

An examination of academic persistence of student fathers: A case study of a Texas community college

by

Lauren McCormick

B.B.A., University of Texas at Austin, 2009

M.B.A., University of Houston, 2014

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Community College and Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2024

Abstract

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Findings revealed that student fathers face significant challenges in balancing academic and life responsibilities, childcare, financial strain, and mental wellness concerns being prominent issues. While the institution acknowledges these challenges, its support structures are often misaligned with the actual needs of student fathers. Despite this, student fathers reported positive relationships with faculty, though they remain hesitant to use institutional resources. The study concluded a disconnect exists between student fathers' perceived and actual needs, highlighting the necessity for tailored outreach, more flexible support services, enhanced childcare provisions, mentorship opportunities, and the appointment of a dedicated student-parent liaison. These findings suggest that institutions must adapt their support systems to better meet the unique needs of student fathers to promote academic persistence.

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Approved by:

Co-Major Professor
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Co-Major Professor
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Dedication

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

One in five undergraduate students are raising children, and student fathers represent approximately 30% of the student-parent undergraduate population (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019). Community colleges' role in serving the student-parent population is significant, as they are the top choice for students pursuing their educational goals. According to an analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, 42% of student parents in the United States attend public 2-year colleges more than any other institutional type, and student parents represent 26% of the total community college student enrollment (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019). Although student parents have achieved higher grade point averages than nonparents, many do not complete their certificate or degree (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019). The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) noted 62% of community college student parents leave college without completing their academic goal within 6 years of enrollment (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021).

Community colleges' missions, visions, and core values often focus on serving and supporting all students as they strive to attain their educational and personal goals. Many community colleges seek to support student-parents' academic persistence by addressing the specific challenges they face and providing targeted resources to help them succeed in their academic journey. However, data focusing specifically on student fathers at community colleges are limited.

Statement of the Problem

Student fathers are less likely to enroll in college and graduate on time. A 2021 report by the IWPR found that of a cohort of students from 2012–2017, student fathers represented 61% of student parents without a degree within 6 years of enrollment (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021). According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020), the

male community college student population has declined by 14.7% from 2018 to 2020, with fewer men graduating from high schools, entering community colleges, and ultimately completing their degrees, leaving institutions grappling with motivating and supporting this student segment.

Background of the Problem

Boggs and McPhail (2016) noted “community colleges enroll large numbers of low-income, adult, and minority students” (p. 138), thus providing an “open door” to education for many student populations. Student parents comprise over one quarter of the community college population and represent an important segment in higher education as they bring unique perspectives to the classrooms and college community (Reichlen Cruse et al., 2019).

Although a focus on student-parent educational success is increasing, national data on this population have remained limited. For example, the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System does not collect information on parental status (Gault et al., 2020), and most institutions do not have a means of identifying student parents or their individual needs. In addition, although the Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a valuable resource for colleges to receive data on student parents, the question on the form does not include noncustodial parents, who are parents whose children do not live with them for a majority of the time (Cornell Law School, 2020). Information is only available for those who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, which, at some institutions, is a small percentage of their total student population (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020).

Community colleges have historically served diverse student populations with various basic needs that must be met to contribute to a successful educational journey. Financial challenges, childcare needs, and other emotional influences may affect a student-parent’s ability

to achieve his or her educational goals (Hess et al., 2014). As community colleges strive to reduce barriers for student parents, connecting them to resources for basic needs is increasingly important. Basic needs support, a national priority of the Association of Community College Trustees, and the American Association of Community Colleges, includes food insecurity, housing insecurity, financial instability, mental health needs, and childcare (Association of Community College Trustees, 2021; The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021).

Like many community college students, student parents often enroll part-time while working, thus further complicating work–school balance (Miller et al., 2011). Over half of all student parents report raising children under the age of 6, thus highlighting the vast need for childcare support for both student mothers and fathers (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019). Student-parents’ financial obligations are significant as they often incur childcare expenses and provide basic needs for their children in addition to incurring their own tuition and other educational costs. According to Palacios et al. (2021), student parents spend nearly \$6,000 more annually on non-tuition-related costs such as food, clothing, personal care, housing, utilities, and transportation than students who do not have children. Student-parents’ needs are often complex. Many community colleges seek to understand how specialized student-parent programs, additional financial aid options, and other support can enhance their college experience.

As previously noted, community college student parents are among those who experience basic needs insecurity. The COVID-19 global pandemic, a deadly public health emergency of a severe acute respiratory disease that began in 2019, triggering social and economic global disruption, has further deepened these needs as “parenting students played dual roles as caretaker and student” (The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021, p. 4).

IWPR found balancing day-to-day responsibilities with work, school, and family needs often presents a challenge for student parents, thus presenting “time poverty” (see Definitions section) as a factor in students’ rationale for stopping out of classes (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021). Decisions to step away from college include rigid work schedules, transportation needs, and working extensive hours to provide for their family’s basic needs (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021). In addition, stress factors related to these challenges can often increase mental health issues for student parents.

The economic stability and social mobility of student parents are noted to be challenging as they make efforts to complete their educational goal for long-term benefits despite their low-income economic status while taking courses (Gault et al., 2014). A college certificate or degree can enhance career opportunities or workplace advancement, thus increasing student-parent income, improving their economic well-being, and contributing to the local community. For example, a 2014 survey of female community college students in Mississippi revealed student parents are more motivated to pursue higher education to improve their children’s lives (Hess et al., 2014).

Student parents include parents who are married or living together, single mothers, and single fathers. Zhan and Pandey (2004) included data from a 1993 Panel Study of Income Dynamics for a report that noted single parents are “more likely than two-parent families to live in poverty” (p. 661). Policies should be used to promote educational opportunities to “reduce poverty and enhance self-sufficiency among single parents,” (Zhan & Pandey, 2004, p. 662).

Student fathers, a subset of student parents, include men who are married or living together or single parents. Student fathers may also include teen fathers or adult learners, each with its challenges. Teen fathers have been shown to have lower high school graduation rates

when compared to their nonparent peers. However, programs to support balancing fatherhood while finishing school are limited. Sipsma et al. (2010) found teen fathers are often associated with low socioeconomic status.

Data from IWPR show that 61% of student fathers overall drop out of college, and student mothers have a dropout rate of 48%. This rate increases to 70% for single, Black, and Latino fathers (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021). Whether married, single, teen, or adult, student fathers face many of the same challenges as their female counterparts. Although the needs and experiences of student mothers have been well documented, little research exists for student fathers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the academic persistence of student fathers at one Texas community college.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How did a Texas community college describe their efforts to support academic persistence of student fathers?

RQ2: What factors did student fathers perceive influence academic persistence at a Texas community college?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

A theoretical framework is a lens through which a study is organized to better understand, synthesize, and interpret phenomena in a field of study (C. Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The selected theoretical framework for this study is Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Maslow's theory states that a set of needs drives human behavior and motivation. Five levels of

needs are depicted by Maslow: physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow's hierarchy of needs will be used to guide this study of student-fathers' experiences.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) noted a "conceptual framework makes the case for why a study is significant and relevant" (p. 34) and justifies how the study design answers the research questions. The conceptual framework for this study was Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. Bean and Metzner's model examines how social and academic integration affects nontraditional students at a 4-year institution. Bean and Metzner (1985) suggested external factors, such as family or other commitments, impact students more than individual, internal attributes. The model examines factors such as academic performance, background, demographic and environmental variables, and intent to leave. This model of student attrition, adapted from Tinto's (1975) model of student persistence, provides a framework to investigate student-fathers' academic journeys, as many student parents are also adult learners. The literature review further develops the connection between the model's variables and student-father academic persistence.

Methodology

The initial research design was a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study to better understand the lived experiences of student fathers in academic persistence at Texas community colleges through interviews with student fathers. However, upon receiving Institutional Review Board approval, the researcher reached out to several Texas community colleges, with the intent of selecting three colleges from which to recruit but was unable to connect with any self-identified student fathers. Thus, the researcher shifted the design of the study to a case study, while maintaining a focus on student fathers. A case study approach is

used to explore and critique a phenomenon in its context through multiple data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2018) noted that case studies are used to explore the “why” and “how” of a phenomenon (p. 13). This research was a single-case case study which sought to understand the fundamental basis of academic persistence of student fathers from multiple perspectives.

Interviews with faculty, staff, and student fathers were used to collect data and include open-ended questions to guide the discussion, allowing the researcher to ask clarifying questions and adapt the conversation (Tenny et al., 2022). Interview questions and protocol were piloted with student fathers and an institutional employee at the researcher’s home institution. Additionally, the researcher performed a document analysis on various documents that pertained to the study.

Alignment Table

A table has been developed that depicts the alignment of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology, literature review, research question, and interview questions for this study. The table is in Appendix A, Alignment Table. This table serves as a tool to ensure consistency across all elements of the study and illustrating how each component is interconnected to address the research questions effectively.

Delimitations and Assumptions

Delimitations of the study are the factors and boundaries the researcher sets for their study. For this study, the delimitations which constrain the study included site selection and participant criteria, as the study was conducted at one Texas community college. Study participants were current student fathers, representing a small portion of the larger student and student-parent populations, and select faculty and staff at the college. The timing of the study was also a delimitation as interview data were collected during a specific time frame and at one

single point in time of the student father's academic journey. An assumption for this study was that participants' responses were truthful and transparent regarding their personal experiences.

Significance of the Study

The study was designed to expand research on student fathers' academic persistence, specifically at a community college. Additionally, a better understanding of student-father needs can inform college leaders and policymakers to make decisions as they strive to increase success for this population through support services, policies, and other procedures. By highlighting the challenges and experiences faced by student fathers, this research can contribute to more targeted initiatives that promote their academic success and persistence.

Definitions of Terms

Academic success is inclusive of academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post-college performance (York et al., 2015).

Adult learners are students who are 25 years old and older (Education Advisory Board, 2019).

Nontraditional students for this study are defined as students in postsecondary institutions who fall under one or more of the following categories: over the age of 24 years, live off-campus, are financially independent, have a full-time work schedule while enrolled as a student, have dependents other than a spouse, lack of standard high school diploma, or are first-generation students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

Persistence is the term-to-term continuing effort extended toward an educational goal (e.g., degree, workforce training, or certification; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

Student fathers are male-identified “parents or guardians to any biological, adopted, step or foster children” living in their household (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020, p. 6) or a male-identified, non-custodial parent.

