcomes Survey (Fullerton College, 2020). Degree and certificate completers are queried about their wages and employment after graduation to identify income increases and employment in the career fields for which they have been prepared. This research is clearly valuable; however, it is limited in scope. Most importantly, the human element is missing. According to (Pascoe et al., 2020) “The impact of this ongoing academic-related stress to student outcomes and well-being has not been comprehensibly explored” (para. 1). The human element is the idea that every young person has needs beyond the traditional school’s curriculum. Every person needs caring adults, a safe place, opportunities to serve, a healthy start, and effective education. That is, the details concerning how CTE students experience their educational pathways cannot be documented through this survey. The best way to uncover these details is through individual interviews. For this dissertation study, the researcher interviewed current CTE students and asked them to share their college-going experiences, both inside and outside the classroom.

Designing a Guided Pathway without input from students may create unintentional barriers that might cause them to delay their graduation. Understanding nontraditional CTE students' personal responsibilities, and prioritization of college responsibilities, can aid faculty and administrators in making students' learning experiences more relevant to them. The knowledge of the lived experience of CTE students can enhance curriculum and class schedule design.

It seems beneficial for California community colleges to adopt a Guided Pathway approach for nontraditional students who require assistance with course planning due to their external responsibilities, such as taking care of dependents. These students might need more time to navigate class selections, especially in cases where low-enrollment classes are canceled. Therefore, it is essential to have a support system, such as a faculty member who can monitor changes and their progress, to ensure they remain on track and graduate on time.

Implementing Guided Pathways with prescribed classes may directly impact nontraditional students, especially those with external responsibilities, due to specific course sequences that are only offered once a year to maintained cohorts. To better support these students, faculty members may need to provide additional tutoring or engagement opportunities and be open to self-monitoring their teaching strategies. Faculty will need to increase sensitivity to their nontraditional students to support the Guided Pathways framework. This support will require faculty to become equity-minded and ensure they are flexible in their demands.

Background of the Problem

Community colleges prepare students for a variety of careers and can make rapid curriculum changes in programs and certificates to quickly respond to technology demands and updates. Community college flexibility in adapting curriculum to address overall labor needs has

bolstered their image and mission to serve their local communities, preparing students to transfer to universities and enter the workforce with industry credentials and/or work experience. Moreover, community colleges may be the last available route for people who fell behind and did not develop essential skills in secondary education (O'Banion, 2019). By improving CTE outcomes, community colleges can improve the lives of students who might otherwise be precluded from upward economic mobility (Dalporto & Tessler, 2020). For many CTE nontraditional students, being university bound is not an option and only having a high school diploma reduces an individual's chances of getting a well-paying job and reaching the middle class of society. According to Symonds et al. (2011), a high school diploma used to be the passport to earning a livable family wage, allowing youth to enter a career and contribute to society. The 21st-century workforce has drastically changed, reducing the ability to pursue the American dream without at least some postsecondary education (e.g., associate degree or a credential).

In the 2020 presidential election, Joe Biden (2020) delivered the *Battle for the Soul of the Nation* speech and campaigned on a promise to increase funding to individual community college students and institutions. This pledge brought the funding of community colleges to the forefront in the highest office of government in the United States. However, community colleges still have a lingering problem with public perception. Many people in the United States continue to struggle with understanding the benefits of community colleges. Many still believe community colleges are second-chance intuitions leading students to low-skill, low-paying jobs and serving as a revolving door where students declare degree goals and drop out soon after enrolling.

Community colleges were once known as *junior colleges*, signifying universities were more esteemed senior colleges (O'Banion, 2019). To remove the stigma as being second to universities, most community colleges removed junior from their names, with some eliminating community and simply using college in their names. Over time, community colleges have been pejoratively labeled as:

> A handmaiden to the university, a junior academy serving the senior academy, a bridge between high school and the university, an institution to catch the overflow when universities are full. A high school with ashtrays, a college for the dumb rich and the bright poor, a part-time college for part-time students taught by part-time faculty, a holding place to keep students off the street. A technical college, a vocational college, an occupational college. (O'Banion, 2019, p. 128)

Community colleges are much more than this viewpoint suggests. Community colleges "are a manifestation of our society's commitment to educational opportunity, and they reflect a common understanding of postsecondary education as the foundation for economic growth and upward mobility" (Bailey et al., 2015, p. 1). In addition to preparing students for transfer to a university, community colleges prepare students for technical careers. This dual responsibility is not new for community colleges. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was the first legislation that supported funding for vocational training (EdSource, 2005). *Vocational* or *occupational* education programs are now CTE. The change in name was updated to alter the perception of value for this type of education. The difference between vocational education and CTE is rigorous academic skills must be integrated into CTE courses (EdSource, 2005).

Community colleges provide more than an opportunity for CTE students to advance their careers; they are a gateway for students to change how they see the world and how they see

themselves. Many CTE students are the first in their family to attend college (ECMC Foundation, n.d.). For most, it may also be the first time students feel they matter and that they are contributing to the local economy and society (Jarema, 2021). CTE students become proud electricians, auto mechanics, firefighters, police officers, nurses, carpenters, and welders. They begin to have social interaction under these job titles, giving them a visible and valued place in society. Many people who work in these careers agree evolving technology makes daily tasks more difficult, requiring more education.

According to Caprino (2016), "Americans have been taught that white collar jobs provide more financial stability and security than blue collar jobs" (para. 13). During an interview with Mike Rowe, Caprino (2016) discussed five myths about blue collar work and workers:

- There are no good jobs left in America.
- The best path to a good job is a four-year degree.
- Trade jobs are dead-end jobs.
- You can't make six figures.
- There is no room for women in the trades. (para. 4)

According to Rowe (2017), "The skills gap will never close until that perception is corrected, and the cost of college will never come down, if we keep telling people a four-year degree is their only hope of being successful" (para. 17). Rowe suggested the skilled labor gap had widened due to the negative stigma CTE has inherited over the years, discouraging many people to overlook a career in the trades.

Another negative CTE perception is that CTE students' cognitive abilities are less than traditional students. According to Goldhammer and Taylor (1972), CTE programs have a reputation of being limited to individuals working with their hands, which require less

intellectual effort. This perception is far from the reality. CTE preparation could set the groundwork for a high-paying technical career and improved financial means. CTE courses can also be the first step to a lifelong learning mindset, enticing trade students to pursue technical degrees. Overall, CTE programs provide an effective fast track to sustainable income. Ultimately, CTE programs are vital to local, regional, national, and global economies.

Statement of the Problem

Community colleges have responded to the immediate need for skilled labor; however, how these changes have affected CTE nontraditional students is not thoroughly addressed in the literature. Community colleges have been given additional state funding sources to train students to enter the technical and skilled labor market. To prioritize and expedite the time students spend in training, many CTE programs at College of the Desert developed meta-major degrees, stackable certificates, and program maps derived from Guided Pathways without the input of nontraditional CTE students. In some cases, these changes have accelerated 16-week classes to 8 weeks, increasing the workload and the frequency these students need to attend college. There is a gap in the literature on how community college CTE nontraditional students prioritize their time to keep up with these new school workloads.

It is stressful for CTE nontraditional students to reflect on previously learned subjects and prioritize time to complete homework assignments while juggling external responsibilities (e.g., full-time employment, family dependents), particularly when they have been out of school for some time. In addition to the hours students need to complete assignments, some students end up taking more courses than they can balance with nonacademic responsibilities. To help prioritize the time students spend at a community college, college leaders have designed and implemented Guided Pathways. Guided Pathways were designed to help students prioritize their class

schedules while obtaining a certificate or a degree; however, these programs do not address the prioritization skills needed by CTE nontraditional students outside of the campus.

Little qualitative research has been conducted to fully understand the collective CTE students' community college experiences. Unlike traditional students who are likely to transfer to a 4-year college or university, some CTE students are bound to enter the workforce after high school due to their financial necessity or the need to support family dependents. Many CTE students are classified as adult or nontraditional learners and have responsibilities that pull them away from their studies. In a 2007 U.S. Department of Labor report, adult students over the age of 24 made up 44% of the U.S. postsecondary education enrollment (Chao et al., 2007). Many adult students see themselves as workers first. For this reason, education programs are often ill-designed to meet the needs of nontraditional adult students and are based on plans for younger traditional-age students. According to Chao et al. (2007):

> Traditional higher education programs and policies—created in an era when the 18- to 22-year-old, dependent, full-time student coming right out of high school was seen as the core market for higher education—are not well-designed for the needs of adult learners, most of whom are "employees who study" rather than "students who work." (p. 9)

When comparing CTE nontraditional students to traditional students who plan to matriculate to universities after community college, CTE students often live more complex lives and also support their families while completing their certificates or degrees. Many are low-income individuals looking to obtain skills and industry certificates to pursue high-paying jobs (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Chao et al., 2007). The risks for dropping out often seem to be greater for these students than students considered traditional. According to Bean and Metzner (1985), the chief difference between the attrition process of traditional and nontraditional students is that

"nontraditional students are more affected by the external environment than by the social integration variables affecting traditional student attrition" (p. 485).

California community colleges have committed to significantly and equitably improving student outcomes in the *Vision for Success* (CCCCO, 2020). The data sets to measure success outcomes for CTE programs are helpful; however, data on CTE students' time management skills and prioritization of tasks are not available. Many CTE students have failed to complete their programs because they (a) failed to complete assigned homework, (b) had issues with attendance, and (c) were unprepared for class topics. This dissertation study highlighted why and how CTE students prioritized their time and from whom they learned to prioritize their time.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine adult nontraditional CTE students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) were designed to learn how and why CTE nontraditional students prioritized their time:

RQ1: What are the overall responsibilities of nontraditional CTE students seeking careers?

RQ2: How do nontraditional CTE students prioritize college and personal demands?

RQ3: Where and from whom are nontraditional CTE students receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals?

Methodology

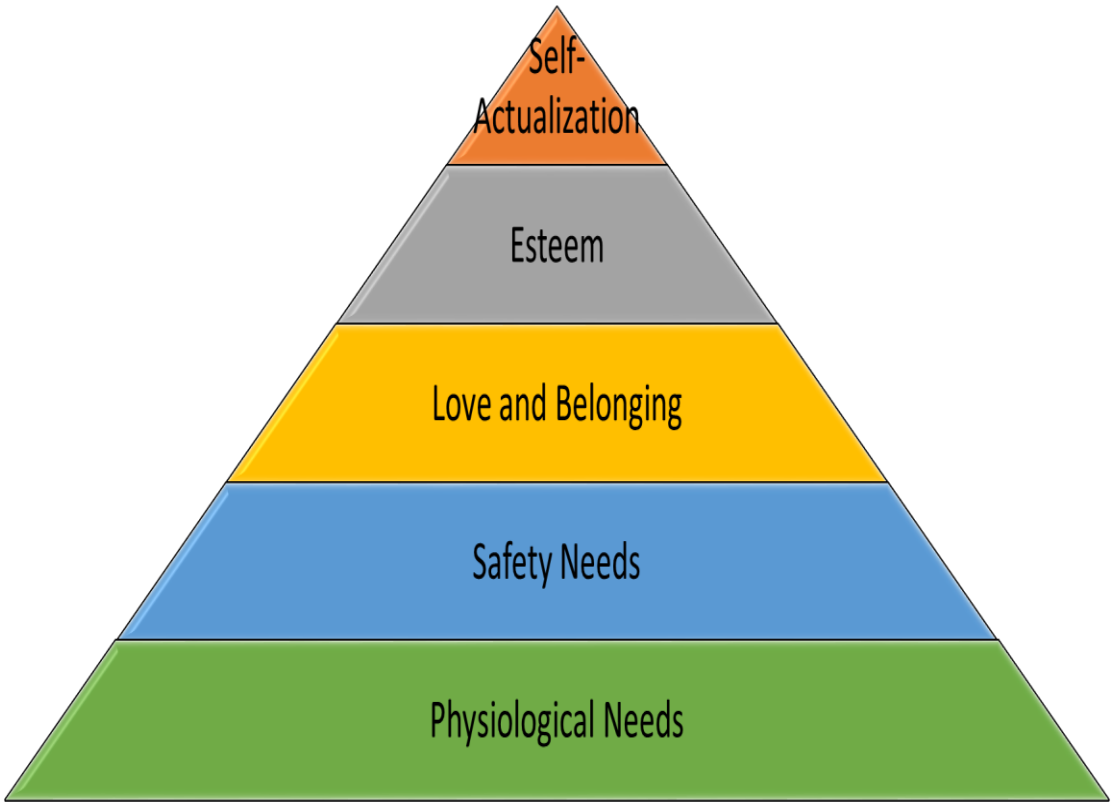
In this study, the researcher employed a phenomenological qualitative methodology with a purposeful participant selection strategy. Lochmiller and Lester (2017) stated, "Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that applies a philosophical perspective to the study of human experience" (p. 110). Purposeful means the researcher selected participants who met one or more specific criteria for this study. In other words, random participant selection would not have been helpful for this study. In-depth, qualitative, one-on-one interviews were conducted to understand nontraditional CTE students' priorities by examining how they allocated their time between schoolwork and personal responsibilities.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides a lens to assist with data analysis and interpretation of research data. Kivunja (2018) said a theoretical framework is "a structure that summarizes concepts and theories, which you develop from previously tested and published knowledge which you synthesize to help you have a theoretical background" (p. 46). For this study, two theoretical lenses were applied. First, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was applied for this study to examine if students prioritized their time while attending college based on personal needs. Maslow's theory establishes a hierarchical system in which each level must be satisfied before an individual can continue to move to the next level. For example, the first level of Maslow's theory explains physiological needs (see Figure 1.1). In this stage, individuals (e.g., students) must be able to secure basic human needs (e.g., food, water, sleep). The data from participants' conversation were analyzed to find themes leading to characteristics found in the first four stages of the hierarchy of needs.

Figure 1.1.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Note. Adapted from "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," by S. A. McLeod, Simply Psychology, 2020 (https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html). In the public domain.

Conceptual Lens

The researcher used a second lens to investigate the RQs. Using Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism as a lens/framework, the researcher investigated "where and from whom" are the participants learning to manage their times. According to Bandura's theories, behavior (e.g., being on time, respecting other opinions) and an individual's personality traits are learned by example.

Delimitations and Assumptions

Delimitations were the boundaries set by the researcher to limit and select the CTE programs included in this study. One delimitation was participants were localized to one college and to a subgroup of CTE students who were not planning to transfer to a university and were pursuing a terminal associate degree or certificate. The five chosen programs had low performance rates over the prior 3 years for certificate and associate degree earners. To learn why these five programs were low performers, the researcher excluded CTE programs with high-performing metrics or associate degrees of transfer, such as nursing or architectural programs. Another delimitation was the number of female participants in the study. Three of the 17 participants were women, and one was a single mother.

To manage the workload on the researcher due to the extensive demand in qualitative methods studies, the researcher limited this study to focusing only on student perceptions and experiences. To further apply Bandura's (1978) reciprocating determinism theory, the researcher had to consider the effects of the learning environment and the interactions between faculty and CTE students. Only students shared their experiences on the phenomena of time prioritization, which resulted in a one-sided analysis.

Lastly, a delimitation of this study was the exclusion of other CTE programs at one selected college, such as architecture, which offered transfer associate degrees. The researcher limited the selection of programs to CTE programs offering short-term certificates or local 2-year associate degrees in the applied sciences (i.e., nontransferable to 4-year institution degree programs).

Significance of the Study

Three main reasons justified researching how and why CTE students prioritized their time. First, by studying and listening to students as they delineate the scope of their responsibilities inside and outside college, leaders can gain insight into how to better serve adult nontraditional CTE students impacted by the implementation of Guided Pathways. CTE student perspectives were needed for this study to understand how they prioritized college assignments. Community colleges serve adult nontraditional students at a sizable number. According to Soares (2018), "California has almost 4.5 million adults who are 'near completers'—nontraditional students who have some college units but no degree" (para 1). Community college leaders make better policy decisions when data are available and used. To inform the progress of a policy implemented, many leaders use closed systems with continuous feedback loops. Hattie and Timperley (2007) explained, "Feedback is information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (p. 81). College leaders are tasked with helping students succeed, making changes to class schedules, and providing access to education. For this reason, leaders need to know of current unmet needs and of significant barriers nontraditional CTE students experience while attending college.

Second, college leaders can gain insight to better understand students' needs and barriers that delay on-time graduation. The researcher identified how nontraditional CTE students prioritized their time, what college influences shaped their prioritization of how they used their time, and how they prioritized school responsibilities while completing their degrees or programs. The researcher conducted personal interviews with current CTE nontraditional students, the target group, at a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) community college to help fill

the gap in the published literature not currently available for this group of adult CTE nontraditional students.

Third, this study served as a CTE feedback loop, providing qualitative information as guidance to college leaders by providing insight into the daily lives of community college nontraditional CTE students who planned to go directly to the workforce after graduation. College leaders have more limited interactions with students due to their administrative roles and responsibilities. Faculty have the most interaction with students due to their daily interactions with them. However, both groups of people need information about students' goals, external responsibilities, and experiences at college. Being too familiar with students might create a bias in information received and being less familiar can distort information. Data from students' voices developed a feedback loop to inform how nontraditional CTE students perceive and experience their college learning environment.

In summary, this qualitative research will aid CTE educators as they try to understand the complex lives of these students, including how their personal responsibilities impact their educational pathways. By learning about external and internal forces CTE students experience, leaders and faculty can derive new ways to communicate and navigate nontraditional CTE students to prioritize their time to graduate on time.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Important terms relevant to this study are defined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1.

Definitions of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Adult nontraditional student	An adult nontraditional student has one or more of the following characteristics: is a single parent, is employed, delayed college enrollment, has dependent(s), did not receive a tradition high school diploma, or are 20 years or older as a freshman (Choy, 2002).
Andragogy	Literally, andragogy is the art or science of teaching adults. Andragogy was developed by Malcolm Knowles and "means that instruction for adults needs to focus more on the process and less on the content being taught. Strategies such as case studies, role playing, simulations, and self-evaluation are most useful" (InstructionalDesign.org, n.d., para. 3).
Career and technical education (CTE)	CTE is organized educational activities that offer a sequence of courses that provides individuals with rigorous academic content and relevant technical knowledge and skills needed to prepare for further education and careers in current or emerging professions, which may include high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sectors or occupations (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, 2006).
Meta-majors	A meta-major degree in CTE is an associate degree designed to use stackable certificates as the building blocks to complete 40 technical units, leaving only general education electives to complete for an associate degree (Ross, 2019).
Middle-skill jobs	Middle-skill jobs generally require more education than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree (Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, 2019).
Pedagogy	Pedagogy is the field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in schools (Kind & Kennedy, 2019).
Perkins Grant	The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (i.e., Perkins IV Grant) is a principal source of federal funding to states and discretionary grantees for the improvement of secondary and postsecondary career and technical education programs across the United States (California Department of Education, n.d.-b).
Soft skills	Soft skills are personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. They are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character traits, attitudes, career attributes, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2017).
Stackable certificates	Stackable certificates in career and technical education have overlapping coursework that can lead to related or advanced specializations (Bohn & McConville, 2018).
Student retention	Student retention is often measured in return rates from one year to another among students (Soika, 2020).
Student success	Student success includes not only strong retention and degree completion rates, but also high-quality learning. It means students are

Term	Definition
	prepared for success in their personal, civic, and professional lives, and that they embody the values and behaviors that make their institution distinctive. Institutions' definitions of success differ given their unique missions, traditions, programs, and the characteristics of the students served (The California State University, n.d.).
Trades or trade careers	Trades are hands-on skilled labor vocations that require education beyond high school. Industries include manufacturing, transportation and logistics, energy, construction, and utilities (Construct Your Future, 2021).
Workforce program	A workforce program is a for-credit career and technical education program leading to a certificate and/or associate degree at a community college (Employment Development Department, n.d.).

Chapter Summary

The community college mission has been evolving continuously for many decades. Once considered less than a college, it is now viewed as a critical institution directly tied to local economic growth and a doorway for students who otherwise would not have accessed higher education (O'Banion, 2019). In this transformation, adult vocational education has benefited by acquiring a new name: CTE. This newer version of vocational training includes integrating academic courses in mathematics, English, and reading with technical education courses. This research study explored a subgroup of CTE students who strived to prioritize their time to succeed in community college and pursue careers in the skilled trades. This chapter included a background and statement of the problem, purpose of the study, RQs, overview of methodology, theoretical frameworks, delimitations and assumptions, significance of the study, and definitions of key terminology used in this study.

Organization of the Dissertation

The study is organized in the following manner: Chapter 1 included the study's overview and introduction to the study. Chapter 2 contains the literature review that informed the researcher of the chosen theoretical frameworks, CTE's history, vocational education rebranding effort, adult student needs, and adult learner learning strategies. Chapter 3 describes the selection

of personal interviews as the qualitative research method. Chapter 4 details the study's findings. Finally, Chapter 5 provides the implications of the findings, recommendations for further research and best practices, and a conclusion.

2. Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine adult nontraditional career and technical education (CTE) students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time.

This review of the literature was conducted to develop deeper understanding of students enrolled in community college career technical programs. The literature review also provided the researcher with a technical vocabulary from current and historical events shaping CTE. The researcher identified gaps in existing literature relevant to the lived experiences of CTE students.

This chapter begins with a broad exploration of the research area and theories used in analysis. Then, it narrows in scope to focus on the research topic and ends with a gap in the literature this study attempted to fill. First, the review provides an overview of the history of CTE and the theoretical frameworks used to drive the study. Information on critical CTE historical events is provided and subgroups found to exist in CTE student populations are covered. The researcher shares supporting data on nontraditional CTE students' needs. Additionally, information shared includes leaders who face the challenges and responsibilities while attempting to find better methods to guide CTE nontraditional students to complete their programs. Lastly, the literature review highlights the information gap found for nontraditional CTE students. The literature review themes are in the following order sequence:

1. Theoretical framework
2. History of vocational education
3. Transitions from vocational to CTE
4. CTE is crucial to California's economy
5. Defining adult CTE learners

6. Adult student needs
7. Adult learner learning strategies
8. Identified gaps

The literature review themes provided the researcher with a framework to recognize delimitations and support the research questions (RQs).

Theoretical Framework

Wilson and Madsen (2008) gave a historical review of the key events that influenced Maslow to study psychology and motivational theories, including his disagreement with Watson's (1913) behaviorism work. This disagreement had considerable influence on Maslow's work. Maslow developed the hierarchy of needs to describe why people become motivated to change their behaviors. Maslow's model provides a visual representation of how humans prioritize their motivations based on five levels of need.

The researcher sought to identify any themes that suggested CTE students were following Maslow's (1943) theory of need. According to Brookman (1989), Maslow's theory of need is used to explain people's motivation level when they lack basic human needs. Maslow named it the hierarchy of needs, which describes people's physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. The theory has been applied broadly in businesses professional development plans to help people reach their full human potential and attain a state of self-actualization (Brookman, 1989).

Brookman (1989) applied Maslow's (1943) theory to explain how academic counselors who intertwine essential elements of care and safety in their academic advising capacity improve student retention. Brookman highlighted an increase in retention outcomes at Pacific Lutheran University when safety needs were addressed. Brookman argued support programs need to go

beyond academic counselors and student affairs practitioners by including faculty outside the classroom setting. For instance, Brookman suggested faculty members could engage in mentorship programs designed to help students attain higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy.

Brookman (1989) concluded a *learning institution* is a place where educators can provide a safe environment where students feel wanted and express their opinions without fear of shame. According to Maslow (1943), a person can move to the next level of the hierarchy when their personal safety is secured. Brookman shared retention improved at Pacific Lutheran University during the 1976–1977 academic year from 69% to 75% as a result of serving students' first four basic needs. Brookman pointed out the natural need for self-actualization is quite different for each student, so every student should be approached personally. Brookman suggested faculty need to understand many college students are deficient in Maslow's most fundamental stage of safety, including lacking food, water, warmth, and rest. Brookman posited these basic survival needs must be satisfied before students can be expected to stay in class. Once these needs are met, students should feel safe and secure on a college campus. Brookman stated an institution cannot expect only faculty to provide these supports; a collaborative effort between students, faculty, and counselors is most effective.

Although Brookman (1989) only focused on the first four levels of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, some students require intervention at the higher levels of Maslow's schema to stay motivated (Wilson & Madsen, 2008). Students considered adult learners often have a job while attending college. Wilson and Madsen (2008) provided another application of Maslow's theory to understand what motivates employees to learn new skills. This application is important to understand because the retraining of the U.S. workforce is at the center of community colleges' missions (D'Amico et al., 2019). Wilson and Madsen used Maslow's theory to build a

framework about motivating employees to continue their education. They argued there is a correlation between having a healthy business and an employee's willingness to invest their time to continue their education. They also postulated understanding Maslow's humanistic view on motivation can be helpful when attempting to motivate employees to continue their education. Wilson and Madsen asserted one way businesses persuade employees to continue their education is by addressing their personal needs.

Although business and education leaders have used Maslow's (1943) theory of need to understand employees and students, they have applied it with caution and with consideration of its limitations (McLeod, 2020; Tay & Diener, 2011). McLeod (2020) explained the limitation of the 5-tiered model of human needs developed by Maslow in 1943 and amended in 1954. McLeod recognized the extended version of Maslow's theory from 1954 better explains why people who have achieved the first four tiers will continue to have these base needs and will be motivated to act or change their behavior accordingly. McLeod first focused on the first four levels: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, and esteem needs, then further examined how some individuals skip steps contrary to the sequential schema. For instance, Maslow assumed the second level cannot be reached without satisfying the first level. Maslow also put a time variable on each level; the more time passes without satisfying the four basic needs, the more motivation is developed in an individual seeking to fulfill these deficiencies. McLeod pointed out other researchers also concluded that Maslow theorized that the first four levels of needs are a prerequisite before attaining another level.

McLeod (2020) described how Maslow (1943) came to his definition of self-actualization for the higher fifth step on the hierarchy. McLeod contended this theory cannot be generalized because Maslow's analysis was based on White, educated males. Rakowski (2008) suggested

Maslow's theory cannot account for a variety of cultures and their inherent motivations. Tay and Diener (2011) concluded the ordering of Maslow's needs in the hierarchy was not always sequential. They indicated people can live in the belonging level without possessing many of the lower attributes.

Overall, Maslow's theory of motivation has been used for understanding human behavior since its publication in 1943 and its update in 1954. Although there has been disagreement about whether each stratum in the hierarchy must be reached by an individual before another can be attempted, the theory provides a helpful framework for understanding what motivates individuals (McLeod, 2020; Tay & Diener, 2011). The cultural limitations of the theory (Tay & Diener, 2011) and the strong need for self-actualization over base needs found in today's workforce (Wilson & Madsen, 2008) highlight the hierarchy might not be as rigid as Maslow (1943) asserted.

The second theoretical lens the researcher applied was Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory. According to PsycholoGenie (n.d.):

> Bandura's theory states that a person's behavior is influenced by the environment and vice versa. In simpler terms, it means that the environment tends to make changes in the behavior of the individual, and in return, the behavior of the individual is also responsible for a change in the environment. So, it means that not only does the environment influence the person's thinking, but the person's subsequent behavior also influences the environment. (para. 4)

Bandura's reciprocal determinism theory states individual factors, behavioral factors, and environmental factors all equally determine how a person learns a behavior (Connor, 2019). A well-documented observation is people behave differently depending on who is nearby (Connor,

2019). The researcher focused on the environmental factors that influenced people to change their behavior toward prioritizing their time. These factors include social norms, access in the community, influence on the environment, and influence on other students.

According to Karpouza and Emvalotis (2019), students and teachers are always developing relationships. However, the power difference between faculty and students can be a barrier to creating a relationship. Students mentioned feeling more comfortable speaking out and participating when they had a previous positive experience with a professor during their one-on-one meetings. Karpouza and Emvalotis concluded the significant finding was agreement that reciprocal determinism theory applied in an educational setting is a good lens to study CTE nontraditional student behavior. For these reasons, the researcher concluded Maslow and Bandura's theories were lenses appropriate in this study.

History of Vocational Education

Over the years, vocational education has evolved due to technological innovation and global economic market forces. Imperatore and Hyslop (2017) provided a graphic timeline to highlight the critical historical milestones that shaped how vocational education transformed into CTE and highlighted how these programs have been funded and supported by the U.S. Department of Education. In 1917, support for CTE was provided under the name of vocational education. In 1917, the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act was signed into law. This law was the first federal financial investment in vocational education. The federal government's initial focus was to support states developing agriculture farms, building homes, and developing industrial education programs. In 1926, the National Society for Vocational Education and the Vocational Education Association of the Middle West merged and became the American Vocational Association (AVA). For almost a century, the AVA has been the driving

force and advocacy group at the federal level for CTE. All AVA presidents who served in this organization have influenced U.S. presidents and presidential candidates during election periods or national leaders during periods of war. Their influence helped shape legislation and directly affected the outcomes of CTE funding.