Time poverty is the “lack of available time that student parents can spend studying and completing course work” (Whitford, 2018, para. 2).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduced and provided an overview of the study by stating the problem and the background of the problem, followed by the overarching purpose of the study based on the problem and gaps in the literature. Next, the research questions and theoretical and conceptual frameworks were identified. In alignment with the purpose and research questions, the proposed methodology was identified as a case study. The delimitations and assumptions of the study were then addressed, as well as definition of key terms for the study. Finally, the significance of the study was also discussed pertaining to its contribution to the field.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study, its background, and significance. Chapter 2 builds upon the background by reviewing the literature that provides context and informs the study. The literature review concentrates on the needs identified in Maslow’s theory of motivation and academic motivation for nontraditional students. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data collected and offer key findings from the study. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a comparison of participant findings and how the findings related to the literature, study implications, and recommendations for additional research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to understand the academic persistence of student fathers at a Texas community college. A review of the literature provides context for the study. Literature analysis led to the literature review being organized into seven main themes: (a) student-parent types and characteristics, (b) Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs for student parents, (c) academic persistence, (d) Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition, (e) student-parent motivational factors, (f) benefits of student-parent success, (g) resource-seeking behavior, and (h) institutional, state, and federal policies. The chapter organization flows in a manner in which variables in Maslow's framework are discussed in relation to student parents. A brief review of academic persistence serves as a foundation for a thorough review of literature relating to Bean and Metzner's model of nontraditional student attrition. A review of student-parent motivational factors, success benefits, resource-seeking behavior and student-parent support policies concludes the literature review. Searches through Kansas State University's library databases (e.g., ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), JSTOR) revealed various sources related to the study. Documents include dissertations, peer-reviewed journal articles, and reports.

Student-Parent Types and Characteristics

Student parents can be characterized and segmented in many ways, including single parents, teen parents, and student fathers. Each segment has its own unique set of characteristics and challenges that shape their needs and motivation. A review of studies concentrating on each student-parent subpopulation highlights many of these attributes and reveals a gap in the research on student fathers.

Single Parents

Student parents include parents who are married or living together, single mothers, and single fathers. The number of single parents in community colleges continues to rise, with women representing nearly 80% of them (Lovell & Scott, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019). In 2014, 2.1 million single student parents were enrolled in community colleges, representing approximately 30% of enrolled students (Kruvelis et al., 2017). Single parents also tend to delay college entry, with 85% not pursuing a postsecondary education directly following high school graduation and having a higher chance of needing developmental courses (Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010). In examining single or unmarried parents' socioeconomic status, Zhan and Pandey (2004) used data from a 1993 Panel Study of Income Dynamics for a report that noted single parents are "more likely than two-parent families to live in poverty" (p. 661) and to "reduce poverty and enhance self-sufficiency among single parents," (p. 662) policies should be used to promote educational opportunities. The referenced literature on single parents is typically focused on the role of single mothers or does not provide specific experiences of single fathers.

Teen Parents

The number of students who begin their journey as a parent while in high school has declined since 1991 (Osterman et al., 2021). In fact, according to the National Center for Medical Statistics, teen birth rates in the United States declined by 4% from 2019 to 2020. However, they are still an important segment of the student-parent population because their educational outcomes and job achievement continue to perform below their non-teen-parent peers. SmithBattle (2007) interviewed 19 pregnant teens and their families in a longitudinal study that "explored teen mothers' transition to mothering from a hermeneutic perspective" (p. 352), which showed teen mothers with low high school graduation and college enrollment rates,

leading to low employment rates and overall quality of life. However, SmithBattle's study was viewed through the lens of the teen mother and her family and did not consider school records or the perspective of school administrators and faculty, which may vary.

Student Fathers

In 2015, male parents comprised nearly 30% of the total student-parent population at higher education institutions across the nation (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019). The National Fatherhood Initiative (2018) is an organization established to provide research on the role of fathers and resources to increase father involvement. The research the National Fatherhood Initiative includes in their resources an analysis of data from a sample of 835 juvenile male inmates from the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research, which examined certain illegal behaviors in young men and its link to their father's presence in their lives (Allen & Lo, 2012). The study's findings showed that children raised with their biological father at home are less likely to have issues with behavior, drugs and alcohol, involvement in crime, and dropping out of school.

Historically, the role of fatherhood has been defined predominantly around being a good provider when fathers support families financially (Bernard, 1981). However, the definition of a good provider has shifted with time. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2023), the percentage of women in the workforce over 16 has grown from 32.7% in 1948 to 56.8% in 2022, thus changing the family responsibilities in the household. Fathers are now expected to contribute to the family by offering emotional support, providing childcare, and assisting with household chores (Bernard, 1981). A qualitative study of Hispanic and African American student fathers revealed that role responsibilities as a father were important and "being there for their child takes precedence over other commitments" (Roy et al., 2023, p. 469). The student-father's

custody status of his child or children could also impact a student's educational journey. Student fathers with sole custody may encounter more obstacles balancing childcare responsibilities, leading to reduced class attendance and study time (Marsiglio et al., 2005). Other custody arrangements could also affect an academic routine because of additional childcare challenges, thus potentially prolonging the time it takes the student father to complete their degree.

Building upon differences between male and female student parents, Lovell (2014) noted women are different from men in terms of the "balance between personal lives and academics" (p. 189). Additionally, women's perspectives of other choices "outside of the classroom, styles of learning, and pedagogical standards" (p. 189) are also different where women are more kinesthetic and tactual, and men benefitted from learning with more structure. Brouse et al. (2010) found that women had higher motivation levels when compared to men.

Theoretical Framework: Maslow's Theory of Motivation

Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation is the theoretical framework that will guide the development of interview questions for the study. The theory is based on the premise that human motivation is impacted by a hierarchy of needs that must be met to reach the highest goal of self-actualization. An additional element of the theory is that a person can only recognize or achieve the next level need in the hierarchy once the currently recognized need is significantly or completely satisfied, a concept called prepotency. When applied to higher education, the concept of Maslow's theory is that a student's achievement of self-actualization (a certificate or degree) impacts whether their other needs are met. A closer look at each level of the hierarchy provides insight into how each factor can impact students' educational journeys.

Physiological Needs of Student-Parents

The lowest level of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy includes physiological or survival needs, such as breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, and sleep. Survival needs must be met before the individual can satisfy higher needs in the hierarchy. Food and housing insecurities are two of the most relevant physiological needs impacting student parents. A review of the literature has shown the effect these needs have on student success and persistence.

Food Insecurity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022) defined food insecurity as the limited availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food or the ability to acquire acceptable food in a socially acceptable manner. A 2019 Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice survey examined over 23,000 student parents from over 200 2- and 4-year colleges. The results showed nearly 53% of respondents reported food insecurity, and 68% faced housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020). Food insecurity's effects on a student's academic performance are significant. Silva et al. (2017) surveyed 390 students who faced some degree of food insecurity at an urban university. Data revealed students who are highly food insecure were 15 times more likely to have failed a class than those who did not face this concern. Although Silva et al. (2017) looked at all student segments, Sallee et al. (2023) focused solely on student parents by interviewing seven self-reporting student parents, seven campus agents, and three student leaders at a large research university in Northeastern United States regarding their experiences of student parents facing food insecurity through the lens of Schein's (2004) theory of organizational culture. A 2016 National Association of Student Personnel Administration survey found that 55% of public 2-year institutions in the United States included food pantries in their emergency aid services (Kruger et al., 2016).

Housing Insecurity

Housing insecurity includes the inability to pay housing-related rent and utilities, frequent moving, and not having a place to live at all (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017). A 2014 online survey by the Women's Foundation of Mississippi and the Institute for Women's Policy Research of female students at Mississippi community colleges revealed that many respondents experienced difficulties paying for necessities, with 41% struggling to pay housing expenses and other housing-related bills (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017). Few community colleges provide residential spaces for their students, and many universities have policies that exclude student parents from living in on-campus housing (Tanner, 2017). Studies considering successful strategies for supporting single student parents found affordable housing essential to student success (Medina-Rhodes, 2018; Wahl, 2018; Women Employed, 2012). Though community colleges often have limited budgets for student services, institutions may offer assistance or connections to resources through grants, state and federal funding, fundraising activities, or partnerships with local community organizations.

Safety and Security Needs of Student Parents

Safety and security needs are included in the second level of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Maslow's theory includes physical safety, having a healthy family, and financial security as three examples of safety and security needs. These needs apply to college student parents in the context of mental wellness and other needs that inherently make student parents feel a sense of safety for themselves or their families.

Mental Wellness

Mental health has been a concern for all higher education students, particularly considering the COVID-19 global pandemic. The Healthy Minds Network and the American

College Health Association (2020) surveyed a random sample of college students on fourteen 2-year and 4-year college campuses on the impact of COVID-19. The survey received responses from 18,764 students, equating to a 10.3% response, much lower than in previous years, resulting in limited results. However, the responses revealed that 60% of students felt that the pandemic increased the difficulty in accessing mental healthcare.

A study of 15 nontraditional community college student parents from Montana, Wyoming, or Colorado, provided insight into the lived experiences of student parents (Peterson, 2014). The study revealed themes in their responses regarding academic persistence, several of which considered mental wellness issues such as stress factors and general well-being. For example, each student parent in the study discussed stress that occurred daily through family, academic, and employment responsibilities, thus requiring them to find methods of coping with and mitigating stress through positive mindsets and stress relief activities (Peterson, 2014). Although the study included male and female parents, 80% of respondents were women, and all were full-time students, thus presenting a gap in the literature on how student fathers handle stress and mental wellness.

Childcare

Childcare is often essential to the success of student parents. A study of on-campus childcare centers' role in supporting single-mother students found that center directors believe they provide a sense of safety and security for parents knowing that their child is safe and nurtured while they can attend classes, easing stress burden (Richardson, 2022). Additionally, Estes (2011) reported that student parents felt childcare provided children an opportunity to experience different settings and people outside of their homes and increased their social and cognitive development. Miller et al. (2011) and Hess et al. (2000) also noted the flexibility and

affordability of childcare options also impact student success, whether it be through friends, family, or neighbors.

Data analysis from the 2015–2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, the 2012–2017 Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study, the 2004–2019 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, and interviews from campus childcare directors were the basis of a research study by the IWPR. The study revealed that although student parents view the need for childcare as a barrier, a lack of data exists attributing student-parent success to the use of childcare facilities (Cruse et al., 2021). Although interviews from the IWPR study revealed a correlation between the offering of childcare and a student parent enrolling at an institution, Cruse et al. (2021) recommended additional data through a survey could provide a better understanding of how utilizing on-campus childcare facilities is related to student success. In IWPR’s Fact Sheet on Child Care Support for Student Parents in Community Colleges, Miller (2010) noted that one study of student parents at a community college revealed that over 80% of students said that the availability of childcare influences a student’s college choice, and 46% said that campus childcare was their top priority when enrolling at an institution. Additionally, 95% of students reported they could increase the number of credit hours taken due to childcare.

Transportation

The previously mentioned study of Mississippi student mothers noted that “long commute times can pose a barrier to completion for students juggling multiple roles and responsibilities” (Hess et al., 2014, p. 4), with over 20% of students spending more than 1 hour roundtrip traveling to class. However, this study focuses solely on the experiences of one state and only female student parents. Other institutions may have shorter commute times if the college is located in a more urban or residential area. Additionally, online courses, which have

increased due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, offer opportunities for students to take classes at the location of their choice, reducing transportation barriers.

Economic Security

Goldrick-Rab and Sorenson (2010) discussed the effects of economic resources on student parents through a conceptual model, theorizing that social interactions, time use, economic resources, and mental and physical health are affected by attending college. Although a postsecondary education may benefit family relationships because “college-educated parents serve as role models for their children and acquire skills that both improve their parenting and help increase their household income” (p. 186), adverse effects could also include economic and emotional stress. Data from IWPR showed the COVID-19 global pandemic, which began in spring 2020, significantly impacted the economic insecurity and caregiving demands on student parents, resulting in a shift of priority of educational goals (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2020). A quantitative analysis of data from the 1993 Panel Study of Income Dynamics examined a sample of 930 single mothers and 168 single fathers to study the effects of postsecondary education on the economic status of single mothers and fathers (Zhan & Pandey, 2004). Zhan and Pandey found fathers generally are more economically stable than mothers. However, mothers and fathers considered lower income tended to be less educated. Thus, Zhan and Pandey “support promoting educational opportunities as a strategy to alleviate poverty among single parents” (p. 671).

Social Needs of Student Parents

The third level of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs is social needs. Social needs include love, acceptance, and belonging through the establishment of emotional relationships. Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) noted college attendance helps students establish social

networks, which leads to many benefits, including economic returns and friendship formation. However, Glowacki-Dudka (2019) stated the characteristics of nontraditional students make it more difficult for students to be integrated on campus due to them not living there.

Family Relationships

Student parents often struggle to balance work, school, and family relationships while they seek to obtain postsecondary education to enhance their family relationships (Dotterer et al., 2020). Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) presented a conceptual framework indicating four primary pathways by which postsecondary education may impact family formation and stability: (a) social interactions, (b) time use, (c) economic resources, and (d) mental and physical health. In contrast, Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) cited that single mothers' social interactions with higher-educated women could also damage relationships with noncollege-educated family and friends by increasing tension over college attendance. The study also noted that in some cases, if a student incurs significant debt to attend college, stress levels regarding finances may increase, thus negatively affecting family stability.

Social Networks

Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen's (2010) model noted "attending college helps students form social networks" (p. 187), which may have a variety of benefits, such as economic returns. These friends influence their decisions about parenting and educational expectations for their children. Social networks also increase the opportunity for developing romantic relationships, which research finds primarily applies to elite 4-year universities (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). However, Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) identified several reasons for lower completion rates of parenting students such as delayed start to college or reentering college after having a child, class attendance patterns, enrollment status increasing the time it takes to complete a

degree, and financial constraints. The impact of social networks on academic persistence will be discussed further with Bean and Metzner's model.

Esteem Needs of Student Parents

Esteem needs can be classified into two categories: (a) personal esteem needs such as dignity and achievement, and (b) the desire for respect from others (Maslow, 1943). Esteem needs can also be defined as seeking value or acceptance from others. Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering indicated student success may be impacted by a student feeling as though they matter or belong.

Student-Parent Self-Identities

As student parents work through balancing being a student and a parent, a conflict of self-identity arises, being defined as the "good student-parent" (Estes, 2011, p. 203). A student father's response from a study held at a 4-year university described his identity as a parent was rooted in the fact that "his child is his first priority and a responsibility that should be carried by both the mother and the father" (Estes, 2011, p. 207). He described the many aspects of child rearing, such as time and energy commitment, emotional effects, and financial support. Additionally, a qualitative study of Hispanic and African American student fathers at various academic levels showed that fathers feel "uncertainty in their decision making as parents" (Roy et al., 2023, p. 468). Both studies included participants who were not the primary caregivers, further emphasizing the need to clarify how student fathers are categorized and documented.

Student parents value the identity of both the student and the parent and do not want either discredited (Estes, 2011). Researching student parents at a university, Estes (2011) found student parents draw from what society defines as a student to describe their identity as a student parent, but they also value their identity as a parent and integrate what they believe it means to

be a good or bad parent. Although the sample size from this study was small and limited to only students at 4-year institutions, the results yielded a personal look at how students defined their identity as both a student and a parent. Responses identified how student parents interpret the cultural ideals of both identities to develop their own set of expectations and values.

Accomplishment and Self-Worth

As previously noted, Estes (2011) found obtaining a postsecondary degree gives student parents a sense of accomplishment by being a good parent or student. Wahl (2018) performed a narrative inquiry of 15 single parents currently enrolled or recently graduated from a college or university in the United States. Thirteen of the participants were women, and only two were men. An analysis of the participants' experiences as student parents revealed motivational factors, such as achieving a life-long goal and personal fulfillment. Wahl's study limits its findings to only single parents, and the participants are majority female parents, thus creating a gap in significant findings from the view of student fathers, whether single or married.

Reid (2013) conducted a quantitative study of 190 Black men from five universities that examined factors influencing their achievement in college, finding that students who reported high self-efficacy and levels of institutional integration earned better grades. Although Reid's study examined factors according to Black men, it did not explicitly look at whether participants were student fathers nor offered the perspective of community college students.

Self-Actualization of Student Parents

A student's success, however measured, sits at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) relates the top level of the pyramid to personal growth or reaching one's full potential. The literature that explicitly discusses self-actualization or self-authorship of community college students or student parents is limited. However, a mixed-methods analysis

focusing on students from 11 various types of colleges who represent a diverse population of students, found that many student goals consisted of “beyond-the-self goals” (Colby et al., 2022, p. 196) and personal growth and fulfillment. The study distinguished responses between four large public, three private universities, two small liberal arts colleges, and two community colleges, showing that community college students were more likely to describe meaning or self-actualization goals and goals of completing their undergraduate degree than those at other institutional types. Although this study included two community colleges and showed differences between this subset of students and other institutions, the sample size was small and did not detail survey respondents further than ethnicity and year of college.

Academic Persistence

Academic persistence is defined by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) as the continuing effort extended toward an educational goal (e.g., degree, workforce training, certification).

Tinto’s (1975) model of dropout behavior highlighted:

The process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process 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 commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (p. 94)

The model also considers individual characteristics associated with students have an impact, either directly or indirectly, on their performance in college. These attributes also include precollege experiences and family backgrounds.

Tinto (1975) also argued the student’s integration into the college, both socially and academically, is what greatly influences their persistence. Further supporting this argument,

Strauss and Volkwein (2004) revealed that classroom experiences, faculty–student connections, and intellectual-growth experiences were predictors of student persistence. The factors considered primarily apply to traditional college students, not those currently working, providing for a family, or adult learners. According to this study, the gender of the student is considered part of the model in that men are more likely to finish college than women. However, this is not the case according to recent data, where men had a 32% graduation rate within 150% of normal completion time at 2-year degree-granting institutions compared to women at 35% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Other characteristics associated with persistence included goal commitment, past educational experiences, and institutional type (Tinto, 1975). Personal commitment to goal attainment has an important influence on student persistence, as noted in various studies on academic persistence (Cope & Hannah, 1975; Munro, 1981; Terenzini et al. 1981). Bers and Smith (1991) discovered that educational goals were the most significant factor distinguishing persisters and nonpersisters among community college students. A study of community college students revealed that a student’s high school grade point average was also shown to be a strong indicator of their academic persistence (Snell et al., 1993). Tinto (2012) noted an institution with a highly supportive and socially engaged campus will have higher persistence rates. However, community colleges are often challenged in influencing student involvement because of external factors such as time commitments (Stahl & Pavel, 1992). Student persistence is influenced by many factors, and as the aforementioned studies have found, nontraditional students, particularly at community colleges, face additional challenges that can hinder their academic progress.

Conceptual Framework: Bean and Metzner's Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition

The median age for student parents is 32 compared to 27 among their independent student counterpart of students without children and 20 among dependent students (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019), thus classifying student parents as predominantly nontraditional students or adult learners. The adult learner student segment represents over 40% of the postsecondary education population (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019). Many adult learners return to continue their education to advance beyond their current job or move into a new industry or career path. Additionally, adult learners may also be characterized as those students who stop out of their educational journey post high school graduation to find a job to support their family, then return to college to receive credentials or a degree to obtain a career that allows them to earn higher, sustainable wages (Education Advisory Board, 2019). Adult learners are typically parents or married and must address their academic responsibilities while supporting their children and managing their household, which has proven difficult (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019).

Due to the identity and characteristics of most student parents, the conceptual framework selected to guide this study is Bean and Metzner's model of nontraditional student attrition. Developed in 1985, this model identifies four main variables that affect students' postsecondary journey: academic, background, environmental, and intent to leave. Each of these factors helps determine longitudinal dropout rates. The model was developed by analyzing data from 40 empirical studies from various types of colleges, students, samples, and analytical methods. Although Bean and Metzner's model and the associated studies have contributed to the research on nontraditional student attrition, the data are over 35 years old. Thus, more recent literature in each defined variable will provide a more current picture of attrition for students who match this unique population. Bean and Metzner's model provides a generalized approach for all

nontraditional students. However, this student segment has various needs, challenges, and experiences that would benefit from being individually examined.

Academic Variables

Bean and Metzner (1985) identified four key academic variables that may impact student persistence. Each variable is addressed, but not all positively correlate with nontraditional student dropout rates. The models used to inform this variation examined academic variables as “indicators of academic integration” (p. 499). Thus, the following variables may indirectly affect persistence through academic performance, psychological outcome variables, and intent to leave.

Study Skills and Study Habits

In their analysis of case studies, Bean and Metzner (1985) determined students with poor study skills and habits are more likely to drop out of college, and some older students felt an absence from a formal educational environment affected their study skills and time management. Preston (1976) also found that nontraditional students spend more time outside the classroom studying, despite being enrolled in fewer classes. Many colleges and universities have implemented college success courses to concentrate on students’ nonacademic challenges, including poor study skills, time management, or organization skills (Zeidenberg et al., 2007).

Academic Advising

According to Bean and Metzner (1985), the academic advising variable “refers to students’ evaluation of the quality of the academic advising they have received” (p. 500). Also noted in the review of literature is that commuter student dropouts noted that improved academic advising services would have increased the chances of them staying enrolled in courses. More recently, Women Employed (2011) presented effective advising as part of the “ideal experience for parenting students” (p. 4). The study provides characteristics of effective advising, such as

being proactive with students, supporting students who were identified in an early alert system notifying faculty who are not doing well in the first half of the term, and being knowledgeable about how certificates and degrees lead to specific careers (Women Employed, 2011). Interviews with community college student parents confirmed the critical role academic advising plays in persistence and educational goal attainment through “sharing knowledge and resources as well as helping students widen their support networks” (Sallee & Cox, 2019, p. 636).

Absenteeism

Absenteeism is “the extent to which students missed class” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 501). The amount of class a student misses directly impacts their ability to achieve their educational goals. When Bean and Metzner developed their model, absenteeism’s relationship to student attrition had little to no supporting research for nontraditional students. However, student parents, despite being good stewards and time managers, may miss class or need flexibility with assignment due dates because of child illnesses or work-related responsibilities (Wood, 2022). Recently, several Texas women testified in support of proposed legislation that defines parenting students’ rights, highlighting the challenges that student parents face academically (McGee, 2023). Some participants noted they had trouble keeping up with courses or accessing class materials when their child was ill, thus putting them behind in class and risking being dropped from courses or failing. Green (2013) also found through a quantitative analysis of the effect of college-family conflict on student-parents’ academic success, that there was a positive association between poorer class attendance and being a student parent.