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE, 2002) described the historical forces that lead to the new branding and infusing of vocational education with academic rigor. The ACTE (2002) mentioned how AVA began by first organizing their committees with representative members from agriculture, industrial education, trades, commercial education, home economics, part-time education, and rehabilitation/developmental education. Since 1932, the AVA has advocated for adult education through their experiences in vocational education. According to the ACTE (2002):

> Ray Fife, the president of AVA from 1932 to 1934, noted, "Vocational education has had much experience in adult education. Nearly two thirds of the vocational education students of the nation are enrolled in adult classes. It can contribute much in organization and method to other forms of adult education." (p. 24)

Skills taught in college changed as modern technologies were introduced to U.S. society (e.g., personal computers, transistors, internet platform and communication networks). Technology rapidly expanded into many industries such as the automotive, aerospace, and utilities sectors. The common local mechanics were at a disadvantage when attempting to diagnose or repair such complex systems. Tradespeople needed new technical abilities to maintain employment. To address technological changes, the U.S. Department of Education added additional guidelines under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of

2006 (2006; i.e., Perkins IV). The Perkins Grant continues to be a principal source of federal funding for technical program provided by community college.

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (2006) declared traditional vocational programs needed to be more integrated with academic rigor to develop students who would be better suited to adapt to any new industry challenges. Students who had taken these courses would benefit from getting a theoretical understanding (e.g., general physics theories) while being trained for welding or automobile industries. According to EdSource (2005), the future workforce needed to be more adaptable to change and competing forces from abroad. The skillset of a tradesperson has changed, and the new goal became to target younger students and increase academic expectations. The new vision of the 21st-century workforce included more academic and CTE branding. Consequently, CTE in California became part of high school and college curriculum.

Accountability and better outcomes also became part of the California's legislature's requirements. Since 1997, high schools have implemented testing on academic standards under No Child Left Behind legislation, focusing on English, math, science, and social studies (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). During this time, students began to take vocational courses to explore career options. According to EdSource (2005), many students completed the equivalent of up to three CTE courses before graduation from high school. Legislators understood students at risk of dropping out of high school could better relate to abstract concepts if applied to everyday applications found in the workforce. They believed hands-on coursework would incentivize students to stay in school, be able to understand academic concepts, and become life-long learners in a chosen career. CTE students formed a significant population in California schools. EdSource (2005) stressed, "In 2003–04, according to the California

Department of Education, 42% of high school students were identified as career/technical education concentrators because they were taking courses beyond the introductory level" (p. 2).

Transitions From Vocational to CTE

Over time, a higher level of competence was required from students entering the workforce in a technical field (see Table 2.1). By 2005, CTE students needed a new technical skillset due to technological advances in every industry sector. The new CTE target was designed for all students and not just students who failed in rigorous math and science courses. CTE students were expected to have gone through a technical course that offered elements of introductory algebra and higher levels of reading skills to give them the ability to be successful in a workforce competing with global markets.

Table 2.1.

Transition From Vocational Education to Career Technical Education Expectations

Areas of concern and change	Vocational education through most of the 20th century	21st-century expectations for career and technical education (CTE)
Purpose	Preparing students for entry-level jobs in occupations that did not require additional education or training beyond high school	Preparing students for technical careers or college-level classes with both technical and academic skills that will help them to adapt to industry needs as their fields change
Target students	Those not intending to go to college	Any student interested in gaining technical skills
Academic expectations	Low: Students enrolled in less rigorous math, science, and English courses than college-bound students	High: All students prepared with technical and academic skills giving them more options after they graduate
The economy and its needs	Many low- and medium-skill jobs available that provided sufficient wages to support a family	Most jobs with salaries that would support a family require completion of some training or education beyond high school. A base of strong academic skills is needed to help workers adapt to changes in the economy.

Note. Adapted from "The Evolution of Career and Technical Education in California," by EdSource, 2005 (https://edsource.org/wp-content/publications/CareerTech05.pdf). In the public domain.

Educational institutions continued to adapt to new rigor in CTE classes and courses by integrating math, reading, and writing into CTE courses; yet, it is unclear if this practice helped students. According to Malkus (2019), with the new CTE reform, high school students looking to upsell their resumes took CTE courses, distorting data intended for measuring if the intent is to help students at risk of failing high school. Malkus compared the changes taking place because of the rebranding of vocational education to CTE. The new vocational education image stems

from the latest legislative request to revamp and change the image tied to skilled workers from a previously industrialized workforce under a new name: CTE.

Malkus's (2019) longitudinal study, between 1982 and 2013, looked at how high schools preparing students for technical field higher education reported success results after implementing more academically rigorous CTE coursework. Malkus questioned how data were collected and categorized. Malkus found students taking business-related classes classified as CTE were responsible for the positive CTE data. Malkus reported math concentrators did not improve, arguing CTE courses have not contributed to any positive increases. New CTE concentrators showed improvement, but results were from students who just stopped by the CTE tent and picked up a few courses to make their resume or portfolio look diverse in technology (Malkus, 2019). According to Malkus, the *CTE tent* was a term coined for students taking high school CTE classes who are not interested in pursuing a career in CTE. These students only stop by to take a couple CTE courses to improve their transcripts for transfer to a 4-year institution. Malkus made an alarming point about current CTE concentrators. The reported data from the schools looked promising; however, after taking a more in-depth look, students in need of CTE as the last alternative to a well-paying career might be facing the same barriers they were dealing with before the transformation from vocational to CTE. When new CTE concentrators were compared to traditional vocational concentrators (e.g., math), no improvements were made. Additionally, business CTE enrollment dropped by 75%. Malkus (2019) stated:

> For CTE to be successful, leaders—especially those currently developing state plans—must ask themselves more than merely whether CTE programs are producing adequate outcomes, but whether CTE programs in high school are targeting the students who need them the most. (Making Sense of CTE Trends section)

Malkus pointed out some leaders only use CTE data to the advantage of college-bound students and questioned whether leaders in education understand CTE students' needs well enough to serve all students and not just the ones who were college bound before CTE was implemented in high school.

CTE is Crucial to California's Economy

According to Pham et al. (2020), "California possesses a large economy that is unique from the rest of the U.S., and its skilled labor force depends heavily on training from community colleges" (p. 52). For this reason, the researcher proposed CTE programs are worth improving their completion rates. Pham et al. investigated the employment outcomes of students receiving CTE training at a community college. They used the California Community College Career Technical Education Employment Outcomes Survey (CTEOS). This investigation was a longitudinal analysis from CTE student data captured in CTEOS 2014, CTEOS 2015, and CTEOS 2016 cohorts. The result of this investigation proved all three hypotheses to be true:

- participants obtained hourly wage increase after schooling compared to before schooling,
- schooling had a positive impact on employment status, and
- schooling had a positive impact on employment term.

Table 2.2 summarizes findings concluding positive outcomes on the first hypothesis; CTE students did gain a significant increase in hourly earning income by completing a CTE program. In 2016, nontransfer students showed a larger gain of $5.40 per hour versus $4.50 per hour for students who transferred to a 4-year university.

Table 2.2.

Median Wage Earnings Before and After Schooling

Year	Type	Average hourly wage (median)			Wilcoxon signed-rank (Z)
		$ Before schooling	$ After schooling	$ Difference (median)	
2014	Transfer	11.00	16.00	5.00	27.1***
	Nontransfer	15.00	20.00	5.00	34.9***
2015	Transfer	12.50	20.00	7.50	37.5***
	Nontransfer	15.00	20.00	5.00	17.6***
2016	Transfer	11.50	16.00	4.50	38.8***
	Nontransfer	15.00	20.40	5.40	63.6***

Note. ***$p < .001$. Adapted from "California Community Colleges Produce Positive Employment Outcomes: Results from the Career Technical Education Outcomes Survey," by M. Pham, K. C. Greaney, and L. Abel, 2020. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 44(1). (https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2019.1650843). In the public domain.

CTEOS sampling signals an excellent method to investigate the outcomes of CTE programs and the alignment of industry skills in demand. CTE students who complete their program and develop skills related to their industry are recognized and compensated. However, the missing element of these surveys is the lived experiences of nontraditional CTE students who make up this subgroup of students. According to these data, CTE nontraditional students who completed their programs earned more after their education. Additionally, CTEOS data provide a measurement of the payback period for invested time and CTE program completion; however, it does not measure or ask how difficult or easy it is for nontraditional students to graduate from CTE programs.

According to Grosz et al. (2020), "Only about a third of degree-seeking enrollees at community colleges complete a degree or certificate" (p. 2). For this reason, Grosz et al. asked

the following question: Could adjusting the flexibility of CTE courses improve the outcome rate? The empirical approach study included data from CTE students in 114 California community colleges between 2001 and 2016. The participants' data included associate degrees and certificates earned. Program frequency of offering, scheduling, and capacity were the main factors studied. The results of this study were alarming due to the unanswered question about why only one third of CTE students completed degrees or certificates. According to Grosz et al. (2020), "Our results confirm that there is little association between the speed of students' completion of degrees and the extent of flexibility in the program offerings" (p. 20). Grosz et al. suggested California is moving in the right direction by increasing student access. In other words, this study showed a positive outcome of an increase in enrollment with added flexibility. However, this study did not include a qualitative lens framing CTE student perspectives about evening and weekend course offerings and did not explore the lived experiences of nontraditional CTE students who did not complete degrees or certificates.

Defining Adult CTE Learners

Hirschy et al. (2011) examined key differences between traditional students and students pursuing occupational associate degrees or certificates. According to Hirschy et al., CTE student populations are different and require support services tailored to their needs to keep them in college, especially during their first semester. To better understand CTE student persistence, researchers have compared CTE nontraditional students to traditional students using theories like Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory of departure and Bean and Metzner's (1985) nontraditional undergraduate student attrition (Hirschy et al., 2011). Hirschy et al. also analyzed Bean and Eaton's (2001) *Psychology Underlying Successful Retention Practices* and found no model fully described CTE students because their sample references were from students in 4-year institutions

and not community colleges. Instead, components of theories like Tinto's (1975) academic and social integration have been expanded to develop a framework for faculty and leaders to help CTE students succeed in their college journey. For example, Tinto (1975) described the integration model as:

> A longitudinal process of interaction between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems (as measured by his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitment in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (p. 94)

Hirschy et al. (2011) reviewed many variables and attributes from the work of scholars such as Bean and Metzner (1985), Bean and Eaton (2001), and Tinto (1975, 1993). Hirschy et al. offered a conceptual framework that better fits CTE students' behaviors. Hirschy et al. expressed previous reviews of existing student persistence models seem helpful only for leaders to design better support systems for transfer students, but a gap still exists in theoretical models for understanding nontraditional student persistence in pursuing occupational degrees and certificates. Adult CTE students must quickly see the value of their daily lessons to commit their focus and fully participate in the learning process (Hirschy et al., 2011). According to Hirschy et al., earning a credential or participating in an internship, clinical, job shadowing, and being employees in career-related positions are essential pieces in this career-based framework.

Ashar and Skenes (1993) also said much more attention should be placed on purposely linking academics to careers when supporting adult learner persistence. They appended Tinto's (1975) academic and social integration model to include a third component, career integration. Ashar and Skenes explained career integration is attained when students experience many

activities connecting them to their occupational industries. Although Ashar and Skenes's framework is theoretical and was not tested by research, the construct of career integration may be effective in understanding the persistence of adult learners once it has been applied in a research setting. Ashar and Skenes pointed out Tinto's (1975) theory of dropping out has been criticized because of its basis on Durkheim's (1897/1952) theory of suicide and its development from studying traditional-aged White men from a small, liberal arts college. They believed adding this third component to the model could help better understand what motivates adult learners who are focused on finding employment upon graduation to complete their degrees and certificates.

Adult Student Needs

Sutton (2016) reported on innovators who are leaders in serving adult students. Sutton highlighted Jonathan Talley, director of adult and nontraditional students at Missouri State University. Talley stated colleges can increase retention by streamlining administration, advising, and financial aid processes for adult leaders (Sutton, 2016). Talley understood adult students have a low tolerance for waiting in line and can quickly get discouraged due to many external commitments. Sending them out to navigate through too many offices could exhaust them. Talley contended traditional norms and long vetting processes by college administration, financial aid, and enrollment are systems designed for traditional students. With added external responsibilities, nontraditional students do not have the time to go through many offices to complete a process. Talley observed his institution was not ready to streamline their processes. Talley's success came from developing a one-stop shop where adults can get their service needs in one location. Additionally, the success was linked to an on-call scheduling system where students could go online to make an appointment to see a counselor within 1 hour. According to

Talley, college leaders need to find ways to make it easier by providing quicker access to serve this population of students who have additional responsibilities such as caring for children or elderly dependents.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE, 2022) suggested community colleges can do more than just provide education. The CCCSE highlighted the need for community colleges to extend their services to provide basic needs for nontraditional students. Many nontraditional students face food and housing insecurities, even while working full-time jobs

The CCCSE's (2022) nationwide study involved 82,424 students from 194 institutions. The study revealed almost one third of Community College students in the sample had dependents. Of these students, 34% reported running out of food by the end of the month, which was higher than the 27% reported by students without dependents. Some students even admitted to skipping meals to provide for their dependents. Nontraditional students with dependents also needed help in earning enough income to provide housing. The CCCSE (2022) report stated:

> Any student with unstable housing is experiencing uncertainty, which requires them to spend time and energy figuring out where they will sleep and how they will manage their belongings. This extra work is time consuming and exhausting. It also distracts students from their studies. (p. 11)

The current study aimed to inform community college leaders about the changing demographics and needs of nontraditional students. One significant finding was the difference between students with dependents and students without dependents. Community colleges play a crucial role in developing nontraditional students by addressing issues such as accessibility,

retention, engagement, basic needs, and guiding them through the transition to a career after graduation. These equity factors are particularly important for first-generation students.

Another layer of barriers community college leaders observe is how first-time college students choose careers and if they achieve employment in their desired profession after graduation. If they are first to go to college, their immediate family is seldom knowledgeable enough to mentor them or provide adequate guidance while attending college. Gibbons and Woodside (2014) conducted a qualitative study on family educational history and how this history helps or hinders first-generation college students' and adult students' successes in college. They targeted students who graduated and had families without a college education. The researchers looked for the postcollege students' reflections, perceptions, and role of the father's expectations about chosen careers.

Gibbons and Woodside's (2014) findings were based on multiple qualitative interviews of students' perspectives and their families' experiences during their time in college. A common theme was the influence a father had on their student's chosen career pathway. Gibbons and Woodside found personal coaching and mentoring support systems, whether at home or in college, needed to be in place to increase retention. Recommendations included providing services with more flexible schedules (e.g., weekend counseling sessions) to accommodate students and targeting first-time adult students in their outreach programs. This finding from Gibbons and Woodside is similar to the construct of career integration identified by Ashar and Skenes (1993).

Adult Learner Learning Strategies

Transfer-focused community colleges serve more adult nontraditional CTE students. To support these changing student demographics, leaders wrestle with delivering education to

students who do not have much time to reflect on lectures or the prescribed study time. Ross-Gordon (2011) wrote a literature review on nontraditional students. Most student populations studied in higher education research are traditional students; however, college campuses serve more than 73% of students who can be categorized as nontraditional (Ross-Gordon, 2011). Ross-Gordon additionally concluded most of these students are adult learners and require the college to support and educate them using various modalities and instructional methods not used for younger students coming into college directly from high school. Ross-Gordon identified high-frequency attributes commonly found in nontraditional students include (a) delaying college by at least 1 year following high school, (b) having dependents, (c) being a single parent, (d) being employed full time, (e) being financially independent, (f) attending school only part time, and (g) not having a high school diploma. Ross-Gordon mentioned adult learners have more responsibilities beyond attending classes and find it difficult balancing and prioritizing their time. Ross-Gordon referenced a 2003 National Center for Education Statistics study in which 56% of students over the age of 24 saw themselves as workers first and students second. The lack of further available research into the specifics of why they chose to do so suggests further research is needed to explore adult learners' motivational forces to return to school.

Additionally, Ross-Gordon (2011) discussed instruction delivery methods used for adult learners. Changing the way nontraditional adult students think and view the world is achieved by applying recently learned concepts. Showing the connections between classroom lessons and industry applications was the preferred engagement method for nontraditional students. Nontraditional students also prefer flexible schedules, including online platforms, if these modalities are well-structured. Ross-Gordon pointed out adult students and re-entry students need to have faculty and support programs available to help them learn how to be college

students. According to Ross-Gordon, to gain adult students' attention and full engagement, a more personal one-on-one coaching style is needed. In summary, a nontraditional way of delivering concepts is also needed for CTE adult students who learn differently.

Identified Gaps

Literature is well-documented on the characteristics of nontraditional students including adult learners and first-generation college students. There is agreement that many services and available resources are designed for students who are transferring or pursuing a bachelor's degree. However, there is a gap in the literature identifying how adult nontraditional CTE students spend their time and prioritize their life and school responsibilities while completing their degrees or short-term certificates.

California has made CTE a priority to increase technical skilled labor workforce through short-term certificates. These short-term certificates are popular for adult students who have external responsibilities. However, some of these short-term certificates are condensed versions of traditional certificates, requiring more time and effort for students and faculty to complete. How nontraditional CTE students experience the new stackable short-term certificates has not been fully documented. Chapter 3 illustrates the research methodology used in this study.

3. Chapter 3 - Research Methods

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research methodology selected for this study. This chapter is organized by first reintroducing the study's purpose and research questions (RQs). Second, the research design is explained in detail, including the study setting, participant selection criteria, instrumentation used to collect the participants' interview data, and data management. Third, the researcher describes data coding and analysis methods and how the software, Quirkos (2022), was used to organize data and find overlaps among themes. Lastly, ethical considerations, limitations, and study quality are presented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine adult nontraditional career and technical education (CTE) students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time. The following three RQs guided this study:

RQ1: What are the overall responsibilities of nontraditional CTE students seeking careers?

RQ2: How do nontraditional students prioritize college and personal demands?

RQ3: Where and from whom are nontraditional CTE students receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provided the foundation for the study and guided the research design (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). By conducting interviews, the researcher listened to students' college experiences to identify themes and compared them to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to determine if nontraditional CTE students behaved in ways consistent with the theory.

To understand how and by whom nontraditional CTE students learned to prioritize their time, the researcher asked questions that probed students' motivational forces. If students were motivated to move up Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, the researcher assumed they prioritized their college work before other tasks. According to Warren (1968), although hierarchy of needs has some limitations, it is well-suited to studies of human motivational behavior. Warren stated Maslow's theory considers the physical, psychic, and philosophical premises and, for these reasons, it is a fit in adult education. Warren described how many behaviorists, who accept the premises of self-actualization, agree with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Warren (1968) stated:

> These theorists maintain that there exist within man, over and beyond his animal-like needs, a need to grow as a person, a need to actualize his potential as human. This need will operate to motivate man to the degree that it is free to do so, to the extent that it is not blocked. (p. 5)

According to Chiang and Wang (2004), their research supports Maslow's theory, and "universities could benefit by taking active steps and to consider the best activity course program for adult learners to satisfy their needs—especially the social, esteem, and self-actualization needs of students" (p. 47). For these reasons, the researcher of the current study also used Maslow's hierarchy of needs as one of the lenses to study CTE nontraditional students.

Educators may benefit from knowing what triggers students to motivate themselves to reach higher levels of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. The researcher also attempted to find out from whom CTE students were learning to prioritize their time. According to Bandura (1978), people may learn behavior without positive or negative reinforcement. For example, a student may learn just by watching or hearing how an instructor behaves toward time

management. Sims and Manz (1984) explained how "leader behavior is seen as both a cause of subordinate behavior and caused by it" (p. 222).

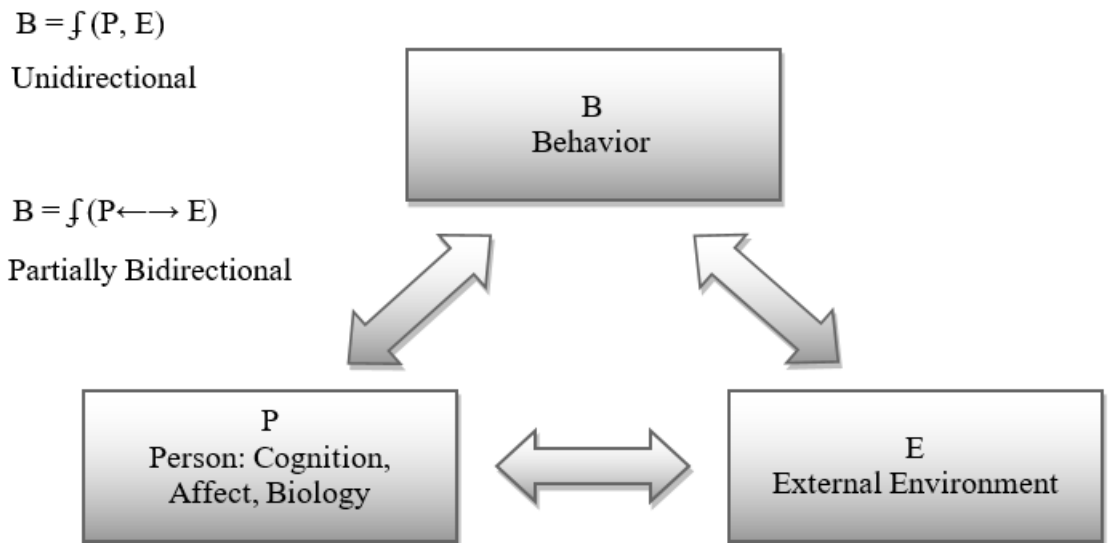
Conceptual Lens

Using a second lens, Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory, the researcher attempted to determine from whom nontraditional CTE students were influenced to prioritize college first.

During the personal interviews, open-ended questions were asked of students to determine if discussions, behaviors, or the idea of time prioritization took place during lectures or lab settings. According to Kelland (2020), one of the most important aspects of Bandura's view on how personality is learned is that "each one of us is an agent of change, fully participating in our surroundings and influencing the environmental contingencies that behaviorists believe affect our behavior" (para. 1). People can learn and change their behavior just by viewing others (Bandura, 1978). Reciprocal determinism theory suggests two pathways influence a person's behavior: external influence and internal motivations (see Figure 1.2). The reciprocating model suggests a person's personal behavior can manipulate others' behaviors (e.g., other students, professors). Or vice versa, a classroom of students can influence a person's behavior. These factors are considered external motivations. The internal pathway is innate; people are born with it as part of biology. Using Bandura's reciprocal determinism theory as a theoretical framework guided this study by providing the researcher direction in developing qualitative interview subquestions and providing a lens to analyze students.

Figure 3.1.

Bandura's Reciprocal Determinism



Note. Bandura's key aspects in the personal aspects affect adult learning. Adapted from "The Self-System in Reciprocal Determinism," by A. Bandura, 1978, *American Psychologist, 33*(4), p. 345 (https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.33.4.344). In the public domain.

The interview questions were designed to draw out themes from students' lived experiences while in a learning setting. This part of the study sought to highlight the type of social climates perceived by nontraditional CTE students. Traditional community college students who are well-prepared in high school are better equipped to succeed when faced with the rigor of work found in community college. Traditional students receive instructions, are made aware of the support resources available, take advantage of them, and perform well (Chao et al., 2007). For nontraditional students, more personal interactions that require substantial effort are necessary for them to develop relationships with faculty members and professionals to complete their educational goals. Using Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory as a second lens to conduct and analyze the results of the study, the researcher asked open-ended interview questions to better understand the relationships and behaviors of students. The

researcher sought to identify if discussions of time management and prioritization occurred during classes, labs, or shared time between faculty and students.

Research Design

The researcher used a phenomenological qualitative approach to gather data about the lived experiences of nontraditional CTE students. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explained why students' voices must be heard in a research study, stating, "We know that qualitative data provide a detailed understanding of a problem while quantitative data provide a more general understanding" (p. 8). For this study, interviews were necessary to understand CTE students' responsibilities. Using Maslow's theoretical framework as a base, the researcher predicted the participants' needs and motivations to continue their educational goals and gained insight into the driving forces of time allocation for these CTE students. Applying Bandura's conceptual lens, the researcher examined external forces, including family or work (e.g., finances). Internal forces included community college faculty and staff.

Study Setting

The researcher selected College of the Desert, one of the 116 colleges in the California Community Colleges system, as the study setting. The college is in the Coachella Valley, which is in the Palm Springs/Palm Desert region of Southern California near the California/Mexico border and served about 12,500 students at the time of the study, with a predominantly Hispanic student population at 74% (see Table 3.1). The region is also known for having low socioeconomic levels. According to City-Data.com (n.d.), the poverty level of the Coachella Valley was 19.9% at the time of the study, well above the poverty rate of California at 14.3%.

Table 3.1.

Fall 2021 College of the Desert Student Characteristics

Characteristic	%
Full-time student	37
Part-time student	57
Work 20 hours/week	79
Age, 19 or younger	37
Age, 20 or older	63
Hispanic	74
African American	5
White	13
Asian	6
Native American	1
Pacific Islanders	0
Others	1

Note. Adapted from Institutional Research Office, 2021. (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/environmental-scan.php). In the public domain.

College of the Desert is a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) by federal designation. HSIs are accredited, degree-granting, not-for-profit institutions of higher education with a full-time undergraduate student enrollment of at least 25% Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Eligibility for the HSI designation is provided under Title V of the Higher Education Act. The HSI designation allows College of the Desert to apply for federal grants and funds to improve and offer programs, services, and resources for Hispanic students and other students of color. Becoming an HSI was crucial for helping College of the Desert Hispanic students feel welcomed, respected, and well-served.

One such grant for technical programs is Perkins V, which uses 40 core indicators to measure the return on investment for funding. In 2021–2022, College of the Desert failed to meet many college aggregate core indicators expected by Perkins V, Title 1 (see Appendix C). These

performance indicators guided the college on where to focus improvement efforts and mirrored researcher interest. For this study, the researcher focused on the 11–20 core indicators, which College of the Desert used during the grant application process to justify CTE funding (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2.

College of the Desert Career and Technical Education Completion Information for Cohort Year 2018–2019

Items earned postsecondary credential		Count	Total	Negotiated level State	Negotiated level District	College performance	% above or below negotiated level
11	CTE cohort*	602	819	89.00	82.08	73.50	-8.6
12	Individuals preparing for nontraditional fields	148	197	89.00	82.08	75.13	-7.0
13	Out of workforce individuals	0	0	89.00	82.08	N/R	N/R
14	Individuals with economically disadvantaged families	444	602	89.00	82.08	73.75	-8.3
15	English learners	32	45	89.00	82.08	71.11	-11.0
16	Single parents	55	84	89.00	82.08	65.48	-16.6
17	Individuals with disabilities	67	73	89.00	82.08	91.78	9.7
18	Homeless individuals	0	0	89.00	82.08	N/R	N/R
19	Youth in foster Care	7	11	89.00	82.08	63.64	-18.4
20	Youth with parent in active military	2	3	89.00	82.08	66.67	N/A

Note. Items 1–40, I certify and acknowledge that performance in the 40 Core Indicator categories. N/R = not reported. Adapted from "The College of the Desert Performance Profile," by California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2022 (https://misweb.cccco.edu/perkinsv/Core_Indicator_Reports/Forms_All.aspx). In the public domain.

According to Zook (2019), the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) designated a new course classification for CTE in career pathways. To determine which program to include in this study, the researcher compared how College of the Desert CTE pathways differed from California CTE pathways (see Table 3.3). From this analysis, the researcher narrowed down the programs considered in this study, while taking into consideration how the CCCCO classified CTE programs versus College of the Desert to obtain the final list of programs.

Table 3.3.

Comparison Between CCCCO CTE Pathways and Available Pathways at College of the Desert

CCCCO	College of the Desert in the School of Applied Sciences and Business
Agriculture and natural resources	Agriculture and natural resources
Arts, media, and entertainment	Automobile and transportation
Building and construction trades	Building and construction trades
Business and finance	Business and finance
Education, child development, and family services	Culinary arts
Energy, environment, and utilities	Energy, environment, and utilities
Engineering and architecture	Engineering and architecture
Fashion and interior design	Hospitality, tourism, and recreation
Health science and medical technology	Public services
Hospitality, tourism, and recreation	
Information and communication technologies	
Manufacturing and product design	
Marketing, sales, and services	
Public services	
Transportation	

Note. CCCCO = California Community College Chancellor's Office. Adapted from "School of Applied Sciences & Business," by College of the Desert, n.d.-b (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/students/acad-prog/applied-science-business/default.php) and "CTE Career Pathways Poster-Standards and Framework," by the California Department of Education, n.d.-a (https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/ct/sf/documents/ctecpwposter.pdf). In the public domain.

Study Participants

After reviewing the characteristics of CTE programs offered at College of the Desert, the researcher targeted nontraditional CTE students who took at least one CTE course in the School of Applied Science and Business in one of five programs that had a track record of awarding short-term CTE certificates and local associate degrees (i.e., nontransferable degrees programs).

These programs included (a) horticulture, (b) culinary, (c) automobile technology, (d) building inspection, and (e) air conditioning technology. These five programs also had a history of low degree-awarding rates, and few students earned transfer degrees, suggesting students in these programs prioritized entering the workforce soon after receiving a credit or noncredit certificate. Students not planning to transfer are commonly in CTE programs; this is confirmed by reviewing the minimal historically awarded Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) designed for students who plan to matriculate to a university (see Figures D5 through D8 in Appendix D). Many of these students graduated with short-term certificates, while a few graduated in automobile and transportation with a terminal associate degree not accepted by 4-year intuitions.

The aim was to identify three students from each discipline to capture a wide range of CTE students pursuing careers. In essence, the researcher aimed to select female and male students who met one or more of the following criteria to be interviewed: (a) were a dependent, (b) were working a full-time job, (c) experienced delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, or (d) had part-time enrollment status.

The researcher used a nonprobability sampling procedure by following the defining characteristics published for nontraditional students established by the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). Nontraditional students have at least one of the following criteria: (a) have delayed college enrollment after high school, (b) are attending college part time, (c) are financially independent, (d) are employed full time while enrolled in college, (e) have dependents, (f) are a single parent, or (g) did not receive a high school diploma.

To find these specific CTE programs to study, the researcher reviewed data available for CTE programs from the College of the Desert Office of Institutional Research. Data from public safety academic degree programs showed most graduates transferred to a 4-year university;

therefore, they were not good candidates for this study (see Figure D1 in Appendix D). The researcher focused the study only on CTE students who did not plan to transfer to a university and focused on entering the workforce following their community college work. Figures D1 through D8 illustrate 5 school years of performance data and student characteristics from various CTE programs in the School of Applied Sciences at the College of the Desert (see Appendix D). Students interviewed included full- and part-time students who were older than 19 years of age and were in their 1st semester or returning after being out of high school.

The number of participants needed for a qualitative study varies among methodologies and depends on access to participants. Creswell (1998) recommended 5–25 participants and Morse (1994) suggested six participants for phenomenological studies. According to Smith (1998), "Because of the detailed and intensive work that qualitative studies entail, sample sizes are necessarily small and the application of mathematical rules to calculate sample sizes is generally not appropriate" (p. 99). By interviewing 17 students, the range of educational paths for CTE students preparing for careers in the trades was well-covered.

The researcher's goal was to interview 15 participants with semistructured questions that helped participants reflect on their daily experience while managing jobs, family, and homework responsibilities. After extensive, face-to-face recruitment efforts by the researcher, 17 participants voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. The participants were selected from across five CTE programs at College of the Desert, including (a) automobile technology, (b) air conditioning technology, (c) building inspection, (d) culinary, and (e) horticulture. Efforts were made to have racial and gender balance reflected among the 17 participants.

The researcher reviewed the performance of public service programs, which included fire technology, medical technician, peace officer, and administration of justice. The graph of

degrees and certificates showed students enrolled in and completed 105 associate degrees in 2019–2020 and four certificates, signaling these students attended the College of the Desert for a minimum of 2 years (see Figure D2 in Appendix D). The graph showed a sizable percentage of the students in these pathways (49%) were 19 or younger, making these students ineligible for this study. There were 176 associate degrees and 49 short-term certificates awarded in 2019–2020 for business and finance programs (see Figure D3 in Appendix D). Similar to the previous program, these data signal students attended the College of the Desert for the purpose of earning an ADT, which did not make them a good fit for this study. Data also showed 36% of students in these pathways were 19 or younger (see Figure D4 in Appendix D). Most of these students earned a degree designated as ADT, which qualified as transferring or partially accepting credit from 4-year institutions.

Instrumentation

Guided by one theoretical framework and one conceptual lens, the researcher developed an interview protocol (see Appendix E). According to Silverman (2000), "Interviews is your aim to describe the 'gritty' reality of people's lives (realism) or to access the stories or narratives through which people describe their worlds" (p. 136). The researcher developed and piloted open-ended interview questions, which were reviewed by two College of the Desert faculty who interacted daily with CTE nontraditional students. See the interview questions in Appendix E. Interview questions aided the researcher in understanding how adult CTE students coordinated their many responsibilities inside and outside of the collegiate setting. Further interview questions probed how students prioritized their responsibilities. The qualitative interviews were intended to help explain why and how the students prioritized their time to attend to their priorities while attending college.

Data Collection

For this study, the main sources of data were in-depth interviews with 17 students. The researcher requested approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Kansas State University to conduct the study. Upon IRB approval of participant questions and all data collection procedures and disclosures, students were invited to participate in individual interviews. In the event a participant felt more at ease doing the interview via video conference, the entire interview was audio recorded. The researcher's preferred video conferencing platform was Zoom. Zoom features included transcription and video recording. Additionally, the researcher took notes during the interviews.

To increase student participation, the researcher introduced the purpose and the significance of the study prior to the interviews. As a guest speaker in College of the Desert courses, the researcher presented the research study via Zoom conferencing and face-to-face meetings during the first 15 minutes of scheduled class from five CTE programs offered at College of the Desert: (a) automobile, (b) air conditioning technology, (c) culinary arts, (d) building inspection, and (e) horticulture. To include older students (i.e., 19 and over), the researcher solicitated students attending day, evening, and weekend courses. During the introduction of this study, the researcher explained identity protection processes, instructions on how questions would be asked, and a statement of participant's right to opt out at any time.

During each presentation, potential interview participants were also made aware of a financial incentive of a $25 retail gift card for participating in a 1-hour session. Students interested in participating were asked to provide basic demographic information (e.g., gender, age, employment) and status of their program to determine if they fit one or more nontraditional CTE characteristics. Students who met the criteria for nontraditional student were contacted by

phone and offered the opportunity to further participate. To ensure interviewee answers were represented accurately, interview participants had time to review their transcribed responses to the questions and add additional clarification, when requested.

Participant selection began on November 1, 2022 with the researcher contacting the five selected programs' lead faculty members. Four of those five lead faculty members allowed the researcher to present via Zoom video conference or present face-to-face during lectures to introduce the study and recruit students. After 2 weeks of Zooming into multiple class sessions, the researcher changed the recruitment approach due to a low number of volunteers. After discussions with the lead faculty about low participation numbers, they all agreed to have the researcher come into the classroom to provide a personalized introduction and allow CTE nontraditional students to ask questions. Seventeen students were selected, which was two more than the initial goal of 15. Presenting in classrooms and presenting the purpose and significance of this study increased participant volunteers.

During the interviews, the researcher asked each participant 10 closed-ended questions to confirm each participant had a qualifying characteristic of a nontraditional student. Then, the researcher asked 10 open-ended, semistructured questions to participants. The researcher developed questions to investigate how these participants managed their time and rationalized their prioritization of responsibilities when equally important school responsibilities intersected with external responsibilities. The researcher intentionally asked questions about who the participant thought was a role model in their career path to confirm if reciprocal determinism and behaviorism theory, chosen frameworks for this study, were applicable. During interviews, the researcher also asked participants about the people, family, or factors that motivated them to return to college to pursue a CTE career.

Data Analysis

Once qualitative data were collected and transcribed, the researcher analyzed transcriptions to find themes that aligned adult CTE student needs with the theoretical framework of Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation. Additionally, an analysis was conducted in search of themes supporting thru the lens of Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory. Data were transcribed and grouped using thematic and interpretative phenological analysis. The data were coded using a mix of inductive and deductive preset codes (e.g., time, guidance, demands, goals, jobs, distractions, stress, prioritization).

The researcher avoided jumping to a quick conclusion during the data interpretation. To validate any findings, the researcher cross-referenced the information with field notes and applied multiple analysis tools such as query view, which is provided by Quirkos. According to Silverman (2000), refutability "means that we must overcome the temptation to jump to easy conclusions just because there is some evidence that seems to lead in an interested direction" (p. 178). Quirkos (2022), which is a qualitative text coding and analysis software, stored interview data and allowed the researcher to code data. The researcher applied Quirkos, an electronic tool, to the text retrieved from the transcription of interviews. The researcher selected Quirkos because it is in the top five software used by qualitative researchers, is easy to use, and has been applied in many education analyses. The researcher used Quirkos to manage text data codes and find common themes in multiple conversations. The researcher evaluated participants' responses to interview questions corresponding to key terms derived from Maslow's (1943) motivation theory and Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism lens to identify themes. These themes were defined and grouped for further use while the researcher applied multiple iterations of coding and thematic analysis on the participants' interview statements.

Alignment Table

To ensure effective research, the researcher developed a table illustrating how the interview questions, RQs, and theoretical lenses aligned (see Appendix A). This was accomplished by analyzing the RQs and participant interview data through Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theoretical lenses. The theories assisted the researcher in applying data triangulation on the results and developing thematic credibility.

Ethical Considerations

Personal interviews allowed the researcher to hear how and why CTE students prioritized their time. Nevertheless, participants may have disclosed personal reasons or risks that may have been difficult for them to share. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017), "At the most basic level, ethics in education research involves: (a) inviting the consent of participants, (b) ensuring no harm is done, and (c) protecting the identity of participants" (p. 71). To ensure data were captured in an ethical manner, the researcher followed all guidelines established by Kansas State University's IRB. As described, participants were asked to volunteer and were provided with an informed consent form that included IRB contact information if any questions arose about data collection or its use (see Appendix F). Furthermore, the researcher intentionally communicated and stressed this point at the beginning of every interview session to ensure participants felt protected and safe when sharing their perceptions, options, and views.

Personal opinions about the phenomenon being studied were also brought to the surface. This exercise helped the researcher identify any biases or personal views. Then, the researcher made a list of these personal biases and isolated (i.e., bracketed) them to ensure they would not distort the interview data or experience during the study. During the interview process, the

researcher documented when participants provided expected results or data that seemed biased due to his presence. Participants were also informed pseudonyms were used, and any identifiable information was not included. Interviewees were invited to review the themes that surfaced in their interviews and made suggestions to increase accuracy. The researcher informed participants that the final analysis would be published and accessible to participants and the public.

The researcher was responsible for safeguarding all information (e.g., documents, recordings, participants' statements, correspondence) and determining if any of the information could personally identify a participant. Further, the researcher committed to not misrepresenting data. To mitigate misinterpretation, the researcher had a postsecondary meeting, after transcribing data, with participants to confirm their responses and direct statements. All information was collected, organized, and stored on a USB flash drive requiring a password. The USB drive will be stored in the researcher's office in a locked safe for 5 years. Any documents, including notes made by the researcher, were scanned onto the drive, reviewed for readability, and then shredded. After 5 years, as required by the IRB, the researcher will delete all identifiable data pertaining to participants.

Researcher Reflexivity Statement

As a CTE instructor for over 15 years in a community college, the researcher's motivation for learning how students decided how to prioritize time arose from many discussions among colleagues. The RQs in this study surfaced from conversations with colleagues discussing how some CTE students were fully invested in their program of study and how others found it difficult to go to class on time or be prepared. These colleagues asked, "How can we as CTE faculty help those nontraditional CTE students who struggle to achieve their goals?" The problem seemed to be rooted in a lack of understanding of why, how, and from whom CTE

students learned to prioritize their time. Based on the researcher's experience while working with this population of students, he identified nontraditional CTE students who do not prioritize their time have the following common challenges: (a) lack of completed homework assignments, (b) issues with attendance and participation, and (c) lack of graduation persistence.

Limitations

To manage this study, the researcher used a small, purposeful participant sample from one community college. By doing this, the population of the study consisted of 17 students. According to Roberts (2010), "Individual results are based on a volunteer sample and do not necessarily define the population to which the individual belongs" (p. 163). The majority of participants were Hispanic and male due to the shortage of women in these CTE programs. Therefore, drawing any broad conclusions was not possible across other races or genders. For example, how male nontraditional CTE students prioritized their time cannot be transfer to their counterpart female students. An additional limitation was providing data on the lived experience of Black male and female CTE students was not possible due to the student body demographics at College of the Desert, which included 74.9% Hispanic students and only 2.4% Black students. Finally, the researcher worked at the chosen community college as a CTE faculty member for 8 years with nontraditional CTE students at the time of the study. The researcher provided participants with full disclosure of his educational background and college responsibilities during the participant solicitation process and before the interviews. This disclosure may have had two different effects on interview participants' responses. One, the participants may have wanted to express all their experiences to inform and motivate changes to better accommodate their needs or experiences while in college. Second, the participants could have shied away from fully disclosing their lived experiences due to fear of lack of confidentiality or knowing the

researcher's ties to the college. Under these limitations, the researcher agreed the findings might have some elements of transferability to other community colleges.

The phenomenological research method inherently has limitations in its design of allowing for multiple perspectives or opinions of participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon (Silverman, 2000). Three significant limitations existed in this phenomenological study. First, the researcher was a faculty member of the selected site at the time of the study and served as the primary instrument guiding data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the researcher was a faculty in one of the CTE-selected programs where 4 of 17 participants were selected. However, the researcher had been on sabbatical for 6 months and did not have any previous contact with selected participants. Due to these existing relationships with the site and the CTE program being studied, the researcher practiced reflexivity and bracketing during data collection and the refutability principle during data analysis.

The second limitation was the lack of female participants; only 3 of 14 participants in this study were female. CTE covers a large section of technical fields. However, the automobile technology and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) technology industries have struggled for many years to attract women to the field. According to a report from Coffin and Lawrence (2020), "The auto industry remains male-dominated in 2019, 23.6 percent of workers employed by automotive manufacturers were women, slightly below the average share for the last two decades (25.2 percent)" (para. 3). HVAC has an even lower percentage of female workers in the field compared to male workers in the automobile technology industry. In fact, "Women made up 47% of the U.S. workforce in 2017, but less than 2% of the 448,000 installers and technicians employed in the HVAC industry" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022, as cited in South Central College, 2023, para. 9). College of the Desert's (n.d.-a) latest program review data

provided the gender information percentage for the 5 years prior to the study. In 2019–2020, the automobile technology program consisted of 91% male students and 9% female students. In 2019–2020, the HVAC technology program gender population was 97% male students and 3% female students.

Study Quality

As the primary investigator, the researcher was involved in all aspects of the phenomenological study. The researcher developed the rationale for selecting the specific site, narrowed the programs to include in this study, recruited nontraditional students, designed the recruitment brochure (see Appendix B), conducted interviews, coded transcripts, and analyzed data. The researcher made sure to document, with field notes, participant behavior and attitudes toward the semistructured, open-ended questions asked during interviews (Creswell, 2014). To preserve the credibility of the findings and the open-ended question asked to participants, the researcher asked two CTE faculty to review all interview protocol questions and advise the researcher if any bias or steering questions existed. Furthermore, the researcher followed the prescribed credibility process by Tracy and Hinrichs (2017), which includes:

- thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (i.e., nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling;
- triangulation or crystallization;
- multivocality; and
- member reflections.

The researcher attempted to apply all four of these prescribed methods. First, the researcher identified the cultural background each participant brought with them and acknowledged this credibility could have significantly impacted the meaning of each question and answer. Second,

the researcher had a postinterview meeting with all participants individually to discuss the themes that surfaced and confirm the participant agreed with the themes and preliminary interpretative phenological analysis. Member checking shows quality/trustworthiness of the collected data. Third, triangulation was applied by collecting data from three sources (i.e., interviews, field notes, and video camera recordings of selected interviews). Two theorical lenses were used for data analysis: Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory and Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory. Both are theories of motivation and behavior that may produce interactions or confirmation of a result.

Chapter Summary

The researcher carried out a study using a phenomenological qualitative method of one-on-one, personal interviews to research the motivation and behaviors of adult nontraditional CTE students. This chapter began with a review of the purpose, RQs, and theoretical framework. The researcher then explained the research methodology, including how the study was planned, conducted, and analyzed. Specifically, the research design, study setting, study participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, data quality, ethical considerations, and limitations were clarified. The findings and data analysis for this study are reported in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the data, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion of this study.

4. Chapter 4 - Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine adult nontraditional career and technical education (CTE) students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time. Chapter 4 is organized by an overview of the theoretical frameworks, description of the participants, field notes, data analysis processes, findings, and a chapter summary. Chapter 4 highlights emerging themes that helped to answer the research questions (RQs). Additionally, subthemes that emerged from applying multiple iterations of coding are explained. While working with the interview data and performing the analysis, the researcher used two theories—Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Bandura's (1978) reciprocating determinism theory—as lenses to answer three RQs:

RQ1: What are the overall responsibilities of nontraditional CTE students seeking careers?

RQ2: How do nontraditional CTE students prioritize college and personal demands?

RQ3: Where and from whom are nontraditional CTE students receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals?

Theoretical Frameworks

In this study, the researcher applied two theoretical frameworks: Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Bandura's (1978) reciprocating determinism theory. The theoretical frameworks chosen for this study were used to guide the data analysis. By conducting interviews, the researcher looked for participants' text segments and compared them to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to determine if nontraditional CTE students behaved in ways consistent with the theory. According to Maslow's theory, people are motivated by the need to satisfy elements in a hierarchy pyramid model. Using a second lens—Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism

theory—the researcher attempted to determine from whom and how nontraditional CTE students were influenced to prioritize college first. According to Bandura, people can learn to behave in a certain way based on their environments or others' influences.

During the review of the participants' interview data, the researcher initially coded recurring words and participant statements such as family finances, work, children, jobs, spouse, dependents, and parents as topics of interest. The researcher then reanalyzed the codes and looked for patterns to identify which codes could be grouped to describe a significant meaning of data. The researcher then applied thematic analysis by manually performing iterative comparisons of the codes, leading to the refinement of themes. Additionally, during further review of the text, the researcher identified two more themes from the interview text. These nine total themes included:

- External Responsibilities
- Barriers Affecting Academic Performance
- Factors Affecting Prioritization
- Motivations for Attending College
- Definitions of Success
- Reciprocating Determinism Theory
- Hierarchy of Needs
- Improving Student Experiences
- Empathetic Advisors

Participant Demographics

For this study, all volunteer participants were notified of the requirements to qualified to be interviewed; they needed to be classified as CTE nontraditional students. The selected 17

participants met at least one of the following nontraditional student characteristics: (a) worked full time, (b) had a dependent, (c) attended school part time, (d) were a single parent, (e) were older than 25 years of age, or (f) graduated from an alternative high school. Participants were from five CTE programs: air condition technology (n = 5), automobile technology (n = 3), building inspection (n = 2), culinary (n = 3), and horticulture (n = 4). Of the 17 participants, 14 had at least one dependent, 2 of 17 were single parents, and 14 of 17 were men. The researcher attempted to interview female students in all five selected programs; however, the heating and air conditioning and automobile technology programs had no female students in those programs. Table 4.1. presents an overview of the final 17 selected participants from five CTE programs who met the nontraditional student criteria.

Table 4.1.

Overview of Participant Information

Participant	Age	Gender	Program of study	Employed	Had dependents	Single parent
1	18	Male	Horticulture	Yes	Yes	No
2	32	Male	Heating and air conditioning	Yes	Yes	No
3	51	Male	Building inspection	No	Yes	No
4	33	Male	Automobile technology	Yes	Yes	No
5	26	Male	Horticulture	Yes	Yes	No
6	32	Male	Horticulture	Yes	No	No
7	28	Female	Culinary	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	19	Male	Culinary	Yes	No	No
9	37	Male	Heating and air conditioning	No	Yes	No
10	30	Male	Heating and air conditioning	Yes	Yes	No
11	21	Male	Automobile technology	Yes	No	No
12	29	Female	Horticulture	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	18	Male	Heating and air conditioning	Yes	No	No
14	18	Male	Automobile technology	Yes	No	No
15	39	Male	Culinary	Yes	Yes	No
16	19	Male	Heating and air conditioning	Yes	Yes	No
17	30	Female	Building inspection	Yes	Yes	No

Field Notes

Field notes taken during interviews helped provide triangulation analysis during the analysis phase. For example, it was documented that participants were talkative, quiet, excited, or nervous to share their experiences. Additionally, the researcher described what stood out the most about each participant, including their daily challenges and motivations for continuing education (see Appendix G). One participant provided limited explanations or examples.

Data Analysis Processes

This section explains the processes of gathering, coding, and grouping codes by topics to develop themes and analyze data.

Gathering and Coding Data

The researcher began data analysis by gathering interview data from participants from audio files and field notes. First, the researcher transcribed the audio files verbatim and uploaded them into the qualitative analysis software, Quirkos. According to Quirkos (2022):

> Quirkos is software designed to help people sort and manage text-based data, by managing sections of text described as being about a particular topic or theme. By cataloguing this "coded" text across dozens of sources, researchers can start to identify themes and trends emerging across the data. This is a manual process; the software cannot anticipate what interests a particular researcher. (p. 5)

The researcher then applied in vivo coding and identified repeating codes. In qualitative analysis, *in vivo coding* refers to deriving codes from the data themselves. According to Delve (n.d.), "In vivo codes utilize the language and terminology used by the participants rather than alternative methods where codes are researcher-derived" (para. 1). The researcher performed line-by-line analysis to code the text. After the text was reviewed and coded, the researcher grouped the coded text to develop themes. Furthermore, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis (see Figure H1 in Appendix G). Quirkos visually tracks and color differentiates codes in a way very similar to someone who applies multiple colors to highlight text manually. Eight colors represented a combination of codes and themes (see Figure H2 in Appendix H).

Theme Development

The researcher used in vivo coding to highlight segments of text, and developed common groups of codes, both descriptive and interpretive, that helped the researcher group and develop themes. For example, the codes of "dependents," "family," "finances," "spouses," "flexible job schedules," "work responsibilities," and "siblings" were grouped by topic and were under the

theme of External Responsibilities, which contributed to how nontraditional CTE students prioritized their time (see Appendix H).

Once the text was coded and themes were developed from grouping codes, the researcher had various tools available, such as word clouds, to highlight texts that were most often repeated in transcripts. Another tool was the query function in Quirkos, allowing the researcher to assign specific criteria to the text search engine. Criteria such as gender or age were filtered using the query function. The query function in Quirkos also allowed the researcher to explore the text by combining and comparing participant statements based on specific properties, such as being a single parent. The query allowed the researcher to identify how personal responsibilities affected the participants' responses.

Two recurring themes during the query analysis surfaced. First, the code of "professors who understand" why someone is late to class or who are willing to accept late assignments was mentioned a total 19 times for participants with dependents and 0 times for participants with no dependents. Second, the code "sleepy and tired" was mentioned 17 times for participants with dependents and only 3 times for participants without dependents. Thus, the identifier of "sleepy and tired" indicated the majority of 14 participants with dependents were exhausted before class.

All participants had jobs that put stress on their minds and bodies, but from the data, having dependents correlated directly with being exhausted before coming to class. Additionally, the code "information missed" was stated more frequently—a total of 16 times by participants with dependents and only 4 times for participant without dependents. Information missed was coded anytime a participant mentioned missing out on crucial lectures or notes due to being too tired, sleepy, or late to class. Thus, participants with dependents were more susceptible to falling

behind on quizzes or class materials, lectures, and discussions. Table 4.2 illustrates the query tool applied to separate participants' statements who had dependents from participants who did not.

Table 4.2.

Quirkos Query Results – Code Frequency by Dependent Status

Code	Had dependents (*n*)	Did not have dependents (*n*)
Increased stress	21	4
Family responsibility	21	3
Professors who understand	19	0
Children	19	0
Sleepy and tired	17	3
Self-esteem	17	12
Security and safety	16	5
Information missed	16	4
Access to isolated study rooms	13	2

Analyzing Data

The researcher used the analysis overlapping function tool in Quirkos to graphically represent various code and theme connections found in participants' data. First, the researcher coded the text by reading line by line and categorizing sentences into codes based on what the participant was sharing or describing. Then, once the text was coded by topics, the researcher grouped these codes. Further analysis of the grouped codes allowed the researcher to develop themes. The codes were then placed under themes. Once the codes were under a theme, the software measured how often the codes intersected with each other and with themes, which all stemmed from participants' responses. To further guide the reader through this process, see Figures H3 and H4 in Appendix H, which show the main theme in the center (i.e., External Responsibilities) in florescent green surrounded by five orbitals. According to Quirkos (2022), the last, outermost orbital illustrates all the themes and codes in the study. In this overlapping

graph, the additional four inner orbitals represent an existing connection to the central theme. The closest orbitals to the center represent the strongest relationship to the main theme. In other words, participants mentioned many codes and made connections among the codes available in the study and the main themes during their explanations or statements. Observing the orbital near the center theme (i.e., family finances) inside the second-most inner orbital suggested that participants mentioned family finances as a factor affecting how they prioritized their time.

This finding is evident in how close the two codes were to the central theme. The graph also displayed two codes with a connection (i.e., “family responsibility first” and “family finances” orbiting the central theme of External Responsibilities). Furthermore, participant statements and the overlapping graph analysis signaled most participants satisfied their family needs before addressing college work. To guide readers of this significant finding, Figure H5 in Appendix H provides a zoomed-in version of the overlapping graph illustrating how the analysis software drills into the theme’s center by bringing in only the codes mentioned in relation to the center theme of External Responsibilities.

Summary of the Findings

This phenomenological study sought to identify the driving forces affecting how nontraditional students prioritized their time. The researcher explored participants’ external responsibilities to better understand their complex lives and how they planned their schedules to reach their educational goals. The researcher and participants discussed these educational and personal journeys in one-on-one interviews.

Presentation of Data and Findings

In this qualitative study, participants' lived experiences could be grouped into two categories: participants with dependents and participants without dependents. Out of 17 participants, 14 had dependents who required their attention and time.

Participants With Dependents

Participants with dependents prioritized their schedules daily mainly based on the primacy of family's needs, financial obligations, or work schedules. Although they clearly stated the importance of their educational goals, 10 out of 17 participants were willing to sacrifice these goals by being absent from class or by earning poorer grades if their external responsibilities required it. Even with the support of their spouses or family, their financial obligations, such as a mortgage or family events, took precedence. Participant 10 stated:

> The car bills, we have a house; we just got it 2 years ago. We're not paying much for it, we're only paying a little under $1,200 a month. And then, we got two cars for almost $1,000 combined with insurance. Those bills are usually due in the same week. So, if there needs to be more money in the 2 weeks before, I must prioritize work.

In Participant 10's case, working overtime and staying on a tight budget determined if he had enough income saved to pay his family's bills or be absent from class to work more hours. Similarly, Participant 5 was asked how he would choose making the decision to skip class or work. Participant 5 said, "They would bother me but calling off work bothered me more just because I needed that money; as I mentioned before, we live paycheck to paycheck." When the researcher asked Participant 3 how they prioritized when there was a conflict with school assignments or class schedules, and their logic for a decision, Participant 3 responded:

> This has happened. I mentioned how important my family is to me. If I must choose between those two things, I sacrifice the time I must spend at school to do what I need to do for my family. Break night or do sleepless work, then I suffer the consequences later.

On a good day, when their plans were unfolding in their favor, they made it to class prepared for a new challenge. Participant 9 described how he felt having to manage the complexity of their lives:

> Yeah, so it's hard . . . For me, it's complex balancing, you know, my marriage, my life, my child, school because of how I prioritize things. At this moment, school is my priority. And it sucks to say it because my family is very important, but when I'm in that moment of studying, I put them aside a little bit.

Of the participants with dependents, 5 of 14 enjoyed the learning environment their CTE faculty provided. Hearing from their CTE instructors about their daily struggles helped them cope with the lingering stress of work or home obligations. Five out of 17 participants stated how their CTE instructors genuinely understood they had personal lives, families, and jobs outside of college and were willing to work with the students when they could not deliver their assignments on time or attend class. The findings in this study highlighted how faculty who demonstrated empathy with their students provided a form of mentorship and relief from their daily stress.

How participants with dependents prioritized their time to address their college responsibilities changed daily. Some days, their college education took top priority with the help and reminders from their spouses or loved ones. For these participants, being fully immersed in the college experience (e.g., spending time at the college library, joining a campus club where they could collaborate on their ideas) was not an option. None of the 17 participants (0%) mentioned using the library as an option to complete their work or being part of student campus

clubs. Three participants mentioned doing their homework during their class break. Participant 9 mentioned he completed his homework assignments in his car, on campus, or where he felt safe. These nontraditional CTE students presented a significant finding; they did not have additional time to linger on campus due to their external responsibilities and relied on both close relatives as educational advisors and faculty willing to be flexible with assignment deadlines.