Degree of Major Certainty

Bean and Metzner (1985) included students’ degree of certainty with their major selection because many empirical studies evaluated to develop the model provided supporting

evidence. Researchers found that “older students were more certain of their academic major than traditional age students” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 501). A more recent survey specific to community college student mothers in Mississippi by Hess et al. (2014) found approximately 87% of respondents had chosen a field of study, and 96% found their interest in the field was significant. However, only half said “they were only somewhat familiar, not very familiar, or not at all familiar with the wages in their field or concentration” (p. 16), leading researchers to believe that students may not fully understand the financial impacts of their career choices. Additionally, Women Employed’s (2011) study indicated the need for student parents to have the opportunity to learn about “economically viable careers and related plans of study, complete career testing, and create a realistic plan for graduation” (p. 4).

Background and Defining Variables

Bean and Metzner (1985) included several defining variables in this stage of the model, such as age, enrollment status, and residence. Additionally, although parents’ education was not included in their model, a more recent literature review on first-generation college students is applicable for student parents. More recent research has shown the impact each of these variables has on student parents, as well as the gap in research specifically for student fathers.

Age, Ethnicity, and Gender

A student’s age, although not a significant factor, is associated with potential family responsibilities, hours of employment, and higher levels of absenteeism, which Bean and Metzner (1985) assumed have a contributing effect on a nontraditional student’s academic journey. Additionally, Bean and Metzner (1985) determined that ethnicity impacted attrition rates due to “poorer education provided for minority students at the secondary level” (p. 498). Nearly a quarter of all women in college are student mothers, and student fathers represent a

11% of men in college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). An analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education 2019–2020 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021) showed that 51% of undergraduate student parents are students of color, compared to 49% of undergraduate student parents being White, which is representative of all students where 52% are students of color and 48% are White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). A closer look at the ethnicity of student fathers shows 17% of Pacific Islander and 19% of Black and American Indian men seeking an undergraduate degree are fathers, compared to 9% of Hispanic and 11% of White undergraduate men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

In the 1985 model, gender was included as an indirect impact on attrition due to the differing roles of men and women with family responsibilities. However, as previously noted, Bernard (1981) found more male parents carry a significant portion of these responsibilities, especially in households where the parents are married or living together. The stress related to balancing academics and family responsibilities impacts mothers and fathers differently. A mixed-methods study of gender differences between student parents found that “fathers had a more difficult time dealing with the high demands of their situation, often resulting in lower grades, less time spent with children, and sometimes strained parent-child relationships” (Dotterer et al., 2020, p. 902).

Enrollment Status

The enrollment status variable refers to the number of course credits in which a student is enrolled per term, with part-time students taking fewer than 12 hours and full-time students enrolled in 12 or more hours. Bean and Metzner’s (1985) analysis of case studies found that commuter college students who are enrolled part-time are more likely to drop out of college than

full-time students. Additionally, Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) noted, “Despite empirical evidence indicating that continuous, full-time enrollment is optimal for degree completion, many community college students find that route impossible to follow” (p. 453). In 2015–2016, an estimated 64% of student parents were enrolled part-time in college classes, and 44% of student parents were working full-time while enrolled in classes (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2019).

Residence

One characteristic of most community colleges is that they are commuter schools; thus, students spend less time on campus. However, Bean and Metzner (1985) found the difference in academic activities between residential and commuter students to be insignificant. In contrast, previously mentioned studies by Peterson (2014) and others (Estes, 2011; Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen, 2010; Lovell, 2014) noted nontraditional students are influenced by their involvement on campus, but involvement is exhibited in other ways, such as through faculty engagement, which is discussed further in relation to Bean and Metzner’s social integration variable.

Educational Goals

According to the previously mentioned Tinto’s (1975) student dropout model, which introduces the ways in which specific variables contribute to a student’s academic persistence, educational goals provide insight into their motivation, which may affect their academic persistence. Alfred (1973) found community college students often enrolled in courses for job advancement or personal enrichment rather than to obtain a degree. Because these students complete their short-term goals quickly, their dropout rates are high, suggesting they be studied separately from degree-seeking students. More recent literature has noted that although

community college graduation rates may be low, community college students typically do not take a full load of courses or intend to complete a degree (Sbrega, 2012).

Parents' Education

Bean and Metzner (1985) noted parental education was positively related to student persistence with traditional students. However, when the model was developed, no study was found that specifically “investigated the effect of parents’ educational level on the persistence of students who had been independent of their primary family for a substantial period” (p. 499). Additionally, this model noted that research from Jaffe and Adams (1970) found a father’s educational level did not have a direct impact on a student’s persistence, but other studies found that a mother’s background was related, or that no significant relationship was found between either parent’s educational level. Terenzini et al. (1995) stated that research shifted to focus on first-generation college students, which shows this student population is typically less academically prepared, based on high school and college grades, and comes from lower socioeconomic statuses. Although research could not be found regarding student-parents’ academic persistence as it relates to their parents, literature discussing first-generation students is relatable as student parents face many of the same challenges.

Environmental Variables

Bean and Metzner (1985) defined environmental variables as those over which the college has little control but may impact a student’s persistence. Many of these variables intersect with Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, such as financial needs. A review of recent literature revealed student parents are significantly affected by each of the environmental variables.

Finances

Bean and Metzner (1985) noted many researchers question the validity of students who say that finances are a reason for them dropping out of college and suggested that perhaps the students need to express what they feel is a more socially acceptable response. However, if students are responding truthfully, student reports of financial difficulties show a relationship to attrition. Researchers also found “many older students expressed concern about their ability to finance a college education” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 503). One significant non-tuition-related expense for nontraditional students could be childcare, which in the United States in 2017 was approximately \$5,589 annually (Kruvelis et al., 2017). Hess et al. (2014) examined female students in Mississippi’s community colleges and found student parents are more likely than those without children to receive Pell grants, but in 2012, Congress lowered the number of semesters students can receive Pell grants from 18 to 12 semesters. As Bradley (2013) noted, many community college students are currently employed and take classes part-time, so they cannot complete their academic goals in 12 semesters, thus putting a more significant financial burden on student parents.

Hours of Employment

Many empirical studies have supported the finding that the number of hours per week a student works while attending college impacts their academic persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Specifically, “employment in excess of 20–25 hours per week was negatively related to persistence” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 503). Specific to community colleges, students on commuter campuses and student parents are more likely to be employed and working a more significant number of hours per week than other student populations (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021). Grubb and Lazerson (2004) developed the term “work-family-schooling

dilemma” (p. 85) to describe the challenges student parents face as they juggle their responsibilities, including occurrences such as changes in work schedules that can upset their academic studies. Sallee and Cox (2019) interviewed community college student parents and administrators at two different institutions, including a married couple who were both enrolled in classes and working, finding that course schedules, childcare offerings, and hours of support services proved to be a challenge.

Outside Encouragement

This variable relates indirectly to Maslow’s (1943) esteem needs and is defined as “the extent of encouragement to remain at a college that a student receives from influential persons in the student’s life who are not employed by the college” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 504). Most significant in the 4-year university setting is parental encouragement, which had not been studied at community colleges when the model was introduced. Research that guided Bean and Metzner’s model noted that “older students considered family reaction to their college attendance to be an important aspect of satisfaction with the college experience” (p. 505). Additionally, employers’ support of a student’s educational journey “provides students with psychological reinforcement for continued college study but may also affect student persistence by more pragmatic means such as adjustments in work hours around exigencies in academic schedules” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 505). However, Bean and Metzner also noted no empirical research addressed the relationship between an employer’s encouragement and student persistence in college when the model was developed. Lastly, Bean and Metzner stated the model’s implication is not that internal support from the college did not exist for students, but rather, nontraditional students were more influenced by external encouragement from family, peers, and employers.

As previously discussed, Peterson's (2014) study of community college student-parent persistence at three Mountain West community colleges noted many students experienced positive and negative attitudes from their own parents "related to the value of attending college and whether they were college material" (p. 378). However, most student parents responded that their parents gave them emotional support and encouragement and assisted with some childcare.

Family Responsibilities

Family responsibilities are one of the top reasons for students to leave their educational journey without finishing a degree. Bean and Metzner (1985) included family responsibilities as a variable in their model with significant research that indicates the effects that being a student parent has on the withdrawal rates of students from commuter colleges or community colleges due to more significant stress from family obligations. Lovell (2014) noted, "Negotiations of student-parents' roles between academic and family responsibilities have significant potential for conflicts" (p. 190). Family counseling for conflict resolution has benefitted single student parents at community colleges as they navigate the stress of academics and family (Ray et al., 2000). As previously discussed, Grubb and Lazerson's (2004) "work-family-schooling dilemma" (p. 85) exhibits the issues student parents face when balancing taking care of their children, studying for class, and providing financial support for the families.

Social Integration Variables

Bean and Metzner (1985) defined social integration as "the extent and quality of students' interaction with the social system of the college environment" (p. 507). Tinto's (1975) student persistence model, a theoretical model that draws upon a synthesis of research to offer variables affecting students' dropout behavior, showed students with continuous, quality interactions in their academic journey have a greater tendency to continue pursuing their

educational goals. Social integration typically includes extracurricular activities, on-campus friendships, instructor relationships, and the student's perception of the quality of these relationships. However, community college students and older students have less social integration (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019). Although Bean and Metzner (1985) found empirical evidence "indicating that students' degree of social integration at residence-oriented 4-year institutions is positively related to persistence" (p. 520) at the time the model was developed, these variables were not considered in attrition studies with nonresidential students at 2-year colleges. Their model did not include social integration as a primary factor for nontraditional students. However, as noted previously, student parents have reported on the positive effects of a social network on campus, though they may differ from traditional students' experiences. For example, Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that nontraditional commuter students could increase their on-campus engagement through classroom interactions with faculty and fellow students, collaboration with other students, active learning, and respect for varied talents and learning methods. Nontraditional students can connect with multiple people across campus to adjust to college and become more integrated during their academic experience. Moreover, Wyatt (2011) conducted interviews and focus groups at a large, 4-year university in Tennessee, and found adult learners valued relating coursework to life experiences and that faculty who embraced this concept when teaching were seen as better educators for the nontraditional student.

Student-Parent Motivational Factors

Intrinsic motivation is based upon satisfaction of the activity, rather than receiving a specific outcome. Extrinsic motivation can either be built on receiving a reward or avoiding

punishment. Student parents have reported an array of motivational factors contributing to their persistence on their academic journeys.

Intrinsic Motivation

Students often seek to complete their credentials or degree, obtain a self-sufficient wage, and support their families. For example, an online survey of 544 Mississippi community college female students administered by IWPR showed the top reasons they went to college included supporting themselves and their families and personal enrichment (Hess et al., 2014). These students also noted that personal growth by increasing their knowledge of global concerns and mental fulfillment from a college education was their source of motivation. Hess et al. (2014) focused on community colleges in one state, and the study notes that the “findings should not be taken as strictly representative of this broader population” as the sample differs in age and ethnicity from the state’s female community college student population (Hess et al., 2014, p. 42).

In a study of student parents in a university setting, Estes (2011) found student parents valued the future financial benefits of the education they were obtaining with hopes of providing a better future for their family. This motivating factor was consistent across much of the relevant literature. As previously mentioned, Wahl (2018) interviewed 15 single parents, the majority being female parents, and found most participants reported intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for going back to school. The intrinsic reasons included personal fulfillment and career preferences, where students discussed seeking a career that provided more personal satisfaction or was more in alignment with their interests. The extrinsic motivation was similar to Estes (2011), where study participants were pursuing an education for “a better job or for a higher income due to better employment” (Wahl, 2018, p. 76).