Participants Without Dependents

A few (3 of the 17) participants did not have dependents. Each of these participants had full-time jobs and had never been late to class. When asked about being late, they disapproved of such behavior. They shared a few common factors, including having time to relax after work, playing video games, or watching sports on the weekends. When Participant 8 was asked if his full-time job was affecting his sleep or performance in class, he responded, "Oh yeah. It's not even really work, but it's all . . . it's partially my fault, too, because I'll go home and stay up. I'll get off work and be up for 3 or 4 more hours." Participant 8 described the freedom he had after working his shift. He explained the activities he engaged in and how these leisure activities consumed his time past his bedtime. Participant 4 recalled who kept him on track, sharing:

> "Hey, you got any homework to do?" You know, most people wouldn't want that from your wife, but it's nice because it makes me go, "Oh yeah, I do. Thank you. Thank you—my fish brain. I'm sorry. Basketball season started I am completely out of it!"

Participant 4 did not have any children or dependents that required his time after work. He had many hobbies like playing the guitar and going to the gym. Participant 4 said, "And I've been on a kick the last 5, 6 years where it's just like, pick up the bass guitar, learn the bass guitar, learn this other thing, learn that." Unlike participants with dependents, these participants had time to do pleasure activities.

Two of the three participants without dependents lived at home with their parents, who provided essential resources such as shelter and food. When the researcher performed a more in-depth analysis by comparing the interview data via a query on the code "professors who understand," the code was never mentioned (0 times) for participants without dependents. From the results of this analysis, students without dependents did not need to rely on CTE faculty being flexible with assignment deadlines, implying they had the time needed to complete their college work and did not rely on faculty being lenient by providing more time for assignments. When the researcher asked Participant 8 to discuss any conversation they had with instructors about prioritizing their time to complete assignments, Participant 8 stated his perceptions of how faculty would respond if he needed them to be more flexible, sharing:

> I never really go to the professors to deal with like, time issues because I know, or none of the instructors I've met have advocated for the kind of, leave it to the very end style. So, I don't try to bring it up because I know they will try to steer me away or tell me to start a little earlier.

Participant 8 had no dependents and lived at home with both parents, who provided him with essentials such as food and shelter. Although he had never asked for additional time to complete assignments, he believed his professors would not allow it.

Compared to students with no dependents, all students with dependents commented on their need for faculty to be flexible. Participant 10 recalled his experiences with his CTE professors on the matters of submitting assignments on time, sharing, "Some professors were understanding, like, 'Okay, you have multiple jobs; you can turn it in tomorrow if you like. You don't have to turn it in today, tomorrow is fine or the day after.'" Participant 12, a horticulture student, described how her professor's flexibility made it possible to stay in college. She shared,

“I was showing up late, but not too much. There hasn’t been an issue. As I said, our professors know that sometimes we must get something done at work, and then we leave.”

One of these three participants without dependents, Participant 8, commented he did not perform well when given too much time, so he often waited until the last day before a deadline to start working on an assignment. Participant 8 stated, “So, I like to push it off to the last second because I perform better in high-stress situations. So, I want to leave it to the very end.” When asked about coming to school tired and if work had anything to do with this, Participant 8 stated, “I’m perfectly fine with the work, and then I’ll get home, watch a movie or play something. Then, it is my fault because I could have gone to sleep, but yeah.”

The query function in Quirkos allowed the researcher, during analyses, to filter participants’ characteristics (e.g., age, program of study, gender, having dependents, being a single parent) to further identify and group which participants responded with similar needs. Using a query and applying the filter for dependents, the researcher could identify participants who talked about the need for faculty to have more flexibility on homework assignments, showing up late to class, or going to class while sleepy. In this study, the results provided two different categories of needs and views of community college responsibilities from nontraditional CTE students. Significant differences existed between participants with dependents and participants without dependents.

Findings for RQ1

This section includes an analysis related to RQ1: What are the overall responsibilities of nontraditional CTE students seeking careers? External responsibilities played a role in answering this question.

External Responsibilities

Participants were asked to describe their daily and weekly personal responsibilities, including work schedules, childcare, caring for an older parent, or any time-consuming event they had to attend before their college responsibilities. When the researcher asked this open-ended, semistructured question to Participant 12, she stated:

> I recently became a single mom of three. I have to cook. I have to clean. I have to . . . attend school. Well, I have to go to work. I have to drive my kids around, drop them off at the babysitter.

By contrast, Participant 3 believed his family's religious ties and bible study were the most significant responsibility he had outside of his college responsibilities. He stated, "As a father, too, I make sure that my kids are well taken care of, not only physically, economically, but one of my most important responsibilities is ensuring that my entire family is fed spiritually." Participant 1 also mentioned his family as a significant external responsibility outside of college work, sharing, "I have a 1-year-old daughter, and I have a wife, so it's mainly prioritizing with them, making sure they're all right, making sure nothing's wrong with them, making sure everything's okay, and just taking care of them overall."

Participant 4 had no children or dependents; his most considerable external responsibility was working because he held a managerial position and directly reported to the company's owners. Participant 4 stated:

> I'm a key holder at my job. I'm also a manager at my work. So, when my alarm goes off, the owners aren't there, I'm responsible for meeting the police or whatever to go down there. Or, if they're not there, I must ensure it's open or closed.

When the researcher asked Participant 10 how many hours he worked each week, he stated, "Combined with all jobs, nearly 70 hours." The data confirm these participants had one or more nontraditional characteristics such as having dependents, working full time or more, or being single parents. These characteristics can be viewed graphically through a Quirkos overlapping analysis (see Figure H6 in Appendix H).

Data collected from participant interviews indicate two significant external responsibilities of nontraditional CTE students: family and work. The Quirkos analysis confirmed these responsibilities by displaying an overlap in the second and third orbital of the central theme (i.e., External Responsibilities). The second orbital shows how participants discussed job responsibilities 47 times during interviews and stated family 35 times in the third orbital (see Figure H3 in Appendix H). These data not only address the external responsibilities, but they also delineate the overall obligations the researcher inquired about in RQ1. These data collectively show the External Responsibility theme, particularly family and work, had a significant influence on how nontraditional CTE students prioritized their educational responsibilities. The Quirkos analysis overlap map for this theme also showed this influence (see Appendix H).

Findings for RQ2

This section includes an analysis related to RQ2: How do nontraditional CTE students prioritize college and personal demands? Three themes from the analysis informed this RQ, including Barriers Affecting Academic Performance, Factors Affecting Prioritization, and Hierarchy of Needs.

Barriers Affecting Academic Performance

The theme of Barriers Affecting Academic Performance helped the researcher understand how CTE nontraditional academic performance was directly affected by external obligations. The data retrieved from interviews showed external responsibilities such as family and jobs significantly impacted educational participation. Additionally, the researcher was interested in if these external obligations correlated with how these participants prioritized their time.

Participant 2 referenced work as being a significant distraction from school due to his assigned late shifts. The researcher and participant discussed how accepting another job was not an option. His current employer was paying him enough to stay current with his bills and help with family finances. During the interview, he also mentioned how this type of work (i.e., event banquets) was his expertise. He felt comfortable doing this type of work, but it was at the cost of struggling with his academics. The researcher asked for an example of these struggles. Participant 2 stated:

> I had a long shift the night before and went home around 2:00 a.m. . . . It took me a little bit to shower, like getting comfortable, going to bed, and sleeping. I had to wake up at 7:00 a.m. to get something to eat and get my stuff ready to be on the road by 7:30 a.m. to get here at College of the Desert at 8:00 a.m. I wasn't at my best, at my A game that day. So around 10:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m. when my break was on, I went to my car and slept until 2:00 p.m. I missed the rest of the class.

Participant 10 also described a similar event, sharing, "Even though I was here for the entire class, I kind of just wrote down whatever [the professor] was writing on the board. But that was it. I didn't participate with the other students. I was just too tired." Participant 19 shared another example of being too tired to focus in class due to a late work schedule, sharing:

> I got off work late the night before, came in, just got coffee, and could not get into the mood to do anything. So, at that point, it was me that was dragging out the day because I just couldn't get into it and couldn't find a groove into what I was doing.

Participant 7 had multiple jobs and five children she tended to before college assignments. When the researcher asked, "Can you tell me about a day you were just not feeling it?," Participant 7 responded, "I came to school and had had 2 hours of sleep, and I couldn't focus, I couldn't gather my bearings. Just didn't have enough sleep." Participant 5 was asked the same question, and he responded:

> We have big projects at work when I'm just too tired, and then I still have to come to class. Not specific days, but there [are] times when just physically and mentally, we're drained, and we have to go to class because we have to get our learning. We have to get our degree.

These participants had to cope with changing work schedules or late shifts coupled with family obligations, and it affected their ability to participate or stay focused during class lectures. Working long shifts coupled with their external responsibilities was clearly a barrier for participants with dependents or families.

Factors Affecting Prioritization

When participants were questioned about what takes precedence in their prioritization schemes, many stated emphatically their family's needs came first. Others mentioned finances mattered, or what was going on that day with their children. For Participant 7, she could not provide a definite answer. Choosing between both was a challenge, and she stated, "It's conflicting, especially because I have such a big family. So, it really comes down to what's more

important at the moment, day by day. So sometimes, school comes first and sometimes, my kids come first."

Participant 10 reflected on previous semesters during midterm exams and balancing his work schedule to work the overtime needed to pay his bills. He explained, "Midterms were a disaster. I made it, but it was hard. I have to prioritize which one's more important: the house bill, finals, or something due." Similarly, Participant 5 also had to prioritize based on his family's immediate needs such as groceries, mortgage, and his daughter's after-school activities. Participant 5 shared, "That's something that's always on my mind. How much could I work? How many more hours can I put in so we can have some extra money just so we can take the girls out?"

To dive deeper into his prioritization decision choices, the researcher asked Participant 5, "If you must call in sick to school or work, which one would you call in to and why?" Participant 5 did not hesitate and stated, "I'd pick to school because my family needs that financial support, so I'd have to miss school." For Participant 15, her children were a significant responsibility, and she had to attend to them before addressing any college-assigned homework. She stated, "I try to make [my daughter] go to sleep earlier, and I do, I get my homework done, it gets started probably on Friday, and it'll be finished."

In the first orbital of the Quirkos overlapping graph, the code of "family responsibilities" first overlapped the central theme (i.e., External Responsibilities) with 24 participant statements signifying the direct contribution to how these participants prioritized their time. Additionally, participants talked about "family finances," which was a coded phrase and the second most discussed code. The second orbital showed the codes of "work responsibilities" and "dependents" had the second largest correlation magnitude to the central theme. This is

illustrated by codes orbiting the second orbital close to the central theme. In Quirkos, the closer the codes are to the central theme (i.e., External Responsibilities), the more frequently the participant mentions both in the same conversation (see Figure H4 in Appendix H).

Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs was the first theoretical lens the researcher used to guide the study and to guide the researcher in understanding what motivated nontraditional CTE students to prioritize their time. The researcher asked questions that probed students' motivational driving forces. For example, one open-ended question was, "Explain the motivations that keep you working on your educational goals." If students were motivated to move up Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the researcher assumed they prioritized their college work before other tasks.

Although Participant 10 had high expectations of himself and his education goals, he did not prioritize college every time there was a conflict between work and college assignments; instead, he had to determine if his bank accounts had enough money to cover his monthly mortgage. He shared, "For me, that happens a lot. I have to tell myself what's more important, having to get the house paid or having to . . . ace the test that's coming up in a couple of days?" When he did not have enough money, he prioritized work, accepted more hours, and sacrificed studying for classes. Similarly, Participant 1 stated, "It's mostly my small family; my wife, my daughter, myself, and it also goes back to wanting to help my family, my parents [because] they're already getting too old." Participant 1 was not too concerned with earning a title or esteem but was instead motivated by his finances and the future well-being of his parents.

In contrast to Participant 1, Participant 3 (i.e., a future mechanic) was looking forward to becoming more accomplished and explained how a title following his name would make him

feel. He shared, “Extreme pride. Because not only does that title mean something to me, but it also means something to my father, a diesel mechanic.” Participants 6 and 11 were also motivated by esteem and respect. Participant 6 shared, “I’m doing this with the bigger purpose that in the future, I will not just be doing what I’m doing right now. Like, being a general laborer or just a worker.” Similarly, Participant 11 stated, “I have worth just to, to anyone. You know that I didn’t just lay down and just be comfortable my whole life. That I went out and did something.” Participant 7, a culinary program student, wanted to achieve more than just to gain employment. Her esteem needs meant she wanted to introduce a new product line that would be accepted in her industry. She shared, “I think when I can be able to be an overall brand, I will probably be satisfied with how far I’ve come in the culinary industry.”

The Quirkos overlay analyses displayed in Figure H10 in Appendix H agrees with participants’ responses. The code of “esteem” was assigned 29 times among the 17 participants in the first orbital close to the center. “Security and safety” was assigned 21 times, which moved the code second closest to the central theme. Data suggested nontraditional CTE students were motivated first by their definition of success and second by the need for esteem, which is the fourth tier of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs model. Thus, the researcher assumed most of these participants moved beyond the first three tiers of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs (i.e., physiological needs, safety needs, and love and belonging), aiming for esteem (i.e., the fourth tier of the model). Further discussion on implications for practice are presented in Chapter 5.

Findings for RQ3

This section includes an analysis related to RQ3: Where and from whom are nontraditional CTE students receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals? Multiple themes emerged from the findings, including Motivations for

Attending College, Definitions of Success, Reciprocating Determinism Theory, Improving Student Experiences, and Empathetic Advisors.

Motivations for Attending College

For many participants, being able to provide more options and upward social mobility opportunities for their families was a major motivational factor. Participant 5 reminded the researcher:

> I did mention that my family is the one that keeps me motivated. I see my daughters, and I see my wife, and I want more for us, so they're the ones that motivate me to come to school, get that degree, get that higher position so we can in the future live comfortably and not have to worry about all these other things that I talked about before.

Participant 17 shared a similar family responsibility and wanted the ability to give back to his family. He mentioned how his motivations to attend college stemmed from seeing how hard his father worked to provide for his siblings. Participant 17 stated:

> I want to get a good job, make money, so I could retire [my father] and show him the care he showed us back to him. I guess that's mainly it. I just want to, I hope I can [help my parents financially to retire].

Participant 7 sought credentials to get recognition from her colleagues in her industry. She was also motivated to compete in her culinary training to further her plans to create her brand in the culinary field. She shared, "When I can be an overall brand, I will probably be satisfied with how far I've come in the culinary industry, and then I'll venture onto something else." Similarly, Participant 1 also had plans for entrepreneurship to give his parents a working environment he could control. The researcher asked, "Do you also want your parents to work there?" Participant 1 replied, "Yeah, but nothing too harsh."

Participant 11 mentioned two significant reasons for his motivation to attend college. He believed not having a career in which he could continue to grow would lead to a meaningless life. Second, he believed a CTE career would remove the financial stresses of depending on his next paycheck to survive. Participant 11 recalled:

> Basically, what I was saying before, not wanting to do nothing with my life and not wanting to be just somebody who's living paycheck to paycheck with a minimum wage job or a low-paying job and struggling every day and always waiting for the next check. I want to be financially comfortable where I don't have to always be stressing about money.

Participant 6 provided a similar answer, saying, "I [want a] title, future potential titles, or jobs that can be available, compensation that goes along with it."

Participants 6 and 11 both had motivational reasons that seemed to align with two tiers of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs framework (i.e., esteem and safety needs), which included respect, self-esteem, recognition, and employment. These reasons established the precedence of the application and selection of this theoretical lens used in this study. Maslow's hierarchy of needs provided a theoretical background to analyze the participants' motivations. Although Participants 6 and 11 were motivated by different tiers of the hierarchy model, both were inspired by their needs. With this model, the researcher could predict Participant 11 would first secure his safety needs (i.e., Tier 2) and then continue to pursue love and belonging (i.e., Tier 3) or, like Participant 6, would pursue the need for self-esteem (i.e., Tier 4), which includes respect, status, recognition, strength, and freedom. Additionally, the researcher identified the need for self-actualization (i.e., Tier 5) in Participant 6 and 10, the fifth and highest level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs model.

Definitions of Success

By listening to participants' lived experiences, the researcher sought to answer or inform RQ3. The fifth theme helped group codes that together explains how participants defined success after graduation, how they came about their definitions of success, whether their perceptions of success were introduced to them through observation or guidance, and whether their ambitions for success factored into how they prioritized their time. Additionally, the researcher looked to see if the second theoretical lens chosen for this study, Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory, could be applied after analyzing the participant process of selecting a definition of success.

In this study, all 17 participants (100%) mentioned a person or persons who they saw doing well financially due to continuing their education. When the researcher asked participants who they thought had an influence on how they prioritized college assignments, Participant 6 responded, "My wife. She's a very organized person." Participant 9 also depended on his wife for guidance and motivation. Participant 9 stated, "In a sense, my wife. But my wife, even though she took a very long time to go back to college, she's the one that's been pushing me. She's been keeping me in line." Participant 18 gave credit to her parents, who kept motivating her to stay in school. She shared, "My dad always says . . . you got to work so you can spend. So, for me, it's like education and work go hand in hand because if you don't have the education, then you can't keep going up."

Three participants mentioned how they related to hearing of faculty struggles and seeing faculty being ultimately successful motivated them to keep working through their assignments even when they did not have the time during the week. Participant 12 shared, "Knowing that my professors went to the same school, and I know that they enjoy what they do. Hearing their

experience, yeah, it feels like if they can do it, I can." Two participants mentioned how their older siblings had satisfying careers and provided a learning environment for their families; seeing this success motivated them to stay in school. Participant 10 stated, "My sister has a degree in kinesiology, and my brother has a bachelor's in communications. Having something next to my name is nice because I've always been the sibling who's been the worker." Reciprocal determinism theory provided background knowledge and a behaviorism model to understand from whom and how these nontraditional CTE students learned positive behaviors.

For Participant 9, overseeing a business and helping others get an education encapsulated his definition of success. Participant 9 imagined his future after graduation and stated:

> Once I've made it, it would be more of running a company. I think that once I get to that point, I'm not really going to want so much of the income. I want to be able to use that to be able to help.

Participant 6 stated success would come after he earned higher social status. He shared, "Just a little bit more of a higher title, a more accomplished title, that came with having to go to school." The researcher asked, "Why is that?" and Participated 6 replied, "I just think it's more self-fulfilling for me." Participant 10 was also looking for recognition of acquired status, saying, "For me, to have something next to my name is kind of nice because I've always been the sibling that's been the worker."

Participant 12 was a single parent. Her idea of success involved being able to guide her children through life with the ability to reduce financial barriers for them and for herself. The researcher asked the following two questions: "What's next after graduation?" and "What would feel like success to you?" Participant 12 stated:

> The next thing for me would be to teach my kids how to be resilient and to have a position or . . . be so successful that I have advanced them. . . . It will be easier for them once they get older or I'll be able to help them. Yeah, to live comfortable when I'm older.

For Participants 3 and 17, success after graduation meant having enough earned income to pay for shelter and basic daily necessities, and to support their parents. Participant 3 described success, saying, "I want some comfort myself. I want to be able to drive a car that doesn't break down. I want to be able to pay my mortgage." Participant 17 reflected on her parents' needs and expressed her future as if her parents were in the interview room. She shared, "I want to get to a point where I could be . . . 'I want to help you pay. I want to pay your house, and you guys don't have to work.'" Participant 6 defined success after graduation as having a career and personal life, including being able to participate in events. He shared:

> I just want to have a good balance where I can go to work and give them as much energy or as much as I have in me, but I also want to be able to go home and if I have kids in the future, I want to have energy for them.

From these data, CTE nontraditional students' definitions of success included the codes (a) "more time with family," (b) "more money," (c) "company ownership," and (d) "achievement recognition." The relationship between these codes and the central theme can be seen in the Quirkos analysis overlap (see Figure H8 in Appendix H). The first orbital showed the theme of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs overlaps the central theme of Definitions of Success. Consistent with the hierarchy of needs, participants' perceptions of success are when they reached Tier 4 and Tier 5 of the hierarchy model (i.e., esteem and self-actualization).

Reciprocating Determinism Theory

The third RQ asked where and from whom nontraditional CTE students are receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals. Reciprocating Determinism Theory was a theme and a second theoretical lens applied to guide the study. The researcher planned to learn if participants were influenced by environmental factors to change their behavior toward prioritizing their time. These factors included social norms, influence on the environment, and influence on others or by others. These factors are derived from the three elements of reciprocal determinism theory: (a) environment, (b) behavior, and (c) person. According to Participant 12:

> My sister was the one who pushed it on to me, and she made me look through all of the different studies that there was, and she's like, "Well, you're into really into plants, and you're into science, so why don't you try something like that?" And so, I started with agriculture, and then I finally found horticulture.

Participant 12's sister was a college graduate who attended a university and was working in a professional setting. During the interview, Participant 12 referenced her sister and a faculty role model she followed. The researcher requested her to elaborate on why she thought this faculty member was a positive role model, and she responded, "They're locals. They studied what I'm studying and they studied it at the same place. They've had some experience with what I'm going for, like my ultimate goal is to have my own landscape company." Participant 17 reflected on the advice from his parents to pursue an education. Witnessing the manual labor his parents endured to support him and his siblings, he made it his goal to help them retire. Participant 17 shared:

> This one also goes back to my parents, especially my dad. And he's extremely hardworking. One of the most hardworking people I've ever seen. He's the definition of a family man. He lives for us. So, I want to get a good job, make money so I could retire him and show him the care he showed us.

Participant 17 did not have siblings who had paved the way to higher education. He was the first generation in his family to attend college. He was aware of his family's living environment and wanted to make it better for them. From his interview data, it seemed his living environment motivated his behavior, which informed RQ3: Where and from whom are nontraditional CTE students receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals?

In the case of Participant 9, his motivation to act with positive behavior while in college came from his wife. He discussed how his wife worked during her college years and expected the same from him. He stated, "But my wife, even though she took a very long time to go back to college, she did it, and she's the one that's been pushing me. She's been keeping me in line."

Based on participants' responses, their environment and immediate family members clearly influenced their behavior. Additionally, these responses can be categorized in the three variables of Bandura's (1978) behaviorism reciprocal determinism theory (i.e., environment, personal factors, and behavior). The Quirkos analysis also helps reaffirm participants' responses (see Figure H9 in Appendix H). In the first orbital of the map, the Empathetic Advisors theme was coded 13 times. Further analysis of this overlay of Quirkos map was needed due to the emerging theme of Empathetic Advisors overshadowing the central theme of Reciprocating Determinism. The Empathetic Advisors theme was built after grouping codes including "wife," "brothers and sisters," "counselors," and "faculty." The interview text was coded whenever the participant credited them for providing guidance or advice on continuing their college journey.

The next codes closest to the central theme were “faculty” and “parents,” which confirms the strong ties to the central theme, as confirmed by participants’ statements. Finally, the third orbital shows the code of “brothers and sisters” was coded twice.

Improving Student Experiences

Participants shared how difficult it would be for them to continue their journeys if CTE faculty and employers who supported their growth were to suddenly stop supporting them. Participant 10 reflected on his relationship with his CTE automobile technology instructor, sharing the instructor was flexible in assignment deadlines. Participant 10 said, “I am happy with Dr. Redman. He’s telling me, ‘Are you sure you can turn it in? You can turn it in tomorrow or the day after if you like.’” Participant 6 shared an experience with an employer and the support they provided, stating, “He was actually really open and flexible. Since I returned to school the prior semester, he was already on board with me returning.” Participant 7 confirmed how employers’ schedule flexibility is essential for attending class, stating, “It makes a big difference; before, I didn’t have the luxury of having a culinary job that would work with my school schedule.” In contrast, Participant 17 did not receive his employer’s support once promised. He said, “I told them that I would be starting classes, and they said they could help, you know, move my shifts around and work with me. So that was nice, but now, they’re trying to change it, so it’s rude.” For these nontraditional CTE students, having flexible instructors and employers willing to help with scheduling and assignment deadlines was crucial to their success.

Participant 12 provided insight on how her CTE instructor was familiar with her work schedule and was nonconfrontational when she arrived late to class. She stated most of her CTE instructors discussed policies regarding late homework or arriving late to class on the first day of

class and they reassured students they would not be penalized for attending to their external responsibilities first. Participant 12 stated:

> I was showing up a little late, but not too much. There hasn't been an issue. As I said, . . . professors know that there are times when we have to get something done at work, and then we leave. Or, we had to drive during our break and drive from different locations, so they understand that we're not just leaving from home, we're going from somewhere where we're working.

Participant 17 was late to class on many occasions due to work schedules, but she always stayed caught up due to the additional time granted to complete assignments. She shared, "[The professor] doesn't time our quizzes, which I'm thankful." Participant 3 had both community college experiences and university classroom experiences. He validated how his community college instructors were more understanding of the student population, saying, "For the most part, the faculty had been willing to provide help, and they've been conscious of the students' struggles."

Participants also mentioned two recurring ideas 6 and 12 times, respectively. The first idea centered around how important it was for faculty to have relevant field experience to contextualize theory concepts. According to participants, faculty who are up to date with the current tooling and latest technology in their respective fields seem to better relate with their students. The second idea exemplified how important it was for faculty to share their personal stories, how they succeeded in their industry after college, and how they became successful in college while balancing their external responsibilities. Participant 12 stated:

> Knowing that my professors actually went to the same school and I know that they enjoy what they do. Hearing their experience . . . feeling like if they can do it, I can do it. I

> think they do a very good job of preparing it. I guess they . . . how should I word it . . . understand us.

Participant 5 explained how he did not enjoy taking classes with academic faculty but did like CTE instructors because they had similar likes and dislikes, which made it easier for him to have a personal connection. Participant 5 stated:

> We have a connection. We all feel like we have some similarities in our lives so whenever we come, they accommodate kind of to a general feel, but a general feel to us. We kind of like the same stuff. So, the way they set up, the way they explain, the way they just teach, it's interesting. It keeps us intrigued. It's better for us. We learn fast. I feel like they make us feel comfortable.

Participant 4 also mentioned how motivational it was for him to hear about the career beginnings of his automobile technology professor. His professor's story reassured him it was okay to return to school at a later age and continue working on himself. Participant 4 stated:

> So, it's just like the . . . mechanic man. But for him, it's because his story was similar to mine. So, it's like he tumbled around until he found automotive. And that was the first night I had his class; he told that story.

Subthemes: Improving Student Experiences. Additional subthemes related to the central theme, Improving Student Experiences, included (a) Employers Who Encouraged Education, (b) Faculty Who Fostered a Learning Environment, and (c) Faculty Who Managed Lab Complexity. These subthemes emerged from participants sharing how significant it was having faculty and employers who understood their external responsibilities and were willing to provide flexibility.

***Employers Who Encouraged Education*.** Participants 1, 4, 6, and 8 all benefited from employers willing to work around their class schedules. Whether leaving work early or taking a day to study for final exams, they all reported having support in these endeavors. Participant 1 reported having an employer who supported them in going to school was a driving factor in prioritizing their time. Participant 1 recalled a conversation with his employer, sharing, "My boss, he's the one who told me to come to school to get a better understanding of the business, to get a higher salary or a higher position at any company." Participant 1 had more than support from his employer; his employer described the possibility of moving him to another position in the company after graduation, providing a motivational incentive. When the researcher asked Participant 4 about the schedule flexibility his employer offered, he acknowledged his supervisor's approval. Participant 4 stated, "They're cool with it. As long as I take care of my job." Participant 4 had more work responsibilities than Participant 1 as a team manager and key holder, but he still received support from his employer to go to college. Participant 4 further explained, "They've been cutting me a break. I have class from 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday. I just cut 2 hours off my shift. They're cool with it as long as I handle my managing responsibilities." When the researcher asked Participant 8 to explain how he prioritized his schedule when work conflicted with class, he stated:

> I don't mind it. For if I'm scheduled on a day I have class [and] for sure can't make it to work, my boss is pretty lenient with me about knowing that I can't work that day, and she'll schedule me off.

Participant 6 also stated how his employer supported his college schedule, sharing, "He was actually really open and flexible. Since I came back to school the semester prior, he was already

on board with me coming back to school." Due to this work schedule flexibility, these participants did not suffer any negative consequences when a college–work conflict occurred.

Conversely, some participants reported stress and frustration due to their employers changing their schedules or not keeping up with their agreements. Participants 7 and 17 had a very different experience when compared to Participants 1, 4, 6, and 8. These two nontraditional CTE students did not always have support from their employers to attend college, which increased their stress when having to balance keeping their employers, family, and college responsibilities in order. Participant 7 expressed the difference between receiving such support at her current role compared to her previous employer, saying, "It makes a big difference. Before, I didn't have the luxury of having a culinary job that would comply with my school schedule." Participant 17 expressed his frustrations with having his employer agree to work around his school schedule, then changing their agreement on flexible work schedules during midterms. Participants 17 recalled:

> I told them I was going to be starting classes, and they said they could move my shifts around and work with me. So, I thought that was pretty nice, but now, they're trying to change it, so I felt disrespected when [my boss] asked me to leave school to come to work for her.