Extrinsic Motivation

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted children whose parents have obtained a postsecondary education are more likely to enroll in college. Motivation to help others, such as increasing children's chance of attending college or providing them with a better future, does not have a specific place on Maslow's (1943) original hierarchy of needs; however, outside support is a variable included in Bean and Metzner's (1985) model. Attar Flores (2013) interviewed 12 California community college student parents, and nine of the participants described their encouragement and support during their academic journey coming in various forms from "spouses, family members, friends, or therapists" (p. 69). Additionally, extrinsic reasons cited by single-parent participants were categorized as better job attainment through a new position or for higher income and their children (Wahl, 2018).

McClusky's Theory of Margin

As with Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation, McClusky's (1970) theory of margin also examines different aspects of human motivation. McClusky proposes a formula which determines an individual's margin in life, with margin measuring the difference between power and load of an individual. Power is defined as a combination of physical, social, mental, and economic abilities or skills that may contribute to effective performance in life. Load refers to tasks involved in life's requirements such as obligations with family and work, in addition to self-defined expectations. In contrast, Maslow's theory of motivation is a pyramid-shaped model that categorizes human needs that must be satisfied in each level to reach self-fulfillment at the highest level. McClusky's theory emphasizes the importance of balance and managing stress, while Maslow's theory approaches human motivation from a progression of needs to reach self-

fulfillment. This study identified the factors and needs which may attribute to a student father's academic persistence through the lens of institutional employees and student fathers.

Comparing Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition and McClusky's (1970) theory of margin, both frameworks delve into the factors influencing student persistence in higher education but through different lenses. McClusky's theory of margin focuses on the balance of a student's commitments and available resources, while Bean and Metzner's model emphasizes factors such as academic integration and institutional support and how these elements impact the likelihood of a nontraditional student dropping out. Bean and Metzner's model is tailored to nontraditional students, while McClusky's theory of margin is broader in its focus of adult education.

Benefits of Student-Parent Success

The literature revealed benefits for a student parent reaching their educational goals, such as obtaining a certificate or degree. These benefits may be for the student parent themselves or for the institution or community. A review of the literature in each of these areas showed the impact of student-parent persistence on goal achievement.

Earning Potential

Earning potential varies significantly by an employee's highest level of educational attainment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) reported that, on average, those with an associate's degree earn 19% more, and those with a bachelor's degree earn 65% more annually than those with a high school degree. The opportunity for increased socioeconomic status is a significant intrinsic motivator for student parents (Estes, 2011). Wilson and Cox (2011) found student mothers with a degree are more likely to increase their socioeconomic status and rise above poverty. However, St. Rose and Hill (2013) also noted pay outcomes are important for

student mothers to consider when selecting an academic program to ensure the return on investment of education.

Social Benefits

The benefits of student parents achieving their educational goals extend beyond monetary benefits. A loss in diversity for the college exists if low-income single parents are not bringing their unique perspectives to the classroom (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). Another benefit of supporting student parents is they contribute to a qualified workforce for the community. Student parents who do not complete a college certificate or degree may have trouble providing for their family, thus increasing the need for public assistance (Polakow et al., 2004). Lastly, Hout (2012) noted college graduates are more inclined to increase civic involvement, including voter registration and turnout.

Resource-Seeking Behavior

Resource-seeking behavior among college students is pivotal to their academic success and well-being (Tinto, 1993). As noted in previously discussed literature, students encounter a variety of barriers throughout their educational journey which may require external support, such as academic advising, mental health services, financial aid, childcare assistance, and basic needs support. Factors influencing their help-seeking behavior may include awareness of services, the stigma associated with asking for help, and the accessibility of these resources (Savoie-Roskos et al., 2023). Additionally, self-efficacy is known to affect a student's likelihood of seeking necessary support (Lim et al., 2014). Thus, educational institutions that promote the availability of support services report higher levels of student engagement and retention (Tinto, 1993). Additionally, Sheu and Sedlacek (2004) also found in a study of help-seeking behavior of first-

year students at a large university that male college students were less receptive to professional help than women because men were more likely to conceal vulnerability of needing support.

Institutional, State, and Federal Policy Support

Many states and federal programs have developed policies to encourage student-parent success, in addition to support from institutional programs and nonprofit organizations. For example, City Colleges of Chicago recently piloted a new academic coaching program in partnership with a nonprofit organization called New Moms. One student benefitting from the program noted the program has kept her goal-oriented while providing financial support and making graduation attainable (Carrasco, 2022). At an institutional level, Matus-Grossman and Gooden's (2002) study of single mothers at community colleges found on-campus support (e.g., mental health counseling) affected the students' academic persistence and program completion in an expected time frame. Additionally, Ascend at the Aspen Institute (n.d.) has developed the 2Gen (two-generation) approach which encourages overall family well-being by encouraging the development of programs and resources that benefit the entire family unit, such as a college connecting student parents with childcare programs. On the other hand, some institutional policies negatively impacted student-parent academic performance because participation is required in mandatory activities outside of regular class times (e.g., new student orientation). Additionally, some campuses have a no children on campus policy (Beeler, 2016; Flaherty, 2021)

Federal policies designed to provide public support to become employed (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) are not student friendly because they require participants to work at least 20 hours per week, which can be a challenge and stressor for student parents (Richardson & Harrington, 2022). Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) noted several

policies that may discourage student fathers from pursuing their educational goals. One example is how the federal government counts parents in higher education to assess the need for services, which may show an unbalanced undercount of student fathers. Fathers who do not pay child support or have a child with a woman under 18 have “little incentive to claim financial responsibility for their children and thus be recorded as fathers” (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010, p. 191). Some student fathers may also be negatively impacted by the federal policies that restrict the use of financial aid for those with drug convictions and in prison (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010).

Some state legislators have introduced legislation to support parenting students through various means. In Texas, during the 88th legislative session, Texas House Bill 1361 was passed requiring institutions to establish a staff member as a student-parent liaison to help connect students to appropriate resources and track how many student parents are enrolled in classes and monitor their academic progress (McGee, 2023). Additionally, Texas House Bill 1361 allows pregnant and parenting students to take leaves of absence and excuse missed classes due to pregnancy or childbirth and requires institutions to develop nondiscrimination policies for these student segments (McGee, 2023). Other states, such as Washington and Georgia amended state childcare assistance policies to allow student parents to obtain accessible, affordable childcare as they pursue their postsecondary education. Washington, California, Oregon, Illinois, and Georgia are examples of states that are requiring institutions to collect system-wide data on student parents to increase understanding of this student segment, their support needs, and educational outcomes (Sick et al., 2023; White & Reichlin Cruse, 2021). Although progress is being made to support student parents, research on the effects of these policies, in particular for student fathers, is limited.

Summary

The literature review presented relevant research on student parents. They are a significant and diverse population mainly served through community colleges but encounter many barriers when pursuing their educational goals. However, most of the current research is specific to student mothers, 4-year university students, and only single parents, thus highlighting a gap in the body of knowledge for both community colleges and student fathers. The researcher used Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation and Bean and Metzner's (1985) model for nontraditional student attrition to address filling these gaps and expanding the body of research for student fathers.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Chapter 3 reviews the purpose of the study, research question, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks being used to guide the study. Next, the research design and rationale are identified, followed by the study setting, study participants, and instrumentation. Finally, the data collection, data analysis, alignment table, limitations, ethical considerations, and study quality are discussed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to better understand the academic persistence of student fathers at a Texas community college.

Research Question

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How did a Texas community college describe their efforts to support academic persistence of student fathers?

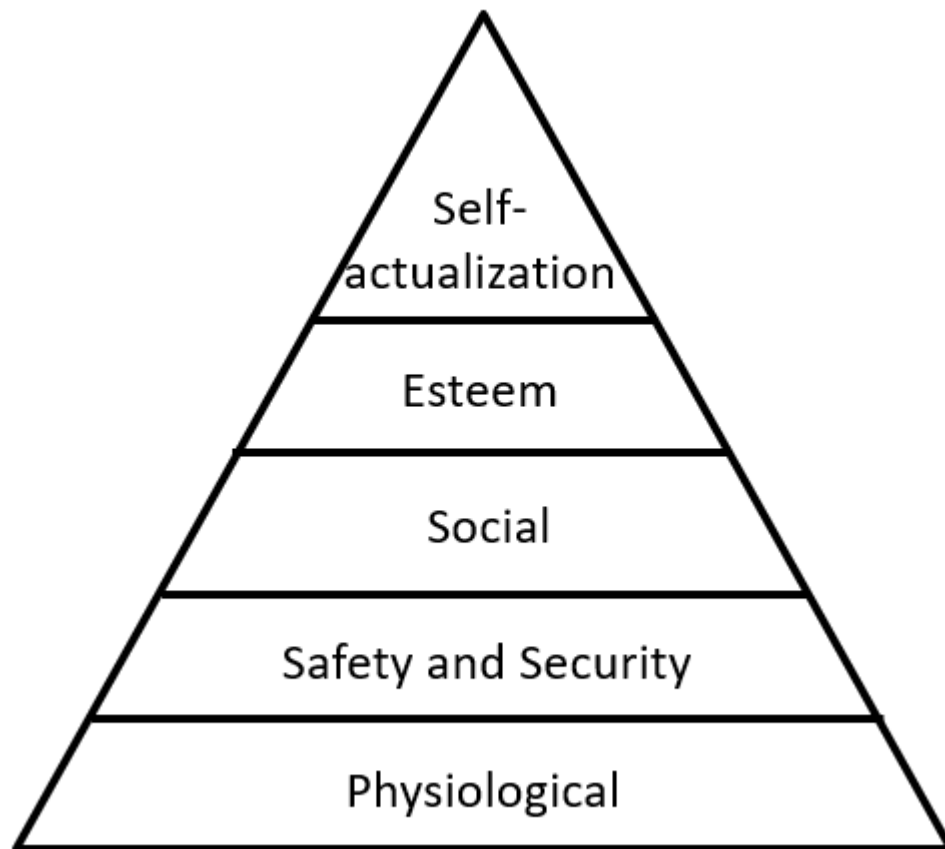
RQ2: What factors did student fathers perceive influence academic persistence at a Texas community college?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation was the selected theoretical framework for the study. Maslow's theory of motivation, which will be referenced throughout the study, includes a hierarchy of needs, which indicates that humans are motivated to fulfill basic needs, then more advanced needs, ultimately reaching self-actualization. Krems et al. (2017) presented the implication that self-actualization, as identified by Maslow (1943), although different for individuals, may be motivated by increasing one's status, thus relating to one's academic persistence and achievements. Maslow's theory of motivation provides a lens to explore the

interplay between student fathers' academic goals, work and family obligations, and pursuit of personal fulfillment.

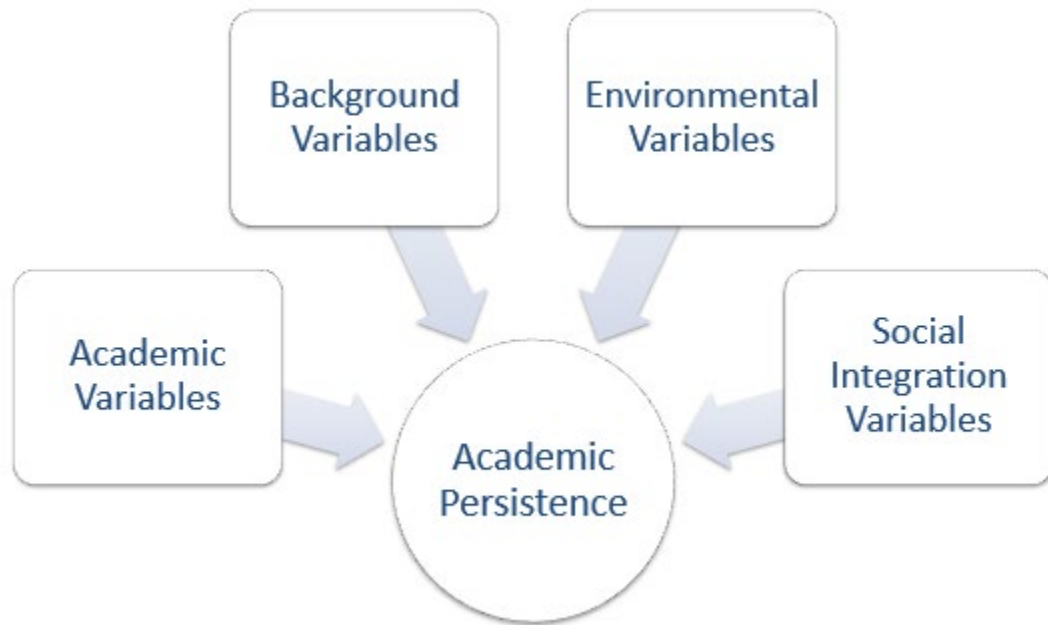
Figure 3.1. Maslow's (1943) Theory of Motivation Hierarchy of Needs



The conceptual framework for the study was Bean and Metzner's (1985) model for nontraditional student attrition. The model is adapted from Tinto's (1975) theory of student persistence, focusing on specific variables affecting the nontraditional student population at 4-year institutions. For this study, Bean and Metzner's model provided a basis for investigating how the institution responds to the needs of student fathers throughout their academic journeys, as many student parents are adult learners navigating the complexities of achieving their

educational goals while fulfilling their parental roles as well. Additionally, the model provides a structure to examine how the related variables interact and may inform their decision-making processes, academic engagement, and persistence throughout their academic journey.

Figure 3.2. Bean and Metzner's (1985) Model for Nontraditional Student Attrition



Both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks were considered in the development of interview questions, document analysis, and coding of collected data. For example, faculty and staff participants were asked how they identified student fathers, what services or practices were offered at the institution, and how their specific role supported student-father success. To explore Research Question 2, student-father participants were asked what makes them feel secure, how social interactions affect their academic journey, and how they use on-campus services to meet their needs.

Research Design

The initial research design was a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study to better understand the lived experiences of student fathers in academic persistence at Texas community colleges through interviews with student fathers. However, after receiving Institutional Review Board approval and reaching out to institutions, the researcher was unable to connect with any self-identified student fathers. Thus, the researcher shifted the study's design to a single-case case study while maintaining a focus on student fathers. A case study approach was used to explore and critique a phenomenon in its context through multiple data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008), including interviews with student fathers and other institutional employees. This research used a case study at one college to seek to understand the fundamental basis of the academic persistence of student fathers from multiple perspectives.

Study Setting

For this study, purposeful sampling was used for the selection of the study setting. Purposeful sampling is used to select “individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 157). The study was conducted at one Texas community college. A Texas institution, specifically the institution where the researcher works, was chosen because of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling aims to collect data from participants who are convenient for the researcher to access and may be based on time, location, and availability of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Initially, the researcher proposed to conduct the study at three Texas community colleges. However, due to low response rates, upon approval, the researcher shifted to the study setting to one college.

Study Participants

The researcher's original intent was to recruit 18–25 student-father participants across three Texas community colleges with childcare facilities; however, after recruitment emails were sent, the researcher was unable to recruit any participants. Thus, a shift to a single-case case study approach was approved to provide an in-depth look at student-father academic persistence from multiple lenses at one Texas community college. The researcher selected 10 faculty and staff and six student fathers from the identified institution, 18 years or older, to participate in the study. Faculty and staff participants were recruited through email based upon their skill set and role at the institution.

The researcher consulted institutional and childcare center leaders to help identify eligible student-father participants. The childcare center provided a low number of possible participants, thus a request for additional participants was made through various student support departments and faculty. Snowball sampling was also used, as student fathers were asked to provide contact information for additional participants who met the criteria. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), snowball sampling begins with “one or a few relevant and information-rich interviewees and then ask them for additional relevant contacts” (p. 134). A combination of outreach to individuals identified by the institution and snowball sampling helped to ensure a more comprehensive pool of eligible student-father participants for the study.

Instrumentation

The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were the data collection method because they allowed participants to share their perspectives, feelings, attitudes, and values (Saldaña, 2011). The researcher performed the interviews and analyzed the results. Interview questions were based upon relevant elements of

Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation and Bean and Metzner's (1985) model for nontraditional student attrition (see Appendix B, Electronic Participant Intake Form and Appendix C, Interview Protocol and Questions). Interviews with faculty and staff were used to inform the questions for the student-father participants. Initially, focus groups were proposed to be used to collect data from student fathers. However, participant scheduling constraints presented challenges, leading the research, upon approval, to perform one-on-one interviews. The participant intake form was used to build the profile of the student father by asking for background and demographic information. As described in the alignment table (see Appendix A), background and defining variables are factors in academic persistence in Bean and Metzner's (1985) model for nontraditional student attrition. The semistructured interview questions for faculty and staff focused on the services, policies and processes the institutional employees described as impactful to student-fathers' academic journeys. Student-father interview questions were created to develop an understanding of their perceptions of their academic journey. The researcher also conducted a document analysis of the institution's website, the institution's *Vision 2025* strategic plan, and the institution's *Trellis Student Financial Wellness Survey Semester Reports for Fall 2023*. The researcher selected these documents to analyze to understand the institution's priorities, future goals, and student experiences at the institution as they relate to student fathers and their academic persistence.

Data Collection

Before proceeding with any part of the study, the researcher received approval from the Kansas State University and participating institution's Institutional Review Boards (see Appendix D, Kansas State University IRB Approval and Modification Approval and Appendix E, Participating Institution IRB Approval). Additionally, an amendment to the IRB application

was made with the change of the research design. Upon receipt of both IRB approvals, communication to both the president and childcare center director of the participating institution was sent in Spring 2024. An introductory letter was sent first to the institution's president (see Appendix F, Introductory Email to President) asking for participation in the study.

Before communicating with potential participants, the researcher piloted the research questions for faculty and staff with a nonparticipating member of the executive leadership team. Additionally, initial communication and interview questions were piloted with student fathers outside of the researcher's current institution of employment, strengthening the instrumentation. Ravitch and Carl (2021) noted piloting a study helps refine the research instrument and determine if there may be issues with the proposed interview protocol, questions, and data analysis.

After gaining approval from the president, faculty and staff participants identified by their role at the institution were sent an introductory email (see Appendix G, Introductory Email/Informed Consent to Faculty and Staff Participants) explaining the study, requesting their participation, and obtaining informed consent. In-person interviews were scheduled at their convenience soon after consent was received for each participant.

To recruit student-father participants, a letter was first sent to the institution's childcare center director (see Appendix H, Introductory Email to Childcare Center Director and Director of Student Life) requesting assistance from the center director in identifying possible study participants. The childcare center provided a low number of possible participants; thus, a request for additional participants was made through student services, faculty, and staff. Electronic announcements with a recruitment flyer were distributed seeking interview participation from eligible participants (see Appendix I, Student-father Recruitment Flyer). To encourage interview

participation, participants were offered a \$25 gift card to Amazon. Once potential participants were identified, the researcher sent an introductory email (see Appendix J, Introductory Email/Informed Consent of Student-father Participants) and participant intake form (see Appendix B) to potential participants explaining the nature of the study and asking for their participation. In the initial communication, the researcher ensured appreciation for the participants' time and efforts providing insights for college leadership and policymakers on student-fathers' experiences in their educational endeavors. As suggested by Saldaña (2011), when scheduling interviews, the researcher offered flexibility on time and day of the interview, so the participant did not feel rushed or fatigued.

The researcher followed a specific protocol for conducting interviews. Interview questions for both institutional employees and student fathers (see Appendix C, Interview Protocol and Questions) focused on understanding the institutional efforts to support student-father academic persistence and developing the student-fathers' experience as it relates to academic persistence. Each interview was no longer than approximately 45 minutes in a semistructured format. Interviews were recorded via Otter ai, an online meeting transcription software. Once transcribed, the researcher performed member checking by asking the participant to review the transcript and interview responses for accuracy. Following member checking, the researcher contacted study participants if clarification was needed.

The document analysis included a review of the institution's website, the institution's Vision 2025 strategic plan, and the institution's Trellis *Student Financial Wellness Survey Semester Reports for Fall 2023*, all of which were either provided by the institution's Department for Planning, Institutional Effectiveness & Research at the researcher's request or

are publicly accessible. Additionally, the researcher referenced newspaper articles for recent institutional information.

Data Analysis

The researcher performed an inductive thematic analysis to ensure rigor, validity, consistency, and replicability (K. Roberts et al., 2019). To analyze the data, the researcher followed the procedural steps for thematic data analysis outlined by Durdella (2019). Creswell (2014) described the validity of a qualitative study as trustworthiness or the “accuracy of the findings” (p. 200). Coding in qualitative research provides meaning to data through patterning and classifying data for further analysis (Saldaña, 2011). Inductive coding provides that the themes are developed specifically from the data, rather than from prior research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Thus, an inductive, descriptive analysis provides that the coding themes are developed from the spoken words in the interviews and summarizes the topic.

After all interviews were complete, they were transcribed and sent to participants for review for accuracy of transcription. After transcription, the interviews were coded using descriptive coding. Descriptive coding uses nouns to summarize the topics within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first step of the coding process was to add labels to words, phrases, or specific sections of the interviews, including information the participant found important or connects to the literature review. Codes were then extracted and clustered into categories based on the researcher’s interpretation. Themes began to emerge, and previous transcripts were revisited to look for instances of the themes that may have been missed. This iterative process was repeated several times to ensure all themes were captured. The researcher used Delve Tool, a qualitative data analysis software, to organize the data.

Alignment Table

An alignment table (see Appendix A) was developed to describe how Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation as a theoretical framework and Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of student attrition as a conceptual framework informed the study. The table also aligned the literature review with the methodology for the study and research question. Additionally, the alignment table related the interview questions in Appendices B and C to literature findings.