These participants provided insights into how nontraditional CTE students experienced their journey while navigating through their job responsibilities. Participants who had their employer's support of positive influence seemed to enjoy going to class without the stress or work schedules. "Employers who encouraged education" was coded 16 times under the theme of Improving Student Experiences. The Quirkos overlapping analysis graph in Figure H11 in Appendix H

visually shows this close relationship between the subtheme of Employers Who Encouraged Education and the central theme of Improving Student Experiences.

Faculty Who Fostered a Learning Environment. Another topic of interest surfaced when participants described what worked best for their busy schedules was faculty who intentionally created a learning environment where all students could share their field knowledge. Participant 12 explained her classroom experience, sharing:

> Honestly, sometimes I feel nervous because I feel like everybody has more experience than me and what we're doing. But I enjoy it. Everybody's able to, since they have experience, show and tell what they've gone through, what they've experienced in the field, and so I can get that as a reference. What they're going through or what they're doing. The professor as well, he'll answer any questions, and then he'll give you his opinion.

Participant 5 shared a similar classroom experience, saying:

> I feel comfortable going into the classrooms knowing I get along with the students; we all have something in common. The professors are always trying to get you to learn. They're always trying to get to see your point of view and their point of view. So, they make a very comfortable environment when we walk into the classroom.

Participant 11 used this learning environment to destress from work. He stated, "I have a really good time in welding and automotive. Everyone usually tries to learn, and everyone helps each other learn." The Quirkos overlapping analysis graph (see Figure H11 in Appendix H) visually shows this close relationship between the subtheme of Faculty Who Fostered a Learning Environment, which was coded 28 times, and the theme of Improving Student Experiences.

***Faculty Who Managed Lab Complexity*.** The last subtheme, Faculty Who Managed Lab Complexity, was coded 11 times and was found outside the second orbital in the Quirkos overlap analysis (see Figure H11 in Appendix H). Participants reported some CTE programs needed improvement and others were better at managing lab time. Participant 4 wanted more structure and direction going into a lab with specific student learning outcomes. He expressed how he would improve his lab experience, recommending "a more structured [environment], little more structured when it comes to hands-on stuff instead of just kind of pushing the shop button." Participant 17 reflected on his frustration of not being challenged and waiting around for no reason. He mentioned how this frustration affected his attitude about coming to this school because it seemed like the labs were unprepared. Additionally, he expected to do more with his time in the lab than just observing others do their lab. Participant 17 recalled:

> There have been two times when I was first on our projects, and I finished both of them in literally 30 minutes. And I was waiting for the rest of the 3.5 hours, just waiting for everyone else to finish. And by the end of the day, no one finished. So, I was waiting for nothing, and I had to go home.

The researcher did not originally anticipate the theme of Improving Student Experiences for nontraditional CTE students; however, these findings provide insight into critical areas needing improvement to support nontraditional CTE students' busy schedules and expectations. The researcher discusses these findings and recommendations for further research in Chapter 5.

Empathetic Advisors

While asking open questions, the theme of Empathetic Advisors or anyone who encouraged participants to stay motivated and continue going to class emerged. Words that

surfaced during the interviews and became codes included “wife,” “husband,” “faculty,” “brother,” “sister,” and “friends.”

According to Participant 10, he would not have been able to navigate college without his wife. He stated:

> Even though I know what to do or I know what classes, I’m really bad at doing that. I don’t know why. I just have some weird bad luck. I don’t know what it is. I just let her do it because I’d rather she knows my schedule more than I do, if that makes sense.

Participant 7 also stated her spouse was the family’s primary advisor, sharing, “My husband more than anyone in telling me, ‘If you want to do something, go for it.’ It makes a big difference when you have a lot of support behind you.” Participant 13 credited his brother for guiding him through college. He reflected on the positive advice and shared:

> My brother, he’s the one who told me first, “It’s not going to be like high school; you’re going to receive more homework than what high school does.” So, it’s like, try to do your best. If you have a couple of hours of sleep, try to sleep and do as much homework as possible, or try your best, but do your homework.

From the data, participants seemed to have advice from different sources. Some participants had a family member who attended college or was currently enrolled, but a few participants were the first ones in their families to participate in college and had a goal to better their family’s lives. When asked about their CTE faculty providing or sharing advice about time management or prioritization on college assignments, most participants (i.e., 16 of 17) said they never had a personal conversation about it. Participant 16 stated, “I’ve never had those kinds of talks with my instructors. I do not really talk to them. Well, I do, but not about my personal life.” When Participant 14 from the automobile program was asked the same questions, he responded,

"No." Similarly, Participant 7 from the culinary arts program stated, "There have not been any. Even with my schedule, it has not been too much focus on me as an individual." The data results show CTE faculty were not having any time management or prioritization conversations with these participants.

Summary of Presentation of Data and Findings

In summary, all participants in this study were adult CTE nontraditional students inspired to gain skills to work in their chosen technical industry. Many participants decided to start a family first or chose a new career choice if their first career choice no longer suited them. They were not pursuing transfer to 4-year institutions. They had additional responsibilities that limited how much time they could dedicate to their college responsibilities and negotiated with their families or employers for time. Their prioritization strategy was not always consistent, and they sought guidance and advice from people with similar struggles.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study provided insight into how CTE nontraditional students prioritized their time given their complex, busy lives. The researcher interviewed 17 participants from five CTE programs with semistructured, open-ended questions. The researcher identified nine themes from coding and grouping the interview data. Additionally, this chapter provided data from field notes taken during interviews and provided insight into participants' personalities and characters. The data collected during interviews showed how these students prioritized their responsibilities and some of the factors influencing how they spent their time.

In Chapter 5, the researcher discusses the findings and provides a conclusion to this study. The researcher connects the research study to how it filled a gap in literature. Lastly, the

researcher discusses the study's implications and provides recommendations for further exploration of nontraditional CTE students' lived experiences.

5. Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter, the researcher provides an overview of the problem, the purpose of the study, and an overview of the methodology. The research then summarizes the findings and how data from participants answered the research questions (RQs). Next, the researcher indicates how these findings expand the existing literature on nontraditional career and technical education (CTE) students in community colleges. Lastly, implications are addressed and recommendations for further research are explained.

Overview of the Problem

This study examined adult nontraditional CTE students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time. This research study aimed to inform community college leaders of the lived experiences of nontraditional CTE students by revealing how students prioritized their time. Two theoretical lenses were applied in this study: motivational theory (e.g., Maslow, 1943) to analyze how students prioritized their time and if their motivational needs aligned with the hierarchy of needs, and reciprocating determinism theory (e.g., Bandura, 1978) to determine if students' behaviors toward prioritization of time were impacted by behavior modeled by internal or external factors.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined adult nontraditional CTE students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time. This research study aimed to inform community college leaders of the lived experiences of nontraditional CTE students by revealing how students prioritized their time.

By listening to the participants' stories, the researcher was better able to understand the competing responsibilities these students were challenged with daily and how they chose to organize their overall responsibilities—gleaning insights that addressed the three RQs:

RQ1: What are the overall responsibilities of nontraditional CTE students seeking careers?

RQ2: How do nontraditional CTE students prioritize college and personal demands?

RQ3: Where and from whom are nontraditional CTE students receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals?

Review of Methodology

Data were collected from semistructured interviews. The phenomenological qualitative methodology provided the researcher with the tools to explore the lived experiences of nontraditional CTE students and their philosophical perspectives and helped describe a process of events that led to how these participants prioritized their overall responsibilities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The researcher asked 17 participants from five CTE programs closed- and open-ended questions to inform three RQs. Participants described, explained, and reflected on their lived experiences while pursuing a technical certificate or associate degree. Their personal stories of managing their time with their jobs, families, and college responsibilities informed the phenomenon.

Discussion of the Findings

Although all participants selected for this study were nontraditional CTE students, 3 of 17 provided responses similar to traditional students. These three participants responded similarly when asked about their fear of losing their jobs if they could not meet their employers' needs while trying to find a college schedule that would work for them. Two participants still lived at

home, which was the main reason why they were willing to prioritize college first and find another employer if the employer would not prioritize their school. Another common factor these three participants shared was they did not have dependents. The other 14 participants cared for dependents or older parents. Participants with dependents would not risk losing their jobs or neglecting their dependents, leaving them with conflicting priorities. Their primary responsibility was their family needs, followed by their job and education. One participant with dependents mentioned how the order of prioritization depended on how the day unfolded with her children's needs. This study indicates nontraditional CTE students with dependents must make lose–lose decisions that will negatively impact their education, family obligations, or education if they cannot find empathetic employers or faculty to help them navigate their responsibilities.

Participants with dependents had more to balance compared to participants without dependents. A common statement among participants was how they identified with faculty who shared their struggles through college or work experiences. Although these 14 participants were motivated by faculty who shared their educational journeys, 16 of 17 were not receiving time management or prioritization guidance in their CTE programs. Their advice or pressure to succeed in college emanated solely from their siblings, spouses, or parents.

In the following sections, the researcher addresses each RQ by providing participant statements that help answer each question and provide clarity on study findings.

RQ1

RQ1 addressed the overall responsibilities of nontraditional CTE students seeking careers. Two significant and common obligations surfaced among participants in the data: job commitments and family needs. Some participants had job responsibilities that extended well over 40 hours per week. Participant 5 mentioned how working more than 40 hours a week was

usually needed to earn enough money to cover his family expenses. Participant 7's job responsibilities extended to the weekend to ensure her small bakery business orders were fulfilled. Participant 10 provided insight into how he juggled five jobs. The researcher was surprised by the participant's first response regarding the number of hours the participant said he worked; thus, the researcher asked the participant to elaborate on his job schedule. Like Participant 5, Participant 10 provided insight into how some nontraditional CTE students spent time managing multiple jobs to earn enough income to support their families.

Participant 7 grew up with parents who owned a small landscaping business. He saw how difficult it was to run a business. They lost many clients during the COVID-19 global pandemic, so their household income decreased significantly. Although he had other jobs, Participant 7 also committed to his family's success and showed his commitment by prioritizing their needs before his college responsibilities. In Participant 12's case, she stressed her responsibilities of recently being a single mother of three. She had a newborn child to attend to first. Although her mother lived with her and provided some relief by offering to care for her three children, the support came with a burden. Participant 12's mother was elderly and required attention or rides to her medical appointments, which pulled Participant 12 further away from her studies. RQ1 provided insight into the most significant responsibilities of these participants. Their responses reinforced the urgency of having enough hours available to work so they could earn enough income for their respective family's needs. In addition to the participants' statements, the Quirkos coding analysis confirmed jobs and family were the most significant nontraditional responsibilities for CTE students. Findings for RQ1 related to RQ2 informing how these students prioritized a third responsibility—college and personal demands.

RQ2

RQ2 asked about how nontraditional CTE students prioritized college and personal demands. The researcher aimed to understand how nontraditional CTE students managed their time and decided which tasks took precedence, especially when college assignments and personal responsibilities overlapped on the same day. Participant 5 understood the consequences of missing class (e.g., loss of information, missing hints on the next quiz, missing practice on lab exercise), but he prioritized his family and their financial needs first. Similarly, Participant 3 chose to care for his elderly parents first, even for a limited time. In addition to prioritizing his wife and children first, Participant 3 had to ensure his parents' needs were met before he focused on college responsibilities, which added to the pressure and stress he experienced.

Prioritizing family was a common response for nontraditional CTE students who had dependents. Participant 7 confirmed college and family obligations did conflict daily. These participants had dependents to consider when scheduling college assignments or prioritizing their responsibilities. When asked similar questions, participants without dependents responded in the opposite way. Participant 8 had no dependents and agreed with Participant 4; both would prioritize college and working extra hours was not necessary. When a conflict between work and class arose, Participant 4 had the ability to prioritize his education first, had an employer willing to work around his college schedule, and did not have a mortgage or children to worry about daily. Lastly, Participant 11, another participant without dependents, prioritized similarly to Participants 4 and 8. When he attended college for the first time, he recalled he decided to drop out. He strongly believed this was a huge mistake and setback, realizing he needed to return. Participant 11 worked the graveyard shift (i.e., 11:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m.), causing him to become sleep-deprived. However, even with this discomfort, he made it to class lectures. These three

participants with no dependents prioritized their education before their employment responsibility compared to participants with dependents. Findings related to RQ2 provided insight as the researcher explored the final RQ.

RQ3

RQ3 asked where and from whom nontraditional CTE students were receiving guidance related to prioritizing their time to reach their educational goals. Although the researcher expected to hear more testimony of faculty and college counselors being the primary source of guidance, this was not the case. Among the 17 participant interviews, only one participant stated their faculty had discussions with or mentorship guidance for them on how and why to prioritize. Sixteen of the 17 participants said their significant other, siblings, or parents were the ones to credit for the advice or motivation to prioritize educational goals rather than a faculty member or college counselor. Participant 12 saw her sister as a role model. Participant 17 also reflected on a family member as a role model and influencer in how he prioritized time. Participant 17 did not mention any conversations with faculty on time management or prioritization. Similarly, Participants 5 and 7 did not recall any conversations with faculty about prioritization. Participant 11 was the only student of the 17 students in the study who mentioned faculty guidance on prioritization.

The findings suggest faculty need to engage more in prioritization conversations. However, persuading nontraditional students with dependents to choose school assignments over external responsibilities is challenging. Faculty could first build trust and personal relationships before advising nontraditional students on organizing their external responsibilities. Building trust will require a nonintrusive coaching approach tailored to each student and ongoing professional development for faculty going beyond their teaching role. Faculty could then have

uncomfortable and personal conversations with nontraditional students on sacrificing and adjusting time schedules to better balance college, work, family, and friends. The goal is to manage external responsibility better to prioritize college homework assignments and have the time to emerge longer in learning the material. The researcher pondered if this notion occurred in all programs where faculty interacted with older, nontraditional students, and if these students might have been expected to have mastered time management skills already.

The participants' lived experiences in this study provided answers to the RQs. The researcher gained a better understanding of the overall responsibilities, how and why these nontraditional CTE students prioritized their responsibilities, and from whom they received guidance in matters of prioritizing college first.

Discussion of the Themes

The interview provided insight into multiple themes: (a) External Responsibilities, (b) Barriers Affecting Academic Performance, (c) Factors Affecting Prioritization, (d) Motivations for Attending College, (e) Definitions of Success, (f) Reciprocating Determinism Theory, (g) Hierarchy of Needs, (h) Improving Student Experiences, and (i) Empathetic Advisors. From these, two themes have the potential to influence college policies (i.e., Improving Student Experiences and Empathetic Advisors). These themes emerged directly from the participants' lived experiences, which provided further study recommendations and areas of improvement for faculty. Three participants mentioned having decreased stress and increased college engagement when their faculty spent time discussing how the daily lessons could be applied in a work setting or sharing personal stories of how they used the skills.

Previous research on disengaged community college students has shown faculty can play a role in persistence by providing guidance on prioritization. For example, McClenney and Arnsparger (2012) stated:

> Of course, students do often talk about the challenges of setting priorities, managing time, and learning to "do college" more effectively. But listening carefully to their stories of leaving college, one can hear the themes: the need for personal connections, the essential value of clear expectations that are consistently enforced, and the attractions of college work connected to life's work. (p. 108)

The current study's data highlighted the extent to which CTE faculty were working within the framework of these themes. The findings also show where students received prioritization guidance when none was available in their program.

Implications Related to Literature

There has been abundant research on high school CTE students; however, there is a need for research literature regarding community college CTE students, particularly the lived experiences, or listening to the stories, of CTE nontraditional students and how they prioritize their time. Hirschy et al. (2011) examined key differences between traditional students and students pursuing occupational associate degrees or certificates. According to Hirschy et al., CTE student populations are different and require support services tailored to their needs to keep them in college, especially during their 1st semester. To better understand CTE student persistence, scholars have compared CTE nontraditional students to traditional students using theories such as Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory of departure and Bean and Metzner's (1985) nontraditional undergraduate student attrition (Hirschy et al., 2011). Hirschy et al. also analyzed Bean and Eaton's (2001) *Psychology Underlying Successful Retention Practices* and found no

model fully described CTE students because their sample references were from students in 4-year institutions and not community colleges.

According to Hirschy et al (2011), to understand attrition of nontraditional CTE students, educational leaders must first understand the needs and daily challenges this student population encounters. In this study, the lived experiences of nontraditional CTE students provided insights in two areas of their lives: (a) factors advancing them to achieve their educational goals and (b) factors that became barriers to their educational goals. The explanations of these students' lived experiences provided a small sample of how nontraditional CTE students navigated their overall responsibilities. Similarly, Ross-Gordon (2011) found these types of students tend to be more willing to miss class if work or family requires it. They depend on faculty to understand this priority. During the analysis, participants stated 19 times the importance of having faculty who were willing to be flexible on assignments and deadlines or allowing late arrivals to class. According to Hittepole (n.d.), "Faculty members are crucial to the success of nontraditional students. While these students require flexibility and understanding from faculty, many report that positive interactions with faculty members have a significant impact on their success" (para. 14).

Brookman (1989) applied Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory to explain how academic counselors who intertwine essential elements of care and safety in their academic advising capacity improve student retention. Brookman highlighted an increase in retention outcomes at Pacific Lutheran University, an expensive, exclusive, private institution, when safety needs were addressed. Brookman argued support programs need to go beyond academic counselors and student affairs practitioners by including faculty outside the classroom setting. For instance, Brookman suggested faculty members could engage in mentorship programs

designed to help students attain higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy. The current phenomenological study brought attention to the notion that nontraditional students in five CTE programs were not receiving essential mentorship, such as time management and prioritization guidance, from their faculty. Additionally, participants never mentioned engagement programs such as student clubs or office hour activities where a more personal interaction can occur between students and faculty. It is essential to remember 14 of 17 participants had dependents, so any additional activities outside the classroom that were not mandatory were simply not a top priority.

However, these findings provided the first steps to open the discussion about how faculty can implement more engagement activities after classes to help students navigate their educational journeys. According to Levin et al. (2006), CTE faculty are responsible for more than providing an academic challenge; they are directly linked to student development, learning, and outcomes. More personal, one-on-one conversations with students and faculty can reduce barriers (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). Karpouza and Emvalotis (2019) concluded students and teachers are continuously developing relationships. However, the power difference between faculty and students can be a barrier to them creating a relationship. Students in that study mentioned feeling more comfortable speaking and participating when they had a previous positive experience with a professor during one-on-one meetings. Additionally, Karpouza and Emvalotis concluded a significant finding was agreement that Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory applied in an educational setting is a good lens to study CTE nontraditional student behavior. In the current study, the researcher used Bandura's reciprocating determinism as a lens, including three factors (i.e., behavior, self, and external environment), to investigate where CTE students learned time management and prioritization skills needed to succeed in

college. The lived experiences of these participants provided data identifying family members who were the driving force in determining how they prioritized their responsibilities. Their behavior was motivated by their external environments, such as the obligations to their dependents or spouses or the influences of a family member who achieved a certificate or degree. According to Grabowski et al. (2016), "Nontraditional students report that stress resulting from environmental factors poses one of the biggest challenges to academic achievement and degree completion. Environmental factors include finances, emotional support from family, domestic responsibilities" (p. 3).

Sutton (2016) highlighted innovators who are leaders serving adult students. Sutton highlighted Jonathan Talley, director of adult and nontraditional students at Missouri State University. Talley stated colleges can increase retention by streamlining administration, advising, and financial aid processes for adult leaders (Sutton, 2016). Talley understood adult students have a low tolerance for waiting in line and can quickly get discouraged due to many external commitments. Sending them to navigate through too many offices could exhaust them. Talley contended traditional norms and long vetting processes by college administration, financial aid, and enrollment offices are systems designed for traditional students. With added external responsibilities, nontraditional students do not have the time to go through many offices to complete a process. Talley observed his institution was not ready to streamline their processes. Talley's success came from developing a one-stop shop where adults could get their service needs in one location. Additionally, the success was linked to an on-call scheduling system where students could go online to make an appointment to see a counselor within 1 hour. According to Talley, college leaders need to find ways to make it easier for this population of

students by providing quicker access to serve them because they may have additional, time-consuming responsibilities such as caring for children or elderly dependents.

This current study identified and validated external responsibilities nontraditional CTE students faced daily. The qualitative data surfaced the urgency of students' financial needs while they attempt to attend class and manage to work overtime. Ross-Gordon (2011) concluded adult learners have more responsibilities beyond attending classes and find it difficult to balance and prioritize their time. Many nontraditional-aged students over the age of 24 see themselves as workers first and students second (California Community Colleges, n.d.). Since 2011, the need to understand older students and support nontraditional students has not changed. According to the Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO, 2021) in the 2021 State of the Systems report:

> Fifty-two percent of students are 24 years old or younger, and 48% are 25 years old or older. The system uses the Perkins Economically Disadvantaged metric as a measure of students' income status based on their receipt of financial aid and other social benefits. Sixty-four percent of students across the system are classified as Perkins Economically Disadvantaged, 36% are not Perkins Economically Disadvantaged. (para. 4)

Ross-Gordon (2011) concluded nontraditional students need help prioritizing school responsibilities because they see themselves as workers first and students last. According to Grabowski et al. (2016), "Nontraditional students note a lack of support from their peers, faculty members, and family friends, as a barrier to academic success. Institutions may opt to provide counseling, academic, and career services with evening hours and online services" (p. 5). In the current study, interview data provided an additional perspective from nontraditional students about prioritizing their time—one perspective from students with dependents and the other

perspective from students who did not have dependents. Fourteen of 17 participants with dependents or elderly parents prioritized work first and were willing to drop out of college if they could not find a flexible schedule. However, the other three nontraditional participants with no dependents would find another job before missing out on college. The main difference in this study compared to the available literature on nontraditional students is the researcher dove deeper into a subgroup of nontraditional CTE students. The subgroup of nontraditional CTE students struggled to prioritize commitments. Additionally, the researcher sought to understand the hierarchy of prioritization these students used when deciding between responsibilities. Finally, the study findings provided insights about how CTE students prioritize their educational goals and the people who provided guidance to achieve them.

Implications Related to Practice

The goal of this study was to examine adult nontraditional CTE students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time. This research study has implications for practice, policy, and theory. Implications of findings for practice in this study emerged for nontraditional CTE students and CTE faculty.

Implications for Nontraditional CTE Students

The current study demonstrated how nontraditional CTE students with dependents prioritized their overall responsibilities. Fourteen of 17 nontraditional CTE students prioritized their time and responsibilities depending on their dependents' needs, even if this decision negatively affected their educational goals. When viewed from a prioritization hierarchy, these students prioritized their employment first, family second, and education last. Participants reported negotiating between hours spent in a classroom or at work was a daily conflict. The current study findings support the idea that nontraditional CTE students with dependents

prioritize their time based on factors including finances and family obligations. In this study, participants with dependents prioritized opposite to participants who did not have dependents. The three participants without dependents reported putting school first, even if losing their employment was necessary. Thus, community colleges could develop orientation sessions that include or require the entire family to attend to inform the entire family or supporting spouses of the challenges the student will face when assignments and deadlines arise. This program would also bring forth the expectations and time commitment required to complete the journey as a family successfully. According to this study, nontraditional students with dependents negotiate time with their employers and family daily.

Implications for CTE Faculty

In the current study, findings showed how nontraditional CTE students were given flexibility (i.e., additional time) to work on their school assignments with their instructors when their external responsibilities, such as work or family dependents, required their attention. According to four participants, this flexibility came from faculty stating they understood the external responsibilities facing nontraditional CTE students. Although the extra allotted time provided by CTE faculty was beneficial for nontraditional CTE students, the researcher also interpreted it as empty disclosure on the first day of class. By empty disclosure, the researcher meant faculty were sharing the extra time allowances policy on the first day of the class to set the classroom management standard of their classroom, but they left the responsibilities of prioritization and time management to students. In this study, participants were asked to recall and explain a time when they had a one-on-one conversation or discussion with a faculty member about prioritization of responsibilities; 16 of 17 participants reported they never had such a conversation. This left only 1 of 17 CTE students acknowledging personal mentorship or

guidance on time management or prioritization skills. CTE faculty are expected to teach technical courses, help streamline students' pathways as they transition from the classroom and into the workforce, and assist nontraditional CTE students to adapt to newly learned work ethic and soft skills. In essence, CTE faculty have the responsibility to serve nontraditional students equitably. However, to do this, faculty must understand students' challenges, dependents, or job responsibilities to find new ways to connect classroom lessons to their current situations.

To achieve an equitable classroom setting, faculty should receive professional development training to understand how to implement equitable principles better in their teaching. Treating all students equally is not the same as practicing equity; rather, equity involves understanding the fundamental principles of equity and applying them in classrooms. According to Dr. Bensimon (California Education Learning Lab, 2020), it is important to recognize faculty members are not necessarily representative of the populations they serve, and their personal biases can sometimes hinder their ability to provide effective education. For instance, faculty members may have had more resources or experienced fewer obstacles while pursuing their own education and may unconsciously expect similar advantages from their students. To ensure all students receive the support they need to succeed, faculty members must be willing to reflect on their own teaching methods and take accountability for their students' outcomes. Rather than blaming students for poor performance, faculty members should be willing to examine and adjust their own teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students better.

Therefore, CTE faculty could consider implementing more personal mentorship programs to help develop and guide CTE nontraditional students who still need to learn these skills. Faculty providing more time or waivers of assignments is helpful; however, this study's results

indicated these modifications are not enough because nontraditional students cannot always learn independently without any formal plan. Additionally, faculty cannot have all the burden of this work; career coaches or specified CTE counselors need to be next door and visible from the classroom to give these students a direct line of sight when entering and exiting the classroom. Having a nearby office where CTE students check in to receive this type of assistance may help these students move college responsibilities to the top of their priority list. By improving in this area, faculty will provide nontraditional CTE students with more flexibility; faculty can provide mentorship that can impact student success. In this study, participants reported the absence of this practice as detrimental.

Implications for Community College Education Policy

The study's findings provided a clear need for community colleges to keep equitable principles in every decision made and at the forefront of every faculty. Based on the results, different teaching strategies are required among subgroups of CTE nontraditional students. For example, students with dependents need faculty who understand the external responsibilities they are challenged with and understand how these challenges will affect the student's ability to navigate assignments. One way to fill these faculty positions in this community college is to change how hiring committees evaluate future professors. Hiring a professor based only on academic achievement or having an elegant academic achievement portfolio is insufficient to find an outstanding CTE faculty. The practice of substituting degree levels for work experiences is a fallacy for hiring instructors in CTE. Hiring committees pass on many potential faculty with abundant workforce experience during the hiring process due to the current hiring minimum requirements at the state chancellor's level.

Nontraditional students are looking for faculty to whom they can relate—a coach with fail and success stories experience in the workforce. In contrast, nontraditional CTE students in this study with no dependents did not need such faculty connections. This apparent distinction between nontraditional students supports a new hiring policy grounded on students' equitable needs, not faculty prestige. Hiring committees need to remember CTE nontraditional students need personal guidance to help them to the finish line, and that same size stepstool will not get them there.

For example, through participants' lived experiences, nontraditional CTE students are comfortable communicating with their faculty about the additional time needed to work on assignments or coming late to class when relationships or work-related discussions have occurred. Participants reported this flexibility did not exist in non-CTE classes. In general education classes, meeting deadlines and completing assignments and projects on time was expected, or students would lose out on earning full credit.

CTE faculty prepare students for immediate employment where punctuality and meeting deadlines have financial consequences. The difficulty for CTE faculty is the balance between providing flexibility and traditional academic structure. This crucial topic is of interest to faculty, administrators who design policy, and nontraditional CTE students. In this study, 16 of 17 participants stated neither prioritization nor time management was ever discussed with faculty.

Therefore, policies could be updated to include support for CTE nontraditional students in two critical areas. First, CTE curriculum should include elements of mentorship, career guidance, and organization/prioritization skills and be directly tied to professionals focused on career coaching and planning. These career coaches should have local employer connections and make continuous efforts to develop internships with local businesses. Second, an update to the

student services policy is warranted to provide quick and available services to nontraditional students attending classes late in the evening or on the weekends.

Community colleges can ensure equitable learning by evaluating the interview process and the questions interview committees ask candidates. Asking specific questions about how candidates address, monitor, and assess students can provide insight into their decision-making skills. It is also important to ask for examples of how candidates have created an equitable setting and to what extent they feel comfortable doing so. Community colleges should assess their hiring committee's tools to ensure they are highlighting equitable lenses in all new hires.