Limitations

Limitations of the study included the study being dependent upon the self-disclosure of the participants. This limited the data to what participants chose to share. Although the researcher set geographical boundaries and limited the number of participating institutions as noted as delimitations in Chapter 1, the response size was also limited. Participants were voluntary, thus not including the entire population of institutional employees and student fathers. Additionally, snowball sampling was also used to identify participants, resulting in participants sharing similar descriptive characteristics. However, the study's findings are hoped to be transferable to other states and institutions due to similar challenges and characteristics of student fathers across the nation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in this study included protecting the participants and maintaining confidentiality. Before collecting data, the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board at Kansas State University and the participating institution. Institutional review boards protect research participants by identifying "possible issues in proposed and ongoing research that help further focused thinking about how to safeguard against anything that could be harmful to participants" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 196). The researcher ensured each participant

signed an informed consent form (see Appendix G, Introductory Email/Informed Consent of Participants) and confirmed at the beginning of each interview that the participant understood their participation in the interview was voluntary. To protect confidentiality, participants were identified by assigned numbers. All data collected has been kept confidential and will be stored on an external hard drive in a locked file cabinet for at least 5 years. Any printed data will also be stored in a secure area. All printed and electronic data will be destroyed after 5 years by shredding printed materials and permanently erasing electronic data.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) recommended, as the study instrument, the researcher include information about themselves to be aware of potential researcher bias and its influence on the research. Accordingly, the researcher included thoughtful self-reflection throughout the research process to increase the validity and authenticity of data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Additionally, the researcher maintained a reflexivity journal and included a reflexivity statement.

Reflexivity Statement

I am a current student-parent, first-generation college student. While attending college to earn my undergraduate and graduate degrees, I worked over 30 hours each week to support myself while completing at least 12 credit hours per semester. Additionally, my late father was a low-socioeconomic student father while attending a trade school to receive a heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning certification. Later in life, he taught these courses at a local community college. My child attends the on-campus childcare center at my institution, where I have made acquaintance with the many student parents whose children also are enrolled at the center, which has contributed to my interest in the focus of this study. I am also an employee at the participating institution.

Study Quality

The researcher used Tracy's (2010) eight "Big-Tent" criteria for qualitative research as a model for best practices to increase trustworthiness:

1. **A worthy topic:** The first criterion Tracy (2010) presented is the topic must be worthy of study by being relevant, timely, and significant. As noted in Chapter 1, student parents represent 26% of community college students, with 62% leaving college without completing a degree or certificate in 6 years (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021). This segment of the student population is increasingly vital as colleges seek insights into how best to support their academic endeavors.
2. **Rich rigor:** The researcher ensured the study's rich rigor by using theoretical and conceptual frameworks to guide an extensive literature review and to conduct comprehensive interviews and data analysis.
3. **Sincerity:** The researcher's commitment to advancing the mission of community colleges and student success leads to their passion for the study. The background of the problem further enhances the researcher's interest in making a meaningful contribution to the field of study.
4. **Credibility:** Credibility was established using member checking, clarifying conversations with participants, thematic analysis, and thick, detailed descriptions of the interview data. Member checking took place during and after interviews by asking participants to review the interview transcriptions and study findings to ensure they were accurate, fair, and representative. Triangulation helped increase the study's credibility by looking at evidence from multiple sources to document a code or a theme (Shenton, 2004). The first triangulation source was interviews with faculty and

- staff. The second source was interviews with student fathers, which provided a perspective from each participant. A document analysis that examined the institution and the resources it provided was the third triangulation source.
5. Resonance: The study was designed with the intent to be transferable to other states and institutions interested in gathering insights about student fathers. Quality interview questions encouraged participants to provide thick, detailed descriptions, promoting transferability within the study context.
 6. Significant contribution: As previously stated, the researcher intended for the study findings to contribute to the literature pertaining to student-fathers' academic persistence and to provide a better understanding of student-father needs to inform community college leaders and policymakers as they make decisions to increase the success of this student segment.
 7. Ethical: The researcher followed the procedural ethics of Kansas State University and the institution's IRB, including informed and voluntary consent, the anonymity of participants, and secure storage of data.
 8. Meaningful coherence: Meaningful coherence was exhibited through alignment of the purpose, research question, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, literature findings, selected research design, interview questions, and data analysis.

Summary of the Chapter

The study's purpose was to understand academic persistence of student fathers at one Texas community college. Chapter 3 described the proposed research design identified to address the study's research question. Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation as the theoretical framework and Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition as a

conceptual framework were selected to inform the study. The chapter also identified the study setting and participants, instrumentation, data collection, and plan for data analysis. The chapter also reviewed the alignment table and discussed study limitations, ethical considerations, and quality.

Chapter 4 - Research Results and Analysis

As noted in previous chapters, this study was designed to examine the academic persistence of student fathers at one Texas community college. Chapter 4 reviews the research questions and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to guide the study. Next, the researcher discusses how the data were collected and analyzed, provides a description of the sample, and discusses the findings as they relate to each research question.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How did a Texas community college describe its efforts to support the academic persistence of student fathers?

RQ2: What factors did student fathers perceive influence academic persistence at a Texas community college?

RQ1 focused on the institution's perspective of the support they provide to this subpopulation of students, and RQ2 is centered on the experiences of the student fathers. A document analysis provided insight into both research questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher used three sources of data for the study: (a) semistructured interviews with faculty and staff, (b) semistructured interviews with student fathers, and (c) a document analysis. The researcher performed qualitative content analysis. Data were analyzed using inductive descriptive coding based on the responses of the participants.

The interviewer conducted 10 interviews with faculty and staff members holding various positions and backgrounds and six student fathers. All interviews were in-person and one-on-one.

The document analysis included a review of the institution's website, *Vision 2025* strategic plan, and *Trellis Student Financial Wellness Survey Semester Reports for Fall 2023*. These documents were provided by the institution's Department for Planning, Institutional Effectiveness, and Research at the researcher's request or were publicly accessible. Additionally, the researcher referenced newspaper articles for recent institutional information. The researcher followed the procedural steps for thematic data analysis outlined in Chapter 3.

Participant Demographics

The case study setting and participants were purposefully selected based on the criteria established by the researcher and provided in Chapter 3. The institution selected as the study site was a medium-sized college in the Texas Gulf Coast region. The college has an average yearly enrollment of approximately 4,000 credit-seeking students.

Institution Employee Participants

The researcher interviewed seven staff members, two faculty members, and one employee who held both a faculty and staff position. Faculty and staff participants were selected based on their role at the college to provide a wide range of skills and interaction levels with student fathers. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned during the transcription and analysis phases. Table 4.1 provides additional participant descriptive characteristics and is organized by: (a) pseudonym, (b) department, (c) years at the institution, (d) gender, and (e) organization level. Table 4.1 shows that the gender of participants were 50% male and 50% female.

Table 4.1. Descriptive Demographics of Institutional Employee Participants

Pseudonym	Department	Years at institution	Gender	Organization level
Employee 1	Counseling and Testing	10 years	Female	Staff
Employee 2	Community Partnerships	16 years	Female	Executive Leadership
Employee 3	Counseling and Testing	45 years	Male	Mid-level Management
Employee 4	Student Life and Faculty	5 years	Female	Staff
Employee 5	Financial Aid and Admissions	5 years	Male	Mid-level Management
Employee 6	Student Life	3 years	Male	Mid-level Management
Employee 7	Community Education	6 years	Female	Mid-level Management
Employee 8	Children's Center	21 years	Female	Mid-level Management
Faculty 1	Faculty – Bachelor's	6 years	Male	Faculty Leader
Faculty 2	Faculty	21 years	Male	Faculty

Student-father Participants

Student-father participants were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was used to increase the number of student-father participants. Participants were required to be current students or Spring 2024 graduates over the age of 18 with biological children or stepchildren. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned during the transcription and analysis phases. All participants were 30–39 years old. Table 4.2 provides additional participant descriptive characteristics and is organized by: (a) pseudonym, (b) ethnicity, (c) educational goal, (d) enrollment status, (e) employment status, and (f) relationship status.

Table 4.2. Descriptive Demographics of Student-Father Participants

Pseudonym	Educational goal	Enrollment status	Employment status	Relationship status
Student 1	Bachelor of Applied Technology	Part-time	Full-time	Married
Student 2	Associate of Applied Science in Office Management	Graduated	Part-time	Married
Student 3	Associate of Applied Science in Commercial and Industrial Electricity	Part-time	Full-time	Single
Student 4	Associate of Applied Science in Heating, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Technology; Associate of Applied Science in Commercial and Industrial Electricity	Graduated	Full-time	Married
Student 5	Bachelor of Applied Technology	Part-time	Full-time	Married
Student 6	Bachelor of Applied Technology	Part-time	Full-time	Married

Research Findings

The research findings are organized by major participant group, which also aligns with the order of the research questions. The findings are subsequently organized by the themes that emerged from the interviews. This structure allows for a clear and logical presentation of the data.

Faculty and Staff Findings

For Research Question 1, two faculty members, seven staff members, and one individual, who is a staff and adjunct faculty member, were interviewed, focusing on how the institution described its efforts to support the academic persistence of student fathers. Several major themes emerged from the interviews with faculty and staff members, including academics and personal life balance, student support, mental health awareness, childcare challenges, financial support, student engagement, and student-father encouragement. These themes are discussed below with representative participant quotes included to exemplify the themes that emerged.

Academics and Personal Life Balance

One of the key themes that emerged from every interview with faculty and staff was Academics and Personal Life Balance. This theme refers to the strategies, challenges, and experiences of managing academic responsibilities alongside personal life, particularly the complexities of school, work, and home life, to achieve a healthy balance. Faculty and staff recognized these challenges and encouraged students to consider this when planning their academic journey. Employee 1 felt that one of the challenges that student fathers may experience included “scheduling conflicts” as they balance “full-time jobs and their course load here, as well as commitments at home.” Regarding the academic advisors’ method of serving student fathers, Employee 1 noted:

In academic advising, we try to provide a holistic advising approach where we ask those intrusive questions and take into account all of the responsibilities and commitments that the student has outside of what they’re doing here at our institution. So, aside from the courses that they’re studying here, what else do they have on their plate? What other commitments do they have?

Several faculty and staff noted the importance of encouraging students to have conversations with their families before embarking on their educational journey to set realistic expectations of how the entire family may be impacted. Notably, Faculty 1 explained the conversation he has with prospective students, stating:

You need to prepare yourself and your family for the change. Prepare them for the fact that you're going to have to balance out the academic course load and probably manage a job as well. There's this enthusiasm to hop into the program initially, but you need to go home and prepare those who support you for the fact that they would have to share you with all the other things you're doing as well.

Similarly, Employee 6 urged student fathers to prioritize quality time with their families over rapid academic advancement despite the impact on institutional data, noting:

Spreadsheets are going to see it as a loss, but it's a win. It's a win in other areas because that work-life-school balance matters. It's not going to do you any help if all of a sudden, you're doubling your pay, but your kid doesn't want to hang out with you because you haven't been there.

Faculty 1 acknowledged, as a faculty member, he encouraged students to maintain a healthy balance of being a student and parent, saying that "if scheduling gets very busy, we may encourage people to stop school or cut back on school." Employee 6 revealed a similar sentiment, stressing that "work-life-school balance matters." These quotes highlight the faculty and staff's understanding of student fathers' challenges as they balance academic responsibilities, work, and family life. The impact of navigating these challenges, along with the use of student support services, will be discussed in the Student Support theme section.