Implications of Findings to Theory

In this study, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory and Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory were applied as lenses when developing the research interview questions, during coding of participants' data, and when developing themes to organize participants' interview data. Furthermore, the researcher applied these two theories to study participants' motivations and behaviors. According to McLeod (2020) and Tay and Diener (2011), Maslow's theory of motivation has been used for understanding human behavior since its publication in 1943 and its update in 1954. Although there has been disagreement about whether each stratum in the hierarchy must be reached by an individual before another can be attempted, the theory provides a helpful framework for understanding what motivates individuals. The second theoretical lens applied in this study was Bandura's reciprocal determinism theory. This behaviorism theory states innate factors, observed behavioral factors, and environmental factors all equally determine how people learn a behavior (Connor, 2019). The researcher focused on environmental factors that influenced people to change their behavior toward prioritizing their time.

Implications of Findings for Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Participants reported esteem was a major motivator for students who are returning to community college to pursue a technical career. In participant interview transcripts, "esteem" was mentioned 29 times, followed by "safety needs" 21 times. Using Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs 5-tier model as the lens, the researcher found participants had acquired the first level of physiological needs (i.e., air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, and reproduction). These participants had all these first-tier needs met, and no hunger or housing insecurities were mentioned during interviews. The third tier (i.e., love and belonging) was also skipped. Participants reported having family, friendships, or a sense of connection through community activities or college peers; thus, it was reasonable to skip Level 3 and be motivated by Level 4 (i.e., esteem). Participants mentioned "safety needs" as a motivator to attend college in 21 statements. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs tiers, safety needs are on the second level before love and belonging. Participants who were classified on Tier 2 were those who reported losing their jobs, finding an advancement opportunity, or deciding to find a higher income earning career. Knowing participants aimed for esteem (i.e., the fourth tier of the model), faculty and administrators can look at elements of esteem (e.g., respect, status, recognition, strength, freedom) as a guide for developing nontraditional student mentoring and coaching strategies.

Implications of Findings for Bandura's Reciprocal Determinism Theory

The researcher applied Bandura's (1978) theory and analyzed the external environment where participants were learning to navigate their college responsibilities. Participants reported learning to prioritize their college and personal responsibilities from their spouses or family members. Furthermore, participants with siblings or family who achieved a certificate or were college graduates served as mentors, role models, and motivators for these nontraditional CTE

students. None of the participants reported learning or conversing with their faculty about prioritizing their college assignments first. Two participants mentioned their faculty reminded them to care for their family first if an urgency arose. Although two participants said their instructors could be better prepared before coming to class for the lectures or labs, Participant 9 thought part-time faculty deserved a pass due to having other obligations. This implication directly aligns with reciprocal determinism theory, which states people learn behavior from external environments (Bandura, 1978).

This study aimed to examine nontraditional CTE students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on how they prioritized their time. The findings highlight a need for mentorship and guidance from CTE faculty and lead to further questions about who is responsible and the extent to which faculty contribute to this phenomenon. According to Bandura's (1978) theory of reciprocal determinism, people are influenced to behave by personal needs and social environments. The finding shows a classroom environment promoting a need to prioritize school first or mentorship for arranging a nontraditional students' CTE personal schedule is not highlighted as part of the curriculum.

Recommendations for Further Research

The focus of this study was to understand adult nontraditional CTE students' motivations, personal needs, and inside- and outside-classroom influences on the ways they prioritized their time. There are numerous opportunities for further research to assist colleges in achieving better performance metrics related to Perkins V annual review reports, which are a priority for California and its economy. In addition, nontraditional students pursuing CTE careers may also seek degrees that require interaction with faculty outside of their CTE discipline. As a result, the researcher suggests all community college practitioners stay informed about the student

populations they serve by conducting ongoing research on nontraditional students and community college faculty.

First, faculty need to better understand nontraditional CTE students, their personal responsibilities, and what motivated them to continue attending class. The current study did not include faculty or their perspectives of classroom management, and only included students' perspectives. Future research, such as including CTE faculty as interview participants, could strengthen and corroborate the findings of this study. Listening to faculty lived experiences while working with nontraditional CTE students would provide a broader view of how college workload prioritization is included in daily interactions with students. A study of CTE faculty would allow researchers to apply Bandura's (1978) reciprocating determinism theory in classroom settings to investigate faculty influence pertaining to prioritization. One way to strengthen a future study would be for the researcher to apply a mixed-methods approach that would include a quantitative lens to reach more participants and give a general understanding of the phenomenon.

Second, the CTE programs selected for this study resulted in few female participants. In the event this study is replicated, the researcher recommends strengthening the study by selecting students from all CTE programs available at the college to increase female student participation. Programs such as nursing have a larger population of female CTE students and could potentially lead to further understanding of how nontraditional CTE female students, including mothers, prioritize time.

Third, the researcher recommends selecting a site where the primary researcher has never been employed nor had previous interactions with faculty or students. By making these changes

to the study, participants might feel more comfortable disclosing sensitive data and sharing how their faculty created or did not create a supportive learning and mentoring environment.

Fourth, future research implementing a qualitative approach could measure the yearly attrition rates of nontraditional CTE students with dependents and nontraditional CTE students without dependents to understand how this factor influences completion.

Fifth, although Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was an adequate lens for this study, future research is recommended to have vertical flexibility of each tier. Maslow originally claimed the tier hierarchy order was rigid, which means an individual must complete the lower tier before climbing the next one. By vertical flexibility, the researcher means these nontraditional CTE students were motivated by factors in many levels of the Maslow's theoretical hierarchy model, which was an original theory restriction, but was addressed by Maslow (1987) in his later work where he concluded vertical flexibility was possible.

Conclusion

College leaders have designed and implemented Guided Pathways to reduce the time students spend at community colleges working on their educational goals (CCCCO, 2021). Guided Pathways were designed to help students prioritize their class schedules while obtaining a fast-track certificate or a degree; however, these programs accelerated courses and increased the workloads for nontraditional students. For this reason, these new pathways must address prioritization skills needed by CTE nontraditional students outside of class. The study site was selected because it did not meet many college aggregate core indicators from 2021–2022 expected by Perkins V, Title 1.

The researcher reviewed the literature available on nontraditional students and found abundant literature focusing on high school student performance due to infusions of technical

classwork. Nontraditional students transferring to a university are also well-documented. However, a gap in the literature was identified pertaining to the study of nontraditional CTE students and how they prioritize education. In this study, the researcher sought to understand how nontraditional CTE students prioritized their school responsibilities. Furthermore, this phenomenological study investigated how nontraditional CTE students managed their priorities and from whom they received guidance on prioritization. The study findings suggest further studies of how community college faculty mentor, guide, or coach students on prioritizing external responsibilities is needed.

Chapter 5 concluded this phenomenological study and highlighted existing research on nontraditional students. Furthermore, this study focused on a subgroup of nontraditional students, or CTE students working on short-term certificate preparations for employment and local associate technical degrees (i.e., nontransferable degree programs). The findings of this study provide implications for practice, policy, theory, CTE faculty, and nontraditional CTE students.

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Appendix A – Alignment of Research Questions to Theoretical Lenses and Interview Questions

Research question	Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943).	Bandura's reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978).	Interview questions
RQ1	Physiological needs (e.g., water, rest, food)	Behavior	Please walk me through your external responsibilities besides college responsibilities. If working, how do you feel when your work schedules conflicts with your class schedule? Follow-up- How do you decide which one to prioritize?
	Safety needs (e.g., employment, personal security, resources)	Innate: person	Please explain how do you prepare when it is time to focus on completing college assignments? Would you provide your opinion on the way faculty prepare a learning environment?
	Esteem		Once you graduate, a title such as inspector, mechanical, or technician follows your name. What is your opinion of feelings of such title?
RQ2	Physiological needs (e.g., water, rest, food)	Behavior	Please walk me through your external responsibilities besides college responsibilities. If working, how do you feel when your work schedules conflicts with your class schedule? Follow-up- How did you come to a

			decision which one to prioritize?
	Safety needs (e.g., employment, personal security, resources)	Innate: person	Please walk through how do you prepare when it is time to complete college assignments? Would you provide your opinion on the way faculty prepare a learning environment?
	Love and belonging	External environment	How do you feel about Guided Pathways? Can you share how you feel walking into class? Can you tell me about a day in class you were not "feeling" it? Could you walk me through a conversation with your instructor where they suggested you keep up with prioritization of time?
RQ3	Safety needs (e.g., employment, personal security, resources)	Innate: person	Please explain how you prepare when it's time to focus on completing college assignments? Would you provide your opinion on the way faculty prepare a learning environment?

Appendix B – Recruitment Pamphlet for Participants

Research Participants Needed

COLLEGE of the DESERT

I am a proud graduate of the College of the Desert and am now a faculty member of the School of Applied Sciences and Business. I am also a high school dropout who had a second chance to return to school and continue my education, earning an AA, BSME, MSME, MBA, and P.E.-CA license. I am currently working on a doctorate in Community College Leadership.

COMPENSATION $$$$

- **$50.00 Amazon Card**
- **Entry Lottery of $500.00 or IPad Pro 2**

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

To learn more about how CTE students prioritize their time and from whom or what influences that shape prioritization. The study will be conducted by studying the live experiences of nontraditional CTE students.

SCAN HERE TO PARTICIPATE OR GO TO

[redacted]

WHO IS ELIGIBLE? CTE

Students and meet at least one:

- **Work full time**
- **Have a dependent**
- **Attended school part time**
- **Single parent**
- **Older than 18 years of age**
- **Graduated from alternative high school**

INTERESTED?

If you are interested in participating, please go to https://koalendar.com/e/meet-with-ramiro-galicia **or scan the QR code.**

Associate Professor Ramiro Galicia

[redacted]

Kansas State University

College of Education

Appendix C – College Aggregate Core Indicator Information (2021–2022)

Section 1 Part E-C (for Colleges) **Page 1 of 2**

College Aggregate Core Indicator Information (2021-2022)

Perkins V, Title I, Part C Local Application

Agreement # _____ District/College: DESERT/DESERT

Instructions: Print out forms. Complete and sign bottom of last page.

Cohort Year CTE Enrollments: 11,294 **CTE Headcount: 5,804**

(includes CTE enrollments above introductory level only) (CTE students enrolled above introductory level only)

Core Indicator 1 - Cohort Yr: 2018- 2019 Postsecondary Retention & Placement			Negotiated Level		College Performance	Percent Above or Below Negotiated Level
	Count	Total	State	District		
1 CTE Cohort*	1,948	2,027	91.75	89.15	96.10	7.0
2 Individuals Preparing for Non-Traditional Fields	450	461	91.75	89.15	97.61	8.5
3 Out of Workforce Individuals	0	0	91.75	89.15	N/R	N/R
4 Individuals with Economically Disadvantaged Families	1,537	1,586	91.75	89.15	96.91	7.8
5 English Learners	89	95	91.75	89.15	93.68	4.5
6 Single Parents	263	266	91.75	89.15	98.87	9.7
7 Individuals with Disabilities	183	189	91.75	89.15	96.83	7.7
8 Homeless Individuals	0	0	91.75	89.15	N/R	N/R
9 Youth in Foster Care	21	23	91.75	89.15	91.30	2.2
10 Youth with Parent in Active Military	5	5	91.75	89.15	100.00	N/A

Core Indicator 2 - Cohort Yr: 2018- 2019 Earned Postsecondary Credential			Negotiated Level		College Performance	Percent Above or Below Negotiated Level
	Count	Total	State	District		
11 CTE Cohort*	602	819	89.00	82.08	73.50	-8.6
12 Individuals Preparing for Non-Traditional Fields	148	197	89.00	82.08	75.13	-7.0
13 Out of Workforce Individuals	0	0	89.00	82.08	N/R	N/R
14 Individuals with Economically Disadvantaged Families	444	602	89.00	82.08	73.75	-8.3
15 English Learners	32	45	89.00	82.08	71.11	-11.0
16 Single Parents	55	84	89.00	82.08	65.48	-16.6
17 Individuals with Disabilities	67	73	89.00	82.08	91.78	9.7
18 Homeless Individuals	0	0	89.00	82.08	N/R	N/R
19 Youth in Foster Care	7	11	89.00	82.08	63.64	-18.4
20 Youth with Parent in Active Military	2	3	89.00	82.08	66.67	N/A

Core Indicator 3 - Cohort Yr: 2018- 2019 Non-traditional Program Enrollment			Negotiated Level		College Performance	Percent Above or Below Negotiated Level
	Count	Total	State	District		
21 CTE Cohort*	505	1,924	26.00	25.80	26.25	0.4
22 Individuals Preparing for Non-Traditional Fields	505	505	26.00	25.80	100.00	74.2
23 Out of Workforce Individuals	0	0	26.00	25.80	N/R	N/R
24 Individuals with Economically Disadvantaged Families	389	1,505	26.00	25.80	25.85	0.0

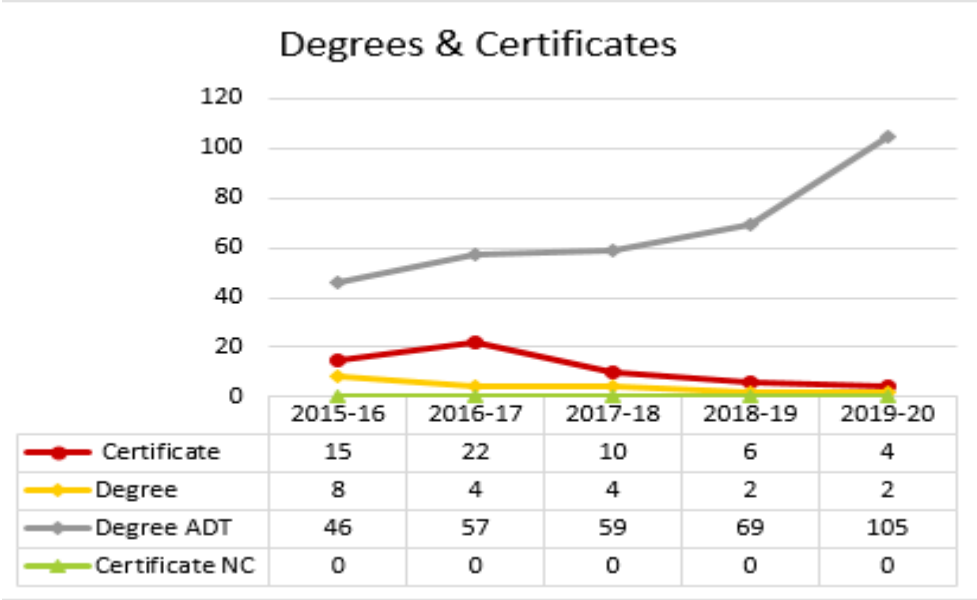
* If no district target is available then state targets will be used.

Page 1 of 2 Report Create Date: 02/01/2010

Appendix D – Degrees and Certificates

Figure D1.

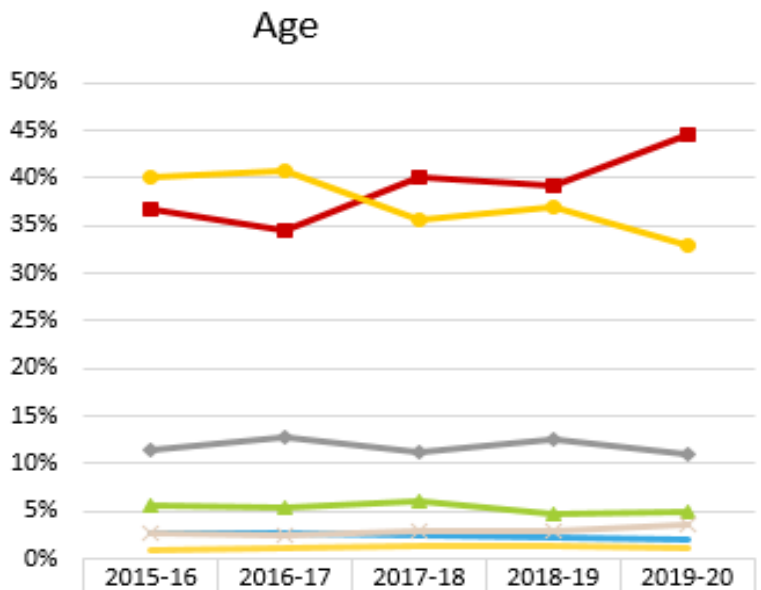
Public Safety Academy Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year



Note. Degree ADT = associate degree for transfer. Certificate NC = nontransferable certificate. Adapted from *Program Review Dashboard*, by College of the Desert, 2021 (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/committee-support.php). In the public domain.

Figure D2.

Public Service Program's Age Demographic Per Academic Year

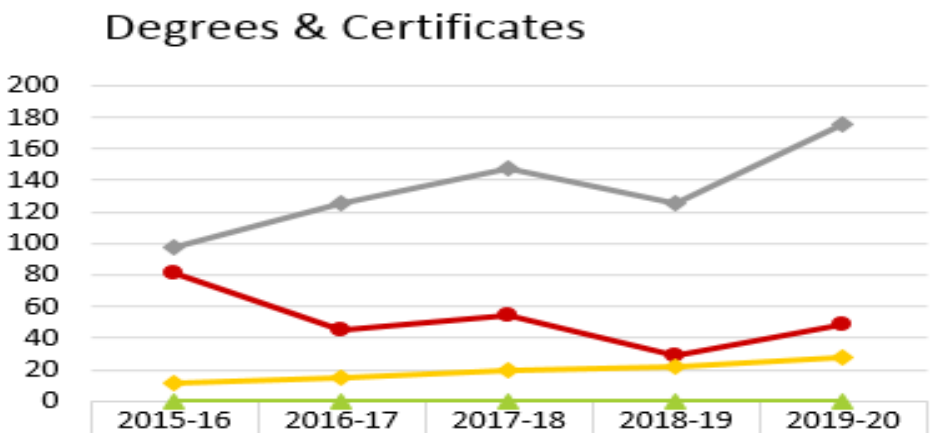


	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
19 or younger	37%	35%	40%	39%	45%
20 to 24	40%	41%	36%	37%	33%
25 to 29	11%	13%	11%	13%	11%
30 to 34	6%	5%	6%	5%	5%
35 to 39	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
40 to 49	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%
50 or older	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Note. Adapted from *Program Review Dashboard*, by College of the Desert, 2021 (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/committee-support.php). In the public domain.

Figure D3.

Business and Finance Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year

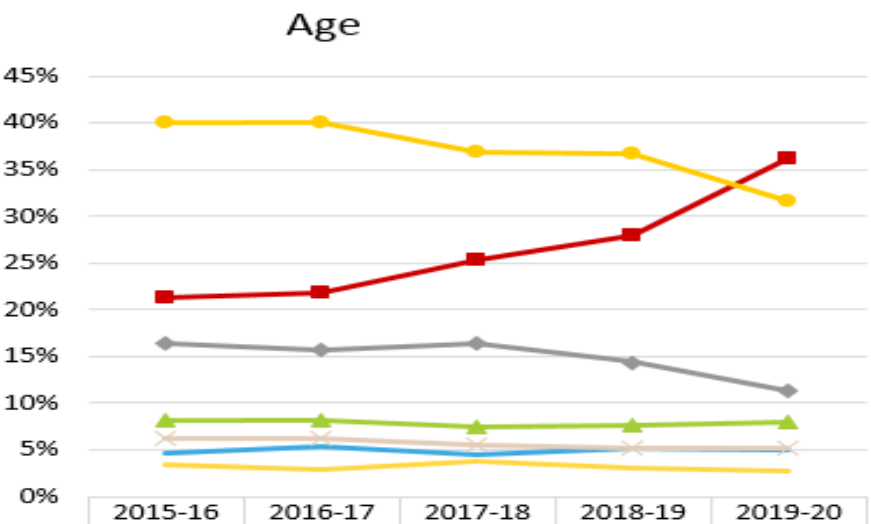


	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Certificate	81	45	54	29	49
Degree	11	15	20	22	28
Degree ADT	98	125	148	126	176
Certificate NC	0	0	0	0	0

Note. Degree ADT = associate degree for transfer. Certificate NC = nontransferable. Adapted from *Program Review Dashboard*, by College of the Desert, 2021 (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/committee-support.php). In the public domain.

Figure D4.

Business and Finance Program's Age Demographic Per Academic Year

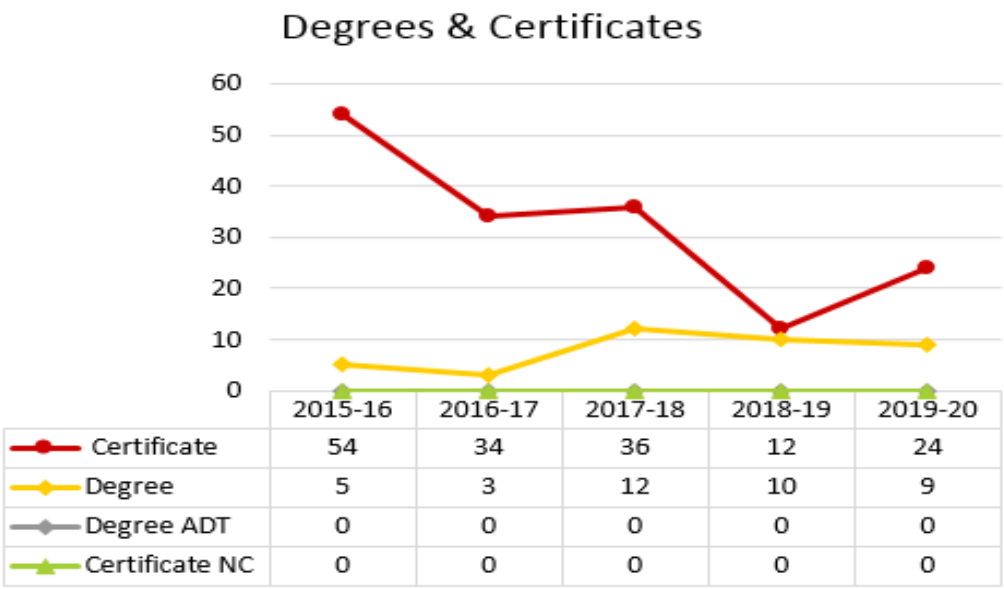


	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
19 or younger	21%	22%	25%	28%	36%
20 to 24	40%	40%	37%	37%	32%
25 to 29	16%	16%	16%	14%	11%
30 to 34	8%	8%	7%	8%	8%
35 to 39	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
40 to 49	6%	6%	6%	5%	5%
50 or older	3%	3%	4%	3%	3%

Note. Adapted from *Program Review Dashboard*, by College of the Desert, 2021 (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/committee-support.php). In the public domain.

Figure D5.

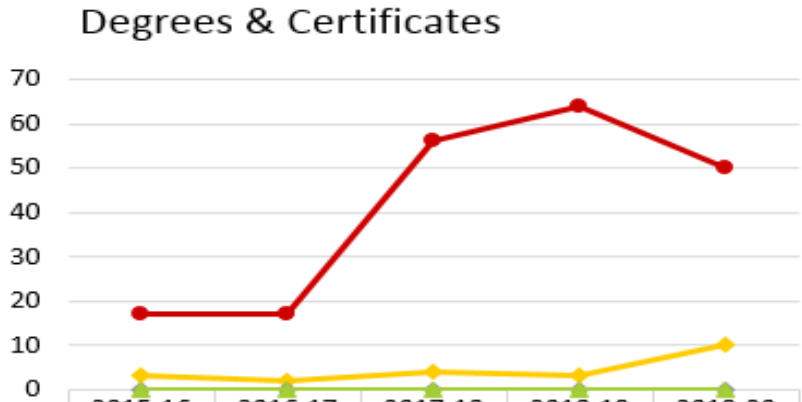
Automobile and Transportation Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year



Note. Degree ADT = associate degree for transfer. Certificate NC = nontransferable. Adapted from *Program Review Dashboard*, by College of the Desert, 2021 (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/committee-support.php). In the public domain.

Figure D6.

Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year

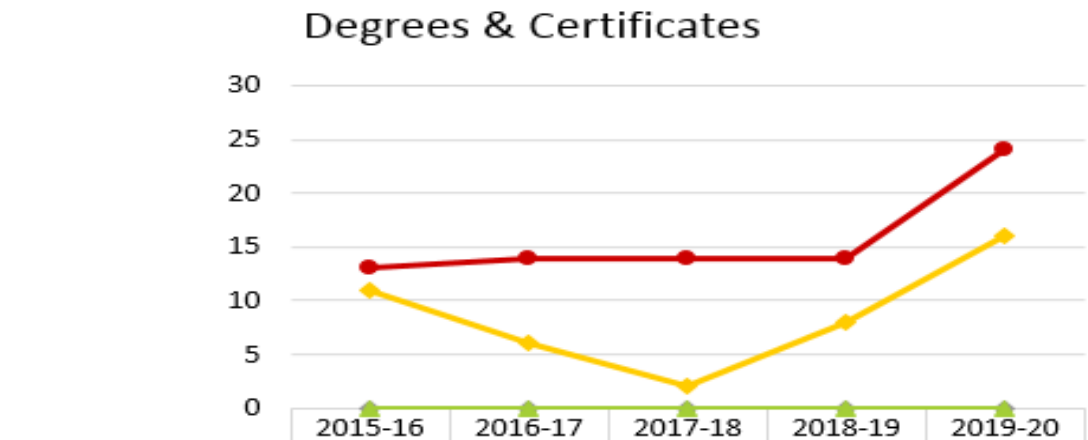


	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Certificate	17	17	56	64	50
Degree	3	2	4	3	10
Degree ADT	0	0	0	0	0
Certificate NC	0	0	0	0	0

Note. Degree ADT = associate degree for transfer. Certificate NC = nontransferable. Adapted from *Program Review Dashboard*, by College of the Desert, 2021 (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/committee-support.php). In the public domain.

Figure D7.

Culinary Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year

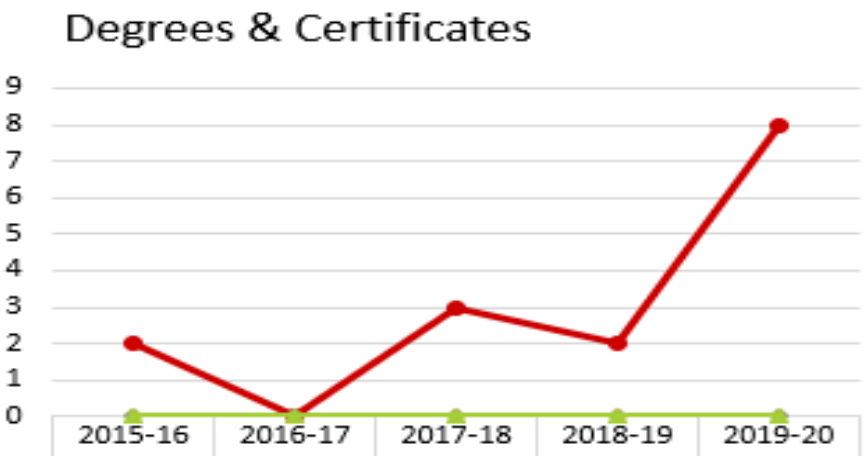


	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Certificate	13	14	14	14	24
Degree	11	6	2	8	16
Degree ADT	0	0	0	0	0
Certificate NC	0	0	0	0	0

Note. Degree ADT = associate degree for transfer. Certificate NC = nontransferable. Adapted from *Program Review Dashboard*, by College of the Desert, 2021 (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/committee-support.php). In the public domain.

Figure D8.

Building Inspection Program Degrees and Certificates Per Academic Year



	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Certificate	2	0	3	2	8
Degree	0	0	0	0	0
Degree ADT	0	0	0	0	0
Certificate NC	0	0	0	0	0

Note. Degree ADT = associate degree for transfer. Certificate NC = nontransferable. Adapted from *Program Review Dashboard*, by College of the Desert, 2021 (https://www.collegeofthedesert.edu/faculty-staff/research/committee-support.php). In the public domain.

Appendix E – Interview Protocol for Participants

Interview Protocol for Participants

Statement of Purpose: The researcher plans to identify how nontraditional CTE students spend their time and how they prioritize their life and school responsibilities while completing their degrees or programs. This study will give college leaders insight into these students' daily lives, including their commitments outside of the classroom.

Introduction of Interviewer: I am a graduate of this college. I began taking courses at the age of 22. I struggled to manage my personal life and college assignments during this time. Being a high school dropout did not help either. However, I have great teachers, tutors, and family support, and over the years, I earned multiple degrees (e.g., two in engineering and one in business). I could not have made it this far without support, and I am now working on my doctorate in leadership.

As I plan to prepare for a future leadership role, I would like to ask about your experiences while attending your CTE programs. I vividly remember my struggles while attending College of the Desert, for example, finding time to study and staying rested to focus on assignments. I hope to find out more about your struggles and success so I can better serve future nontraditional CTE students.

Structural-Informational Interview Questions

1. Please state your name.
2. Please state your age.
3. Please state your program of study here at College of the Desert.
4. Please state where you graduated from high school.
5. How many CTE classes at College of the Desert have you completed?
6. Do you have dependents who occupy your time?
7. Are you a single parent?
8. In your immediate family, can you share their educational achievements?
9. Are you working now, or have you worked while attending college?

Overarching Interview Questions

10. Please walk me through your external responsibilities besides college responsibilities.
11. If working, how do you feel when your work schedules conflicts with your class schedules? **Follow up**-How do you decide which one to prioritize?
12. Please explain how you prepare when it's time to focus on completing college assignments?
13. Would you provide your opinion on the way faculty prepare a learning environment?
14. Can you share you feel walking into class? Can you tell me about a day in class you were not "feeling it"?
15. Could you walk me through a conversation with your instructor where they suggested you keep up with prioritization of time?
16. Who do you feel has had an influence on how you prioritize college assignments?
17. Once your graduate, a title such as, inspector, mechanical, or technician follows your name, what is your opinion or feelings of earning such a tittle?
18. Explain the motivations that keep you working on your educational goals.
19. Explain the feeling or experience when arriving late to classes.
20. What was your experiences while working in College of the Desert labs?

Appendix F – Informed Consent for Participants

The Complex Lives of Community College Students Pursuing Career Technical Degrees and Certificates: An Exploration of Time Prioritization from Students' Perspectives

Informed Consent for Participants

Statement of Purpose: The researcher plans to identify how nontraditional CTE students spend their time and how they prioritize their life and school responsibilities while completing their degrees or programs. This study will give college leaders insight into these students' daily lives, including their commitments outside of the classroom.

Project Design

The data for this dissertation will be guided by the following parameters:

Data will be collected through interviews with students from one community college in Southern California.

The identities of participants will remain anonymous and confidential.

Only pseudonyms will be used in written reports.

No identifiable descriptions will be included in written reports. **Please note:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Any participant may decline to be interviewed or cut short the interview for any reason whatsoever. All interviews will be anonymous and confidential. Names or any identifiable data will not be used. Recordings and transcripts will remain in the hands of the researcher. A copy of this form will be provided to the participant. Completed forms will be stored and locked in the private files of the researcher.

Name of participant		Signature of participant		Date

Appendix G – Participant Information

Participant 1

Participant 1 was direct and quick to answer the demographic questions. First, he mentioned he worked only 40 hours per week, but the researcher discovered during follow-up questions he was working 60 hours per week. Participant 1 did not understand what was considered hours of labor. He appeared to be in a rush to finish the interview. However, he provided excellent information on how he prioritized his time. One of the reasons he worked so much was his obligations to his parents, who depended on him with their small business operations.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was friendly, chatty, and would respond to interview questions by quoting successful typical time management strategies. The researcher had to ask for additional examples in the participant's life so he would discuss personal responsibilities and experiences.

Participant 3

Participant 3 was polite and spoke well. Attending College of the Desert was the beginning of his third career transition; he had previously earned a master's degree. He was confident in answering the overarching questions. What stood out during the interview was the code of "family responsibilities first," which he espoused by grounding himself in his religion and serving the community.

Participant 4

Participant 4 was energetic, had a positive attitude, and had a naturally loud voice level. He provided insights into the good and the bad about his experiences in classroom labs and lectures. He was also very proud of one instructor he considered a good mentor. The automobile

pathway was not his first career choice; he was on his way to becoming a highway patrol employee when he was injured in basic training. He reflected on what he enjoyed the most, which was repairing cars.

Participant 5

Participant 5 communicated well during the interview. He had two children under 3 years of age and seemed to be managing his time and his external responsibilities well. He seemed relaxed during the entire interview. He had positive remarks about his instructors and lab technicians. He explained how instructors ensured all students shared their experiences with the subject being discussed during class sessions. For him, coming to classes was a stress reliever. He thought school was a break from work or family obligations.

Participant 6

Participant 6 had excellent communication skills. He constantly referenced the concept of a “smooth transition” to make sure his coworkers knew when he had to leave work and what was left to do. He mentioned transitioning (i.e., leaving the job, going home, or going to school) and needing time to adjust and ensuring everyone at work knew he was leaving. Based on his comments about transitioning from work to school, it seems the participant had a high level of care for people during the interview.

Participant 7

Participant 7 was well-spoken. She was influenced to return to college by a family of chefs, who encouraged her to continue to update her skills. At the time of the interview, she was raising five children, had a part-time job, and managed her bakery business part time. Participant 7 was unequivocal about her plans after graduation and wanted to become a recognizable brand

in the culinary arts industry. The code word that stood out during this interview was “self-esteem.”

Participant 8

Participant 8 seemed friendly and relaxed. He was clear on what his priority was, which was school. He was a full-time student and a full-time worker. One factor that stood out was his age; he was younger than many other participants and still lived with his parents. During the interview, he mentioned how his current job was “not a lifeline” and he would find another one if he got laid off due to a conflict with his class schedule.

Participant 9

Participant 9 was very serious and was also concerned about his mental state. His pride in being a military veteran and his unique training stood out. He was very protective of his physical surroundings. He wanted to be away from other students as much as possible so he could concentrate.

Participant 10

Participant 10 was energetic and quick to answer the preliminary questions. The researcher was surprised by how many hours he claimed to be working in a given week. He had jobs in four industries: accounting, rideshare driving, construction, and an auto parts store. His combined work schedule took up more than 70 hours a week. He also reflected on a trip to Mexico that was supposed to last 2 weeks and stretched out for 3 years. He had good business acumen and planned to open an automobile business after graduation.

Participant 11

Participant 11 worked as a security guard during graveyard shifts. He was a returning college student who first worked on a biology degree but dropped out. He mentioned he did not

have a sense of direction for a career in biology, so he quit. His motivation to get out of the graveyard work shift kept him working on his technical certifications. What stood out to the researcher was the participant's observation of older people who worked because they had become "trapped" and dependent on money due to children or new car debt. He mentioned how easy it would be to lose this second opportunity to learn a new career.

Participant 12

Participant 12 was friendly and well-spoken. From the beginning of the interview, the researcher was impressed by her multitasking ability. This participant came into the interview with her 4-month-old baby in her arms. She was a single parent of three children and the caretaker of one parent. Her work schedule was also hectic; she cleaned homes full time and managed five landscaping accounts that provided additional income. She talked about everyday stresses and returning to work from maternity leave. She mentioned how her job position had changed and going from location to location was becoming a new issue to manage. She stated she might have to give up her current job and find one that would suit her class schedule better.

Participant 13

Participant 13 was a soft-spoken individual and was new to College of the Desert. He had difficulty understanding the researcher's questions regarding external responsibilities and dependents. Once the researcher defined the word dependent, the participant better explained his daily activities. He began working in middle school at a young age to help his father open a business. Thus, the researcher was unsurprised that this participant started his automobile technology training at a local outreach high school before beginning college. He was also one of the youngest participants.

Participant 14

Participant 14 seemed shy and would only answer “no” or “yea” to the interview questions at first. The researcher was able to have the participant reveal more information during open-ended questions. However, this participant was the researcher’s most challenging interviewee. During an in-depth conversation into his personal life, he discussed how he was raised in an uncertain environment, was a runaway at the age of 16, and lived independently until he became an adult.

Participant 15

Participant 15 spoke well. He seemed a bit upset about having to attend community college. He believed community college homework was something he had already mastered. He was on his second career and working on a degree to prepare for a third career as an instructor. He had many years of experience working in his field and had a degree from a private institution. College of the Desert did not accept his credits from his previous private institution, which fueled his dislike of community college.

Participant 16

Participant 16 was not afraid to tell the researcher how he felt about the good, the bad, and the ugly experiences he had while enrolled at College of the Desert. He was honest about his interactions with faculty and lab technicians. In a way, he confirmed many events the researcher had already heard from students. It is commonly known that new equipment in CTE programs is expensive and limited in labs; thus, some students must wait in line to practice a newly learned skill. Another confirmation was that some instructors come prepared to class and others run their courses with minimal student engagement.

Participant 17

Participant 17 was outgoing and friendly. She was a returning student responsible for caring for her parents and her focus was on her parents and siblings. As an adult with no children, she focused on helping her father, who was going blind. She wanted to work for the city as a building inspector.

Appendix H – Quirke Analysis and Overlay of Theme Charts

Figure H1.

Example Layout of Main Theme and its Codes

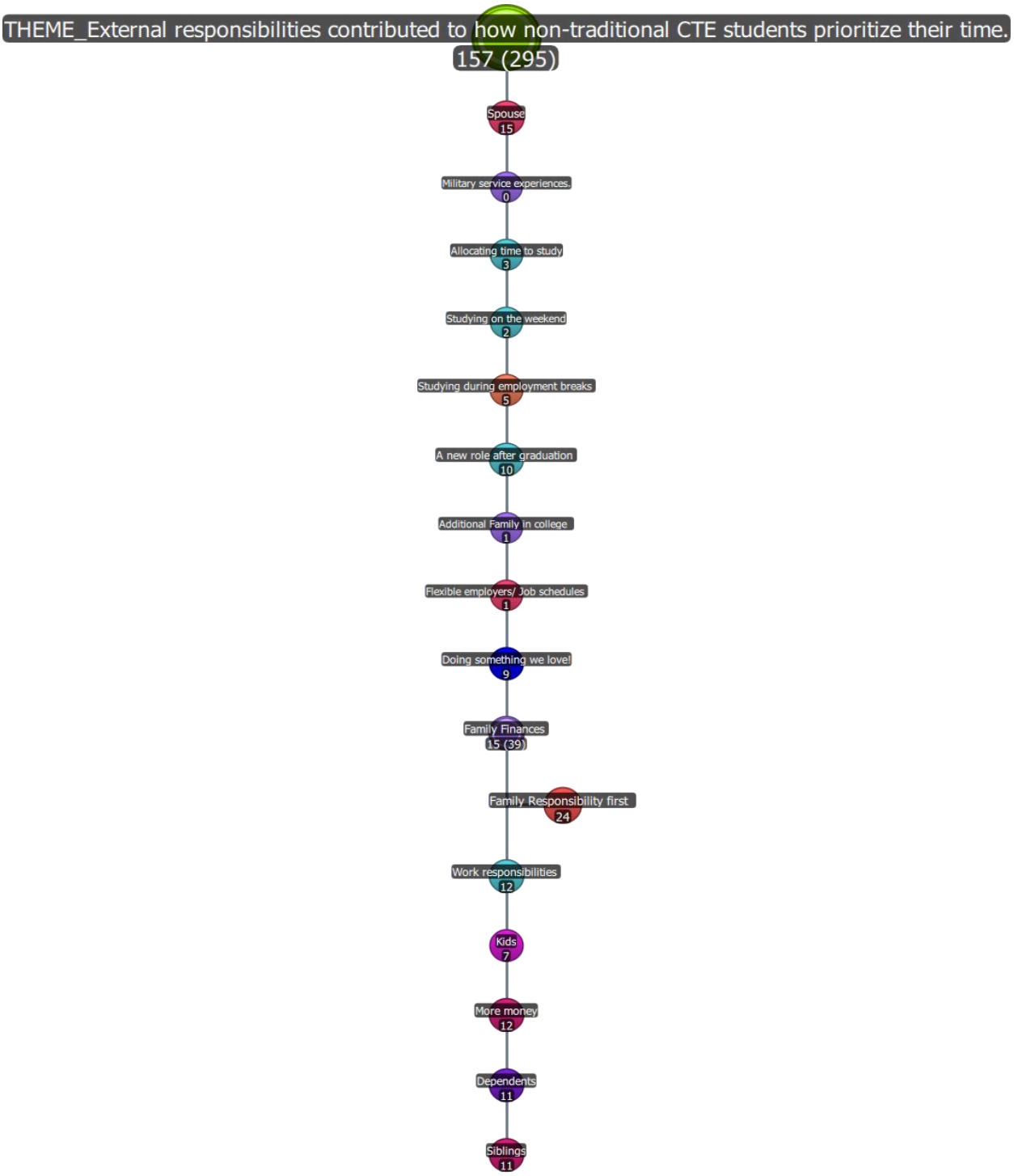


Figure H2.

Snapshot From Quirkos Coding Panel

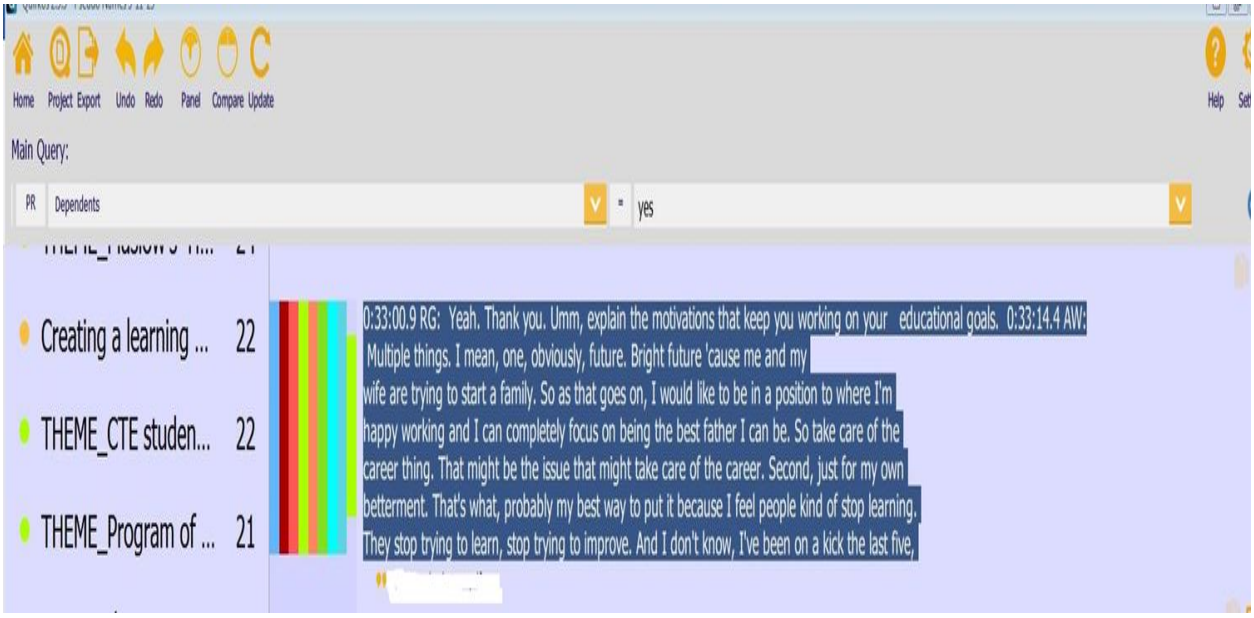
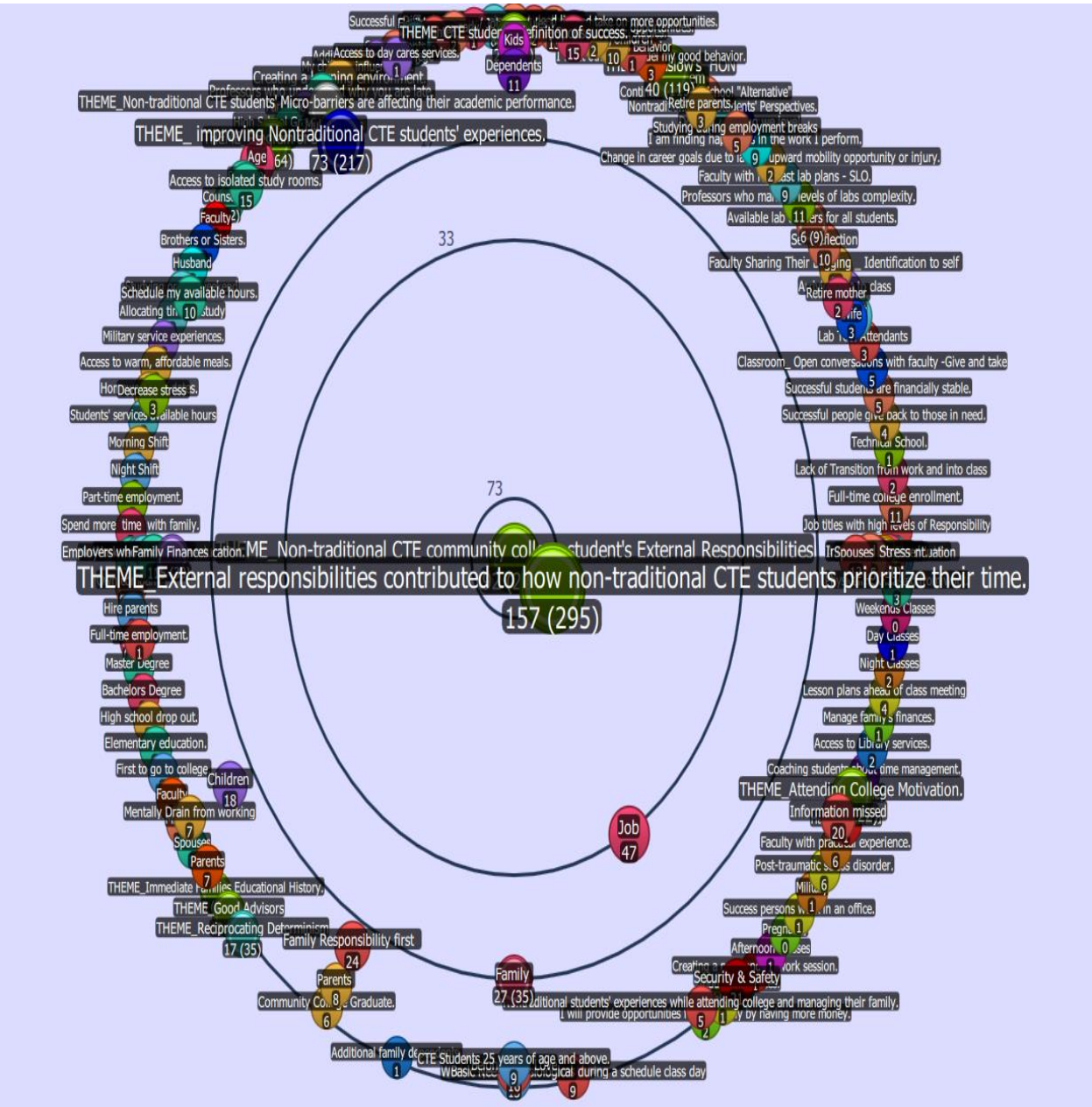


Figure H3.

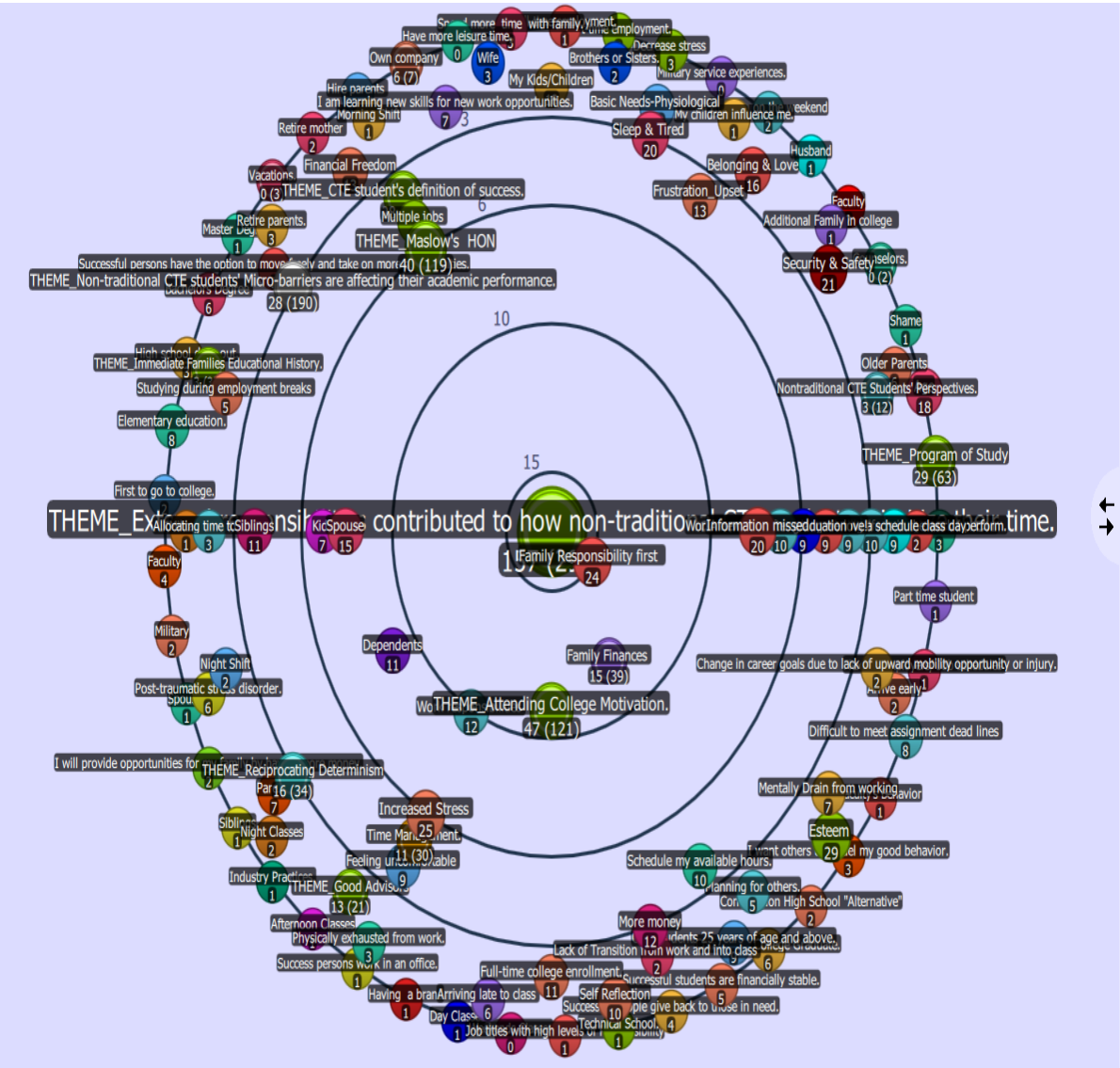
Theme—External Responsibilities



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme External Responsibilities. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H4.

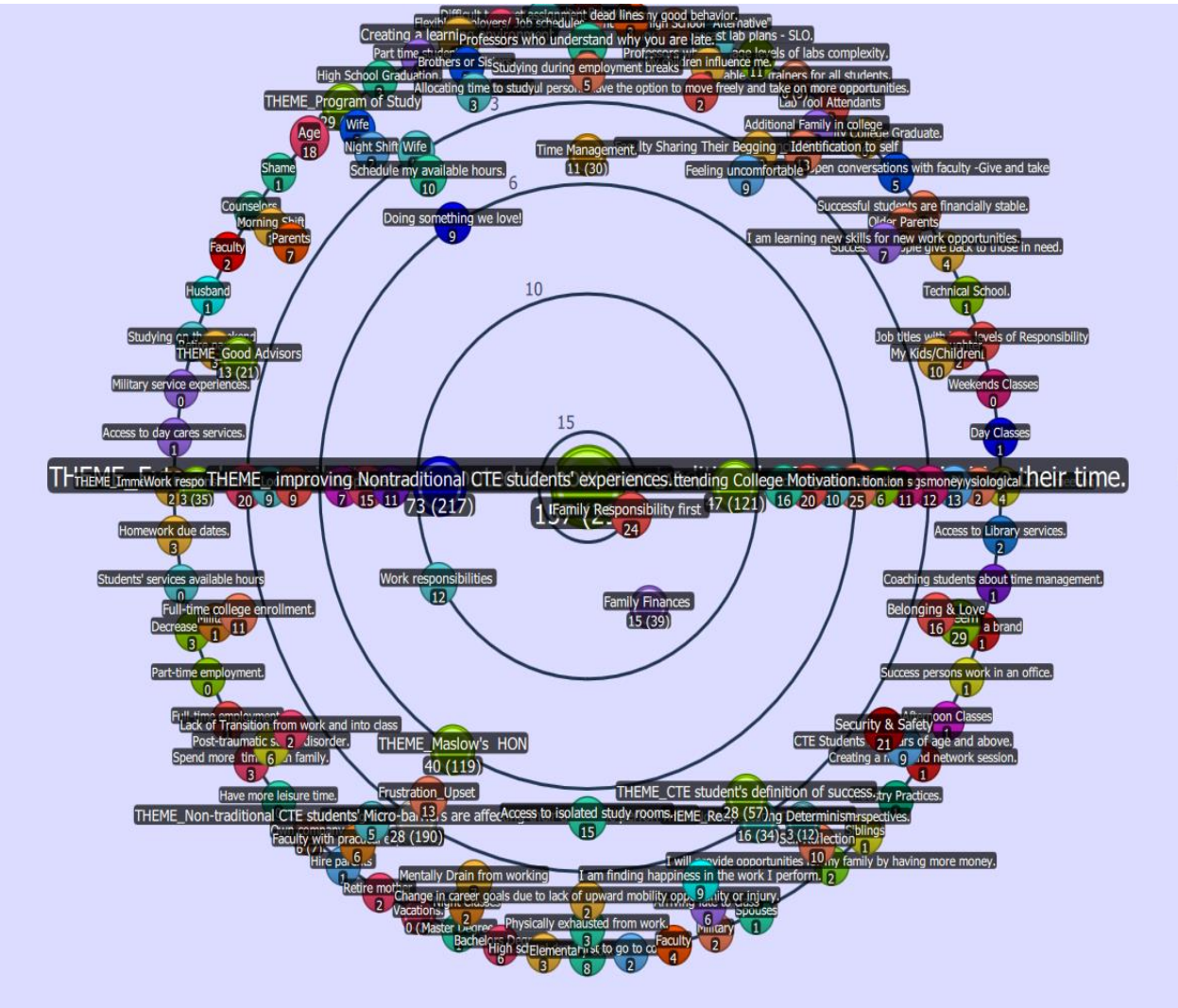
Theme—External Responsibilities Contributed to How Nontraditional CTE Students Prioritized Their Time



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme External Responsibilities Contributed to How Nontraditional CTE Students Prioritized Their Time. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H5.

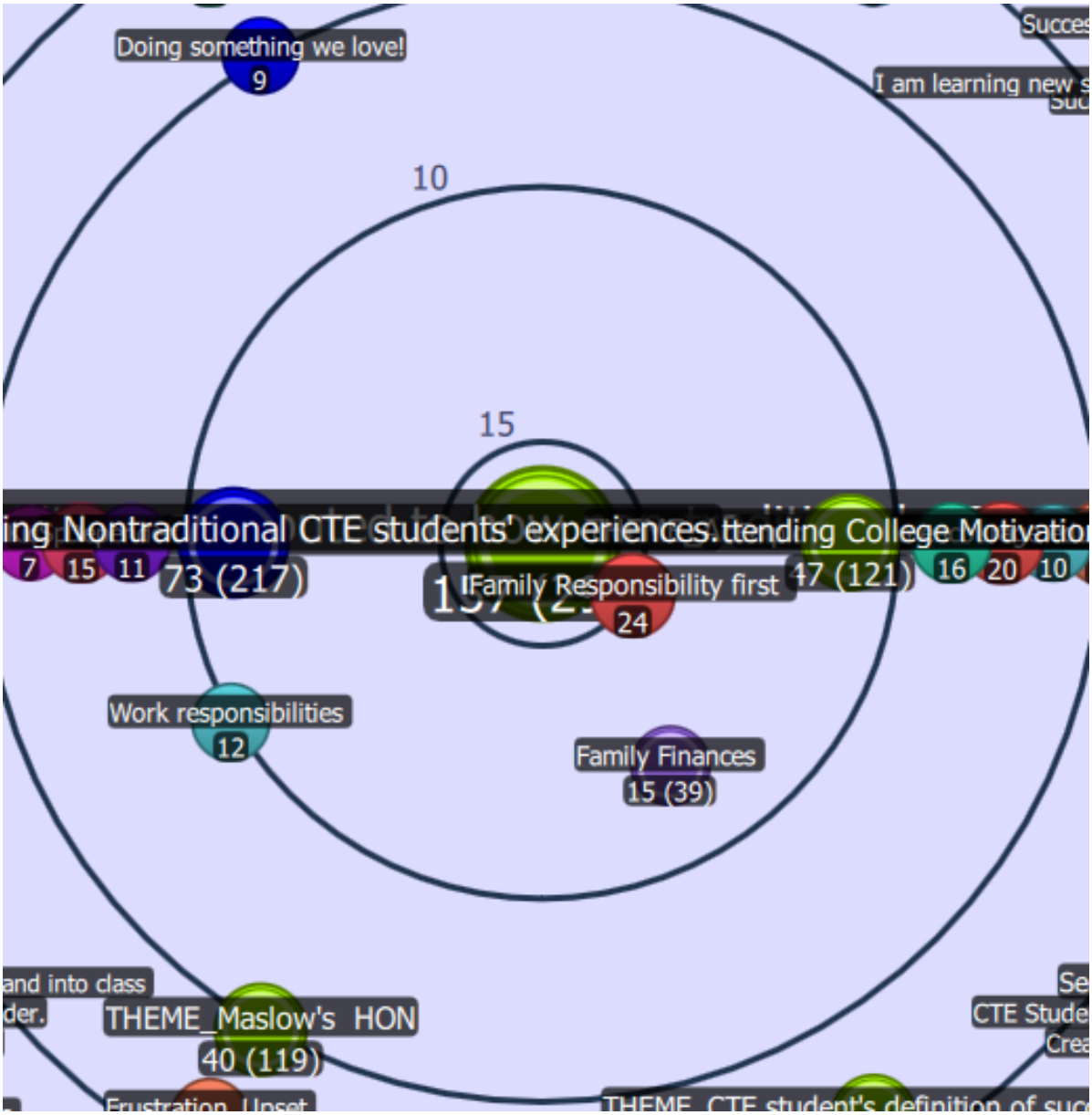
Overlapping Graph of Theme – Contribution to Prioritization of Time



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme Contribution to Prioritization of Time. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H6.