Course Flexibility. A subtheme revealed during conversations with faculty and staff was course flexibility, which included flexibility in class policies and a wide range of course modalities. Faculty and staff acknowledge that traditional course schedules may not always accommodate the needs of student fathers, emphasizing the flexibility offered through online courses, class policies, and support services. Employee 1 noted several course options are available to accommodate student fathers balancing other responsibilities through evening classes, online, and hybrid options.

Employee 3 also discussed various programs and course offerings that would benefit student fathers. One program discussed allows students to earn industry credentials in only a few months. Employee 3 stated:

I think some . . . programs are quick, 9 weeks or 10 weeks and can get someone in and out of here with some basic skills to get a job that minimizes the amount of time that they're here at the college. Some of our offerings, in terms of taking classes online or in person, give them a little bit more flexibility, so they don't have to be on campus every night or every day. They have that flexibility to build their lives around.

Faculty 1 discussed the flexibility offered within the bachelor's program, noting:

Being that our program is primarily online, there is a certain amount of flexibility in how we approach the course. So, we encourage all the students that there are things we allow in the classroom that are offered to all students with regards to access to faculty, using technology to reach out to us, and encouraging them to reach out to us early and often if there are challenges.

Faculty 1 also presented the opportunity to increase awareness of support services for online students, stating:

I think we can make them aware of our services here. They find themselves in a remote space many of them may not feel they need access to these services because they're remote students, but I emphasize it because you're a student, you have access to all of these services where the mental health wellness and all those pieces are part of your support package here at the school.

Employee 4, who is also an adjunct instructor, discussed the importance of not compromising educational standards but also allowing for some flexibility within the course, explaining:

A good instructor or quality instructor won't compromise the educational component. They're still going to be held to that same standard and the same timeline by giving them just a little bit of flexibility because meeting a midnight deadline on a Thursday is not as important as finishing that assignment. Maybe you're going to give him an extension of a few days and understand where they're at, but reaching the end goal with the same quality of instruction is the goal.

Faculty 2 also discussed having a flexible class policy that they have implemented for all students, including not requiring attendance and providing online resources for students who miss class.

Student fathers face the challenge of balancing the responsibilities of being a student, an employee, and a father. The options discussed are not exclusive to student fathers. However, the programs and policies focused on accommodating different student needs and circumstances.

Student Support

The next major theme identified from the interviews with faculty and staff focused on student support. Institutional employees shared support for student fathers as they navigate their academic journey, with words of encouragement such as the Employee 2, stating:

So, when I think about student fathers, I can't help thinking that knowing that you're not in it by yourself and that there are people here who want to help, not necessarily make an example of you and what not to do, but how you are stepping up.

Several staff members shared that the institution had many programs and initiatives that assist students, but none were tailored explicitly to student fathers or parents.

This theme also emphasized the need to provide holistic support and resources to student fathers, ensuring they know the various opportunities available, including childcare services, basic needs, tutoring, and academic advising. This theme is split into three subthemes: (a) understanding student needs, (b) supporting resource-seeking behavior, and (c) leveraging community resources and partners.

Understanding Student Needs. The subtheme of understanding student needs provided insights into the importance of providing support and resources tailored to the unique needs of the student-father population. One of the challenges Employee 2 explained is the rarity of student fathers self-identifying and discussing the challenges they face, especially about single fathers, stating:

I think that first and foremost, you can look across the country, and the number of men that are in college has just declined significantly, and we've seen those numbers here in our enrollment. I think that there's less of a cohort, there's less of a group of folks who can experience and share the challenges of being a dad. I don't think that it's common for people to fly the flag of being a single parent. I think being a single mom is much more common. Being a single mom who has custody of kids is much more common. I think that being a single dad who's responsible for tiny people who are in childcare, who's trying to balance going to school, going to work, and take care of kids, it's an anomaly.

Employee 7 made a similar note regarding the challenges of identifying student fathers: It's very different than some of our student mothers. [Student fathers] don't always self-identify. The only reason why I know we have some is because they create a profile, and one of the characteristics they have to identify is if they're a single parent. and then they can break it down their ages as well. Roughly around 20% of single parents are males. I don't see all of them because they don't come as frequently as single mothers.

Another aspect briefly mentioned by Employee 8 was split families, emphasizing a shift in needs for these families who are dealing with additional challenges.

An additional observation from both faculty and staff included that often they were not able to identify if they were working with a student father. Employee 1 noted they asked probing questions that revealed a student's parental status or, as Employee 6 explained, it was presented when they engaged in discussion about the staff member's own family. As noted, in some instances, the student's role as a father became apparent through casual interactions unrelated to their academic studies.

Supporting Resource-Seeking Behavior. Faculty and staff shared their stance on their critical role in communicating available support resources and empowering students to access the resources that can contribute to their academic and personal success. Employee 7 shared that student support information is included in the program's orientation. Additionally, when asked how staff approaches accommodating the specific needs of student fathers, they noted:

Just breaking the stigma because it's almost like they're ashamed to identify that they're a single father. They don't know how or where to start to ask for resources. Making them feel welcome and easing that transition into communicating what their needs are.

Similarly, Employee 4 highlighted the difference between males and females regarding help-seeking behavior, stating:

There's a huge stigma in help-seeking behaviors in males. It's statistically proven, and we need to be sensitive to that and encourage and normalize that process for the males just as much as we do for the females. As a female, I was raised in that ideology that's just a normal process. That's part of our nature, too. If we don't know it, we're going to find out the answer, but we need to empower males so that they don't have to carry the brunt of everything and that there is some value in seeking help and learning. All these different resources that you have for mental health, whatever the genre you're talking about, we have to normalize that behavior for males as much as we have for females.

Additionally, the employee reported that 19% of food pantry users were male, showing a positive data point on males seeking assistance. Other faculty and staff noted that information was included in their syllabi and promoted during holistic advising sessions. In addition, the marketing department assists with flyers, social media posts, and website marketing for student support resources.

Leveraging Community Resources and Partnerships. The Community Resources and Partnerships subtheme speaks to the institution's work to support the student-father population. Several of the institution's employees noted the importance of collaboration between community colleges and local organizations to support students experiencing financial instability or challenges balancing family responsibilities. These partnerships provide resources such as food and financial assistance.

Employee 7 shared that the partnership with United Way has connected students with various resources, including assisting a student with obtaining a laptop, enabling them to

continue their education. Employee 6 also discussed plans to help students register for the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Lastly, Employee 2 stressed the necessity of faculty and staff knowing the available resources and how to connect students. Employee 4, whose role on campus is to help make those connections, highlighted the significance of referrals to community services to establish the connection so students are equipped to leverage those relationships should they need them in the future. Employee 3 reiterated these thoughts, stating:

I think the college as a whole is always looking for partnerships out in the community. Whether it's with United Way, Salvation Army, counseling centers in the area, or local churches, because we realize that we cannot be everything to all people and all students, but there are additional services that are out there in the community that we want to make sure that we are aware of.

Mental Health Awareness

The theme of mental health awareness illustrated the challenges faced by student fathers and the impact on their mental well-being, which was discussed by several of the institutional employee participants. Faculty and staff acknowledged the increased mental health concerns and the need to normalize mental health resources for males. Employee 4 said, “[We have] all these different resources for mental health, whatever the genre you’re talking about. We have to normalize that behavior for males as much as we have for females.”

Additionally, Faculty 1 expressed the need for faculty to be aware of the mental health challenges students are facing and to provide students with available resources, noting:

Many of our students think that there are higher levels of distress with regard to things like depression and mental health issues that are fighting their way into the academic

space. As faculty and staff, we need to be mindful that students are brave and are carrying a lot of things. Then, coming out of this pandemic period, with all the other factors we are dealing with, we are mindful of those that students are wrestling with and that we provide or make sure they understand what resources we have and that we're not necessarily counselors, but we are marrying those.

As student fathers strive to achieve a healthy balance of academics, work, and family life, institutional employees feel they play a role in supporting mental wellness by increasing awareness of available resources and cultivating a culture of help-seeking behavior, specifically in the mental wellness space.

Childcare Challenges

Faculty and staff also discussed the effect of childcare and the resources the institution offers to assist students, including an on-site childcare center and childcare scholarships. Employee 5 noted that the institution offers a scholarship for childcare, whether at the on-campus facility or otherwise. Childcare tuition at the children's center is significantly reduced for students, according to Employee 2, the executive leader overseeing the center. The employee also noted that while the center was initially established to serve primarily students and institution employees, the ratio of children enrolled at the center whose parents are related to the institution has since shifted, with a higher population being community members.

Another subtopic regarding childcare challenges included offerings for students taking evening classes or having class meetings outside of normal childcare hours. Employee 8 noted that "not many childcare facilities in this area even do evening care," thus leaving it to family or friends to help the student. Faculty 1 noted that he has experienced students incorporating their children into class meetings, stating, "It's finding accommodations to manage their child while

they're doing a team interactive meeting. I've had parents who brought their children into the meeting and made them part of the discussion." Employee 7 shared the story of a recently single father with sole custody of his children and the challenges he faced in asking for help with childcare. The employee emphasized the unique dynamic of single fatherhood and the lack of a support system to navigate these needs. As a whole, institutional employees expressed that childcare-related obstacles may affect student fathers' academic persistence and success.

Financial Support

The next theme identified from interviews with faculty and staff was the financial challenge of being a student and a father. They highlighted resources available to all students, such as the student support fund and financial aid, which they felt could be beneficial to student fathers. Employee 4 described the Student Support Fund and the research supporting its importance, stating:

It's been found that over 50% of college students don't have access to at least \$500 in an emergency, specifically community college students. So, we set a bar with our foundation that if we can meet an emergent need and provide \$500 to students in crisis to keep them in class with the goal of retention, let's do that annually.

Staff noted students can use the funds for various essentials, from needing a new pair of glasses to paying for rent.

In addition, one staff member noted that finances may be the biggest obstacle for student fathers to come back to college specifically for certain ethnicities, stating:

It's going to impact not only themselves but their extended family. Some of them are multi-generational families living in the same dwelling unit and then their spouses and obviously their children. It has a trickle effect that one decision to come back to school. It

has an effect on a lot of relationships in their life financially, and I think they carry the brunt of that. Demographically, if we're talking about some ethnicities like Hispanics, that's a whole cultural issue that they carry a huge load or weight just culturally knowing that they're the caregiver or responsible financially. But regardless of the demographic, I think that all males are carrying at least that burden, emotionally or stress-wise, knowing that they're the main fiscal piece.

Employee 5 shared that outreach efforts for financial aid, for both the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and the institution's scholarship opportunities, are typically for all students and not focused on any specific subpopulation.

Student Engagement

The theme of student engagement occurred in discussions with many of the institution's employees. It encompasses various strategies and practices to foster meaningful interactions between students and the study site. The theme also discussed creating environments where students feel connected, valued, and involved in their educational pursuits. Staff described the influence of student engagement on academic persistence and offered suggestions on ways that the institution could improve student engagement for student fathers.

Employee 6 described their perspective of successful student engagement as "if a student doesn't show up to a program all year long, but