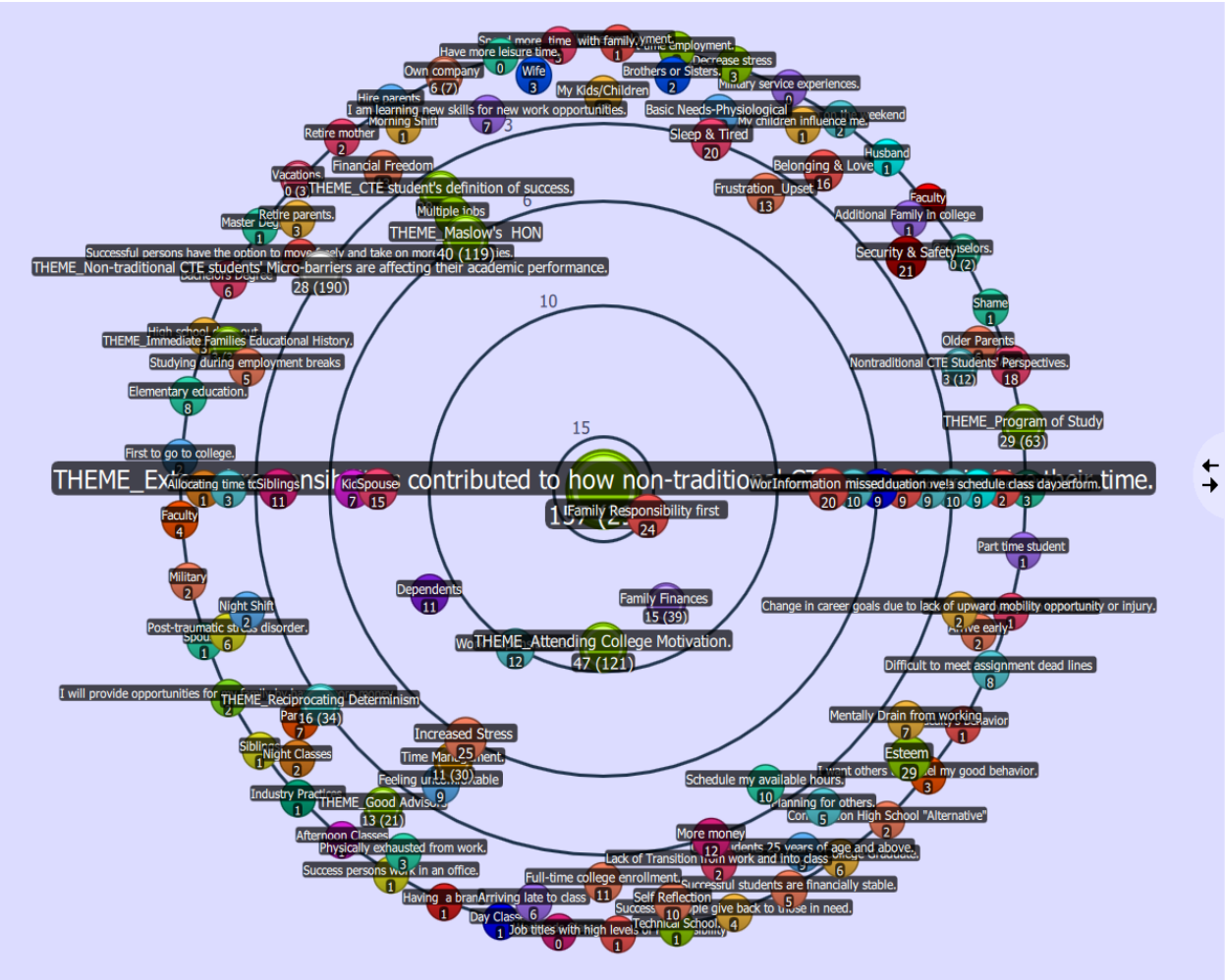
Zoomed in Overlapping Graph of Theme – Contribution to Prioritization of Time



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme Contribution to Prioritization of Time. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H7.

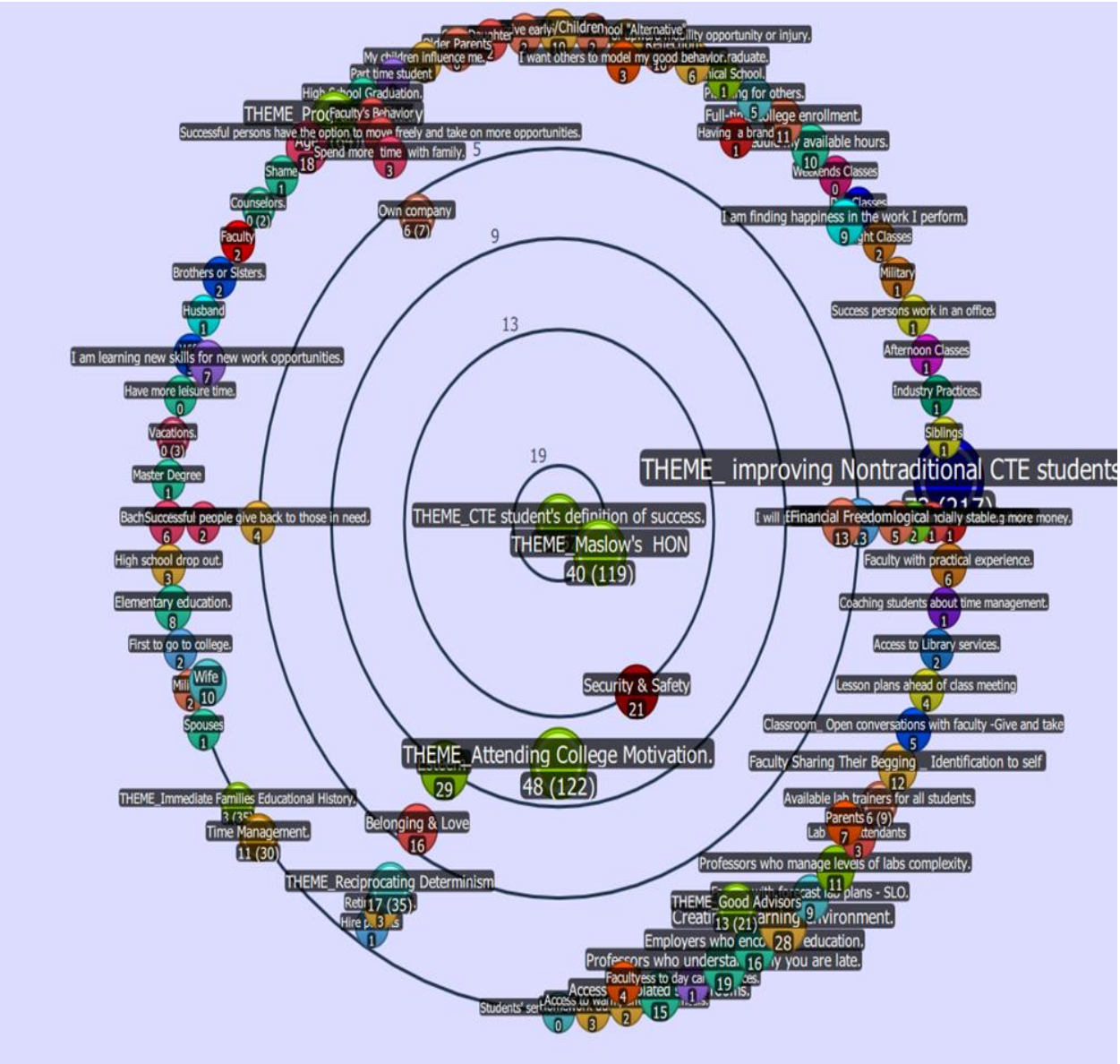
Prioritization of External Responsibilities



Note. Quirkos displays the “codes words” with the theme External Responsibilities. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H8.

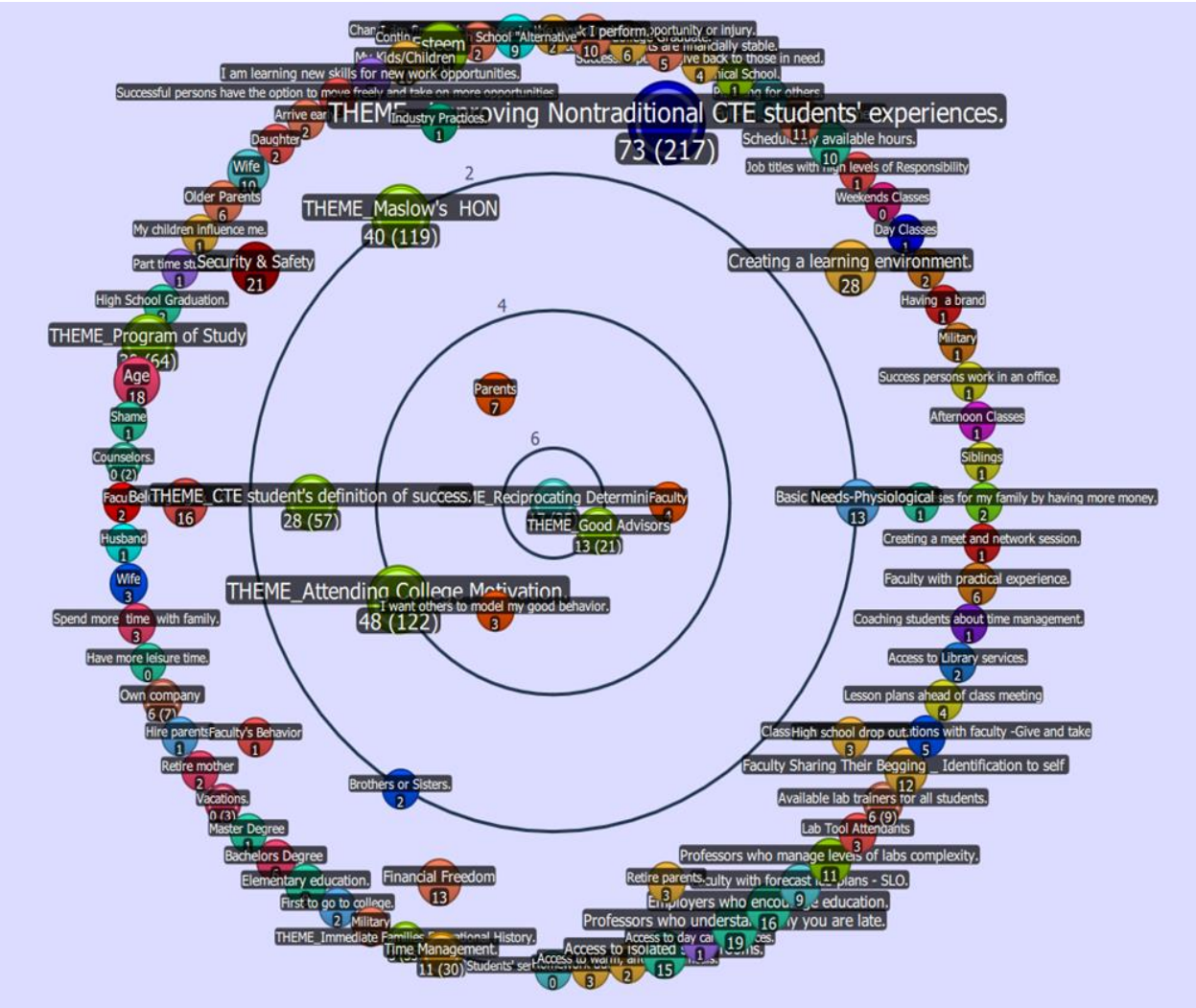
Theme—Students' Definition of Success



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme Definition of Success. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H9.

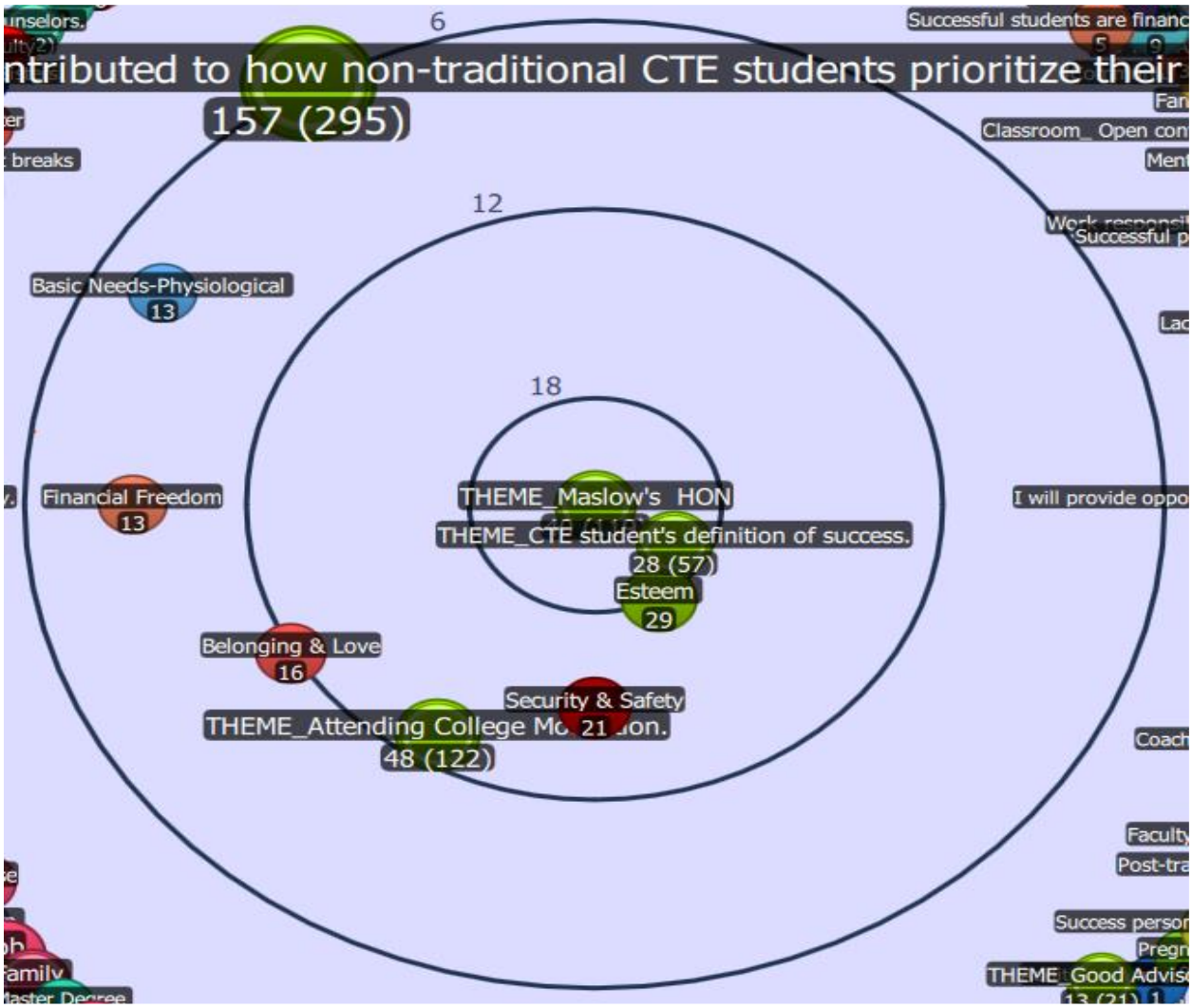
Theme—Theorical Lens of Reciprocating Determinism Theory



Note. Quirkos displays the “codes words” with the theme Reciprocating Determinism Theory. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H10.

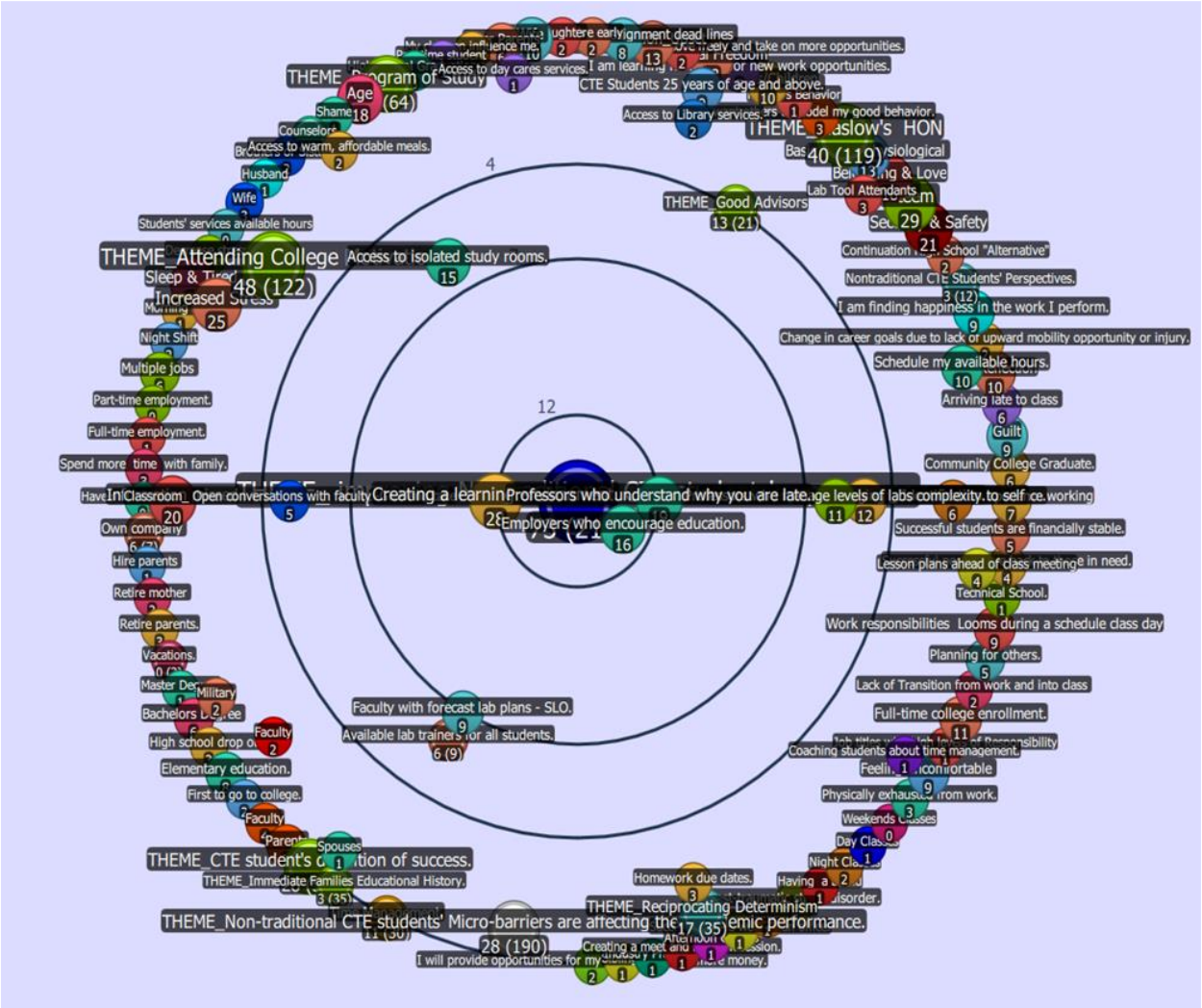
Quirkos Analysis for Theme 7



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme Improving Nontraditional CTE Student Experiences. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H11.

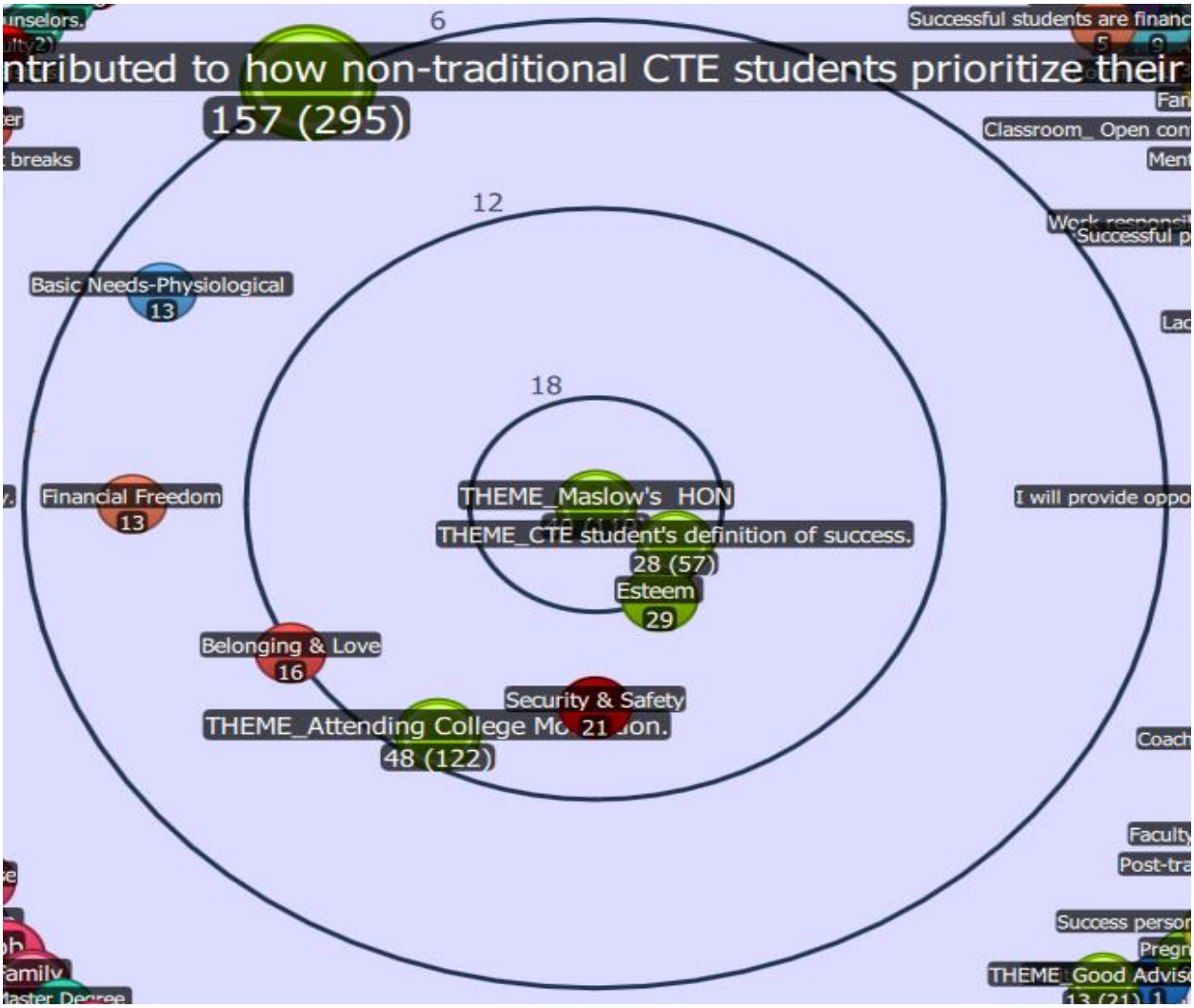
Emerging Theme 8 Quirkos Analysis – Improving Nontraditional CTE Student Experiences



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme Improving Nontraditional CTE Student Experiences. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them near to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H12.

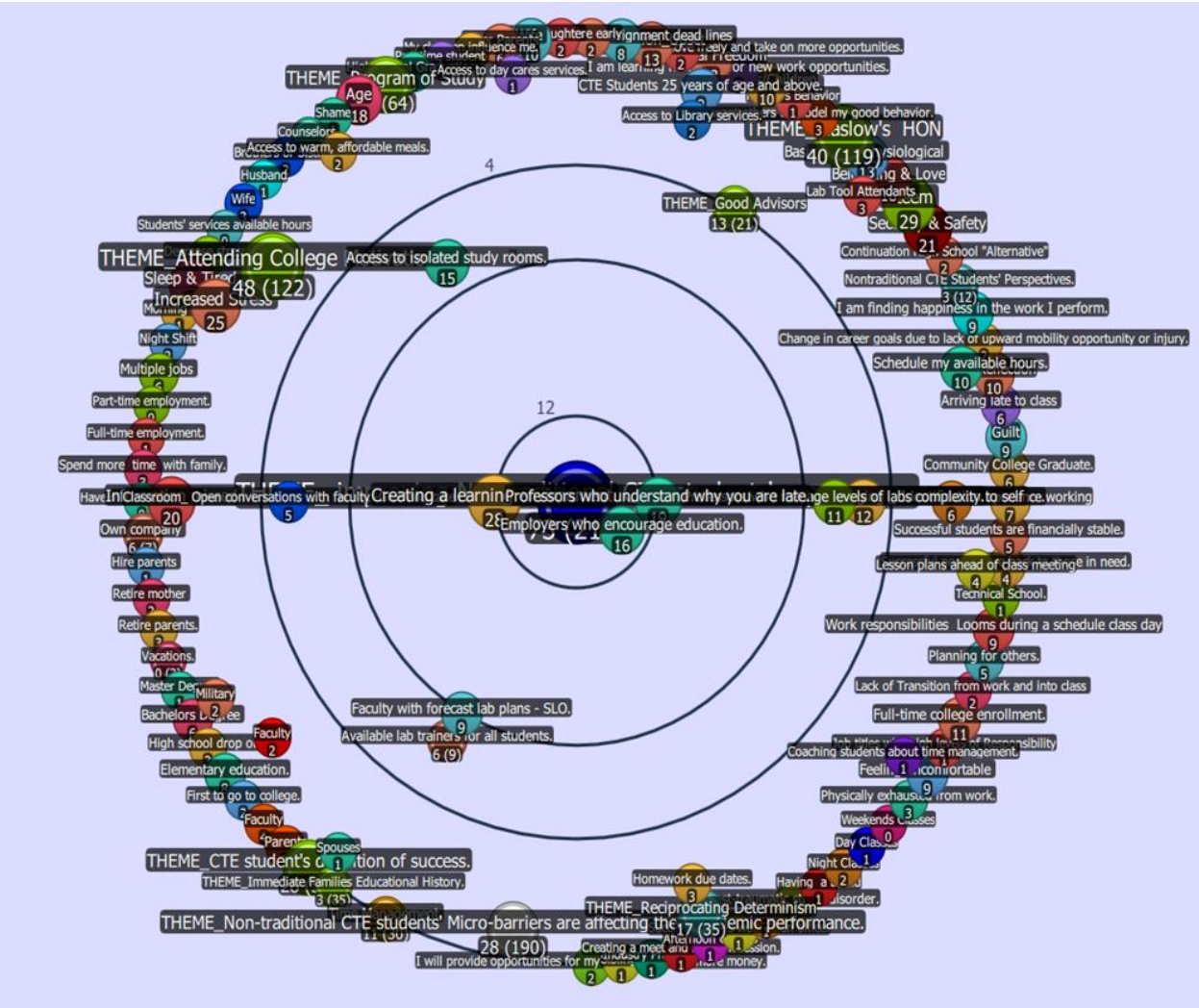
Theme—Theorical lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme Theorical lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe text frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them closer to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.

Figure H13.

Emerging Themes—Improving Nontraditional CTE Student Experiences



Note. Quirkos displays the "codes words" with the theme Improving Nontraditional CTE Student Experiences. The researcher grouped the codes into a central theme. Depending on the transcribe frequency of the codes in conjunction with the central theme, Quirkos analysis software brings them closer to the theme, providing a visual representation of association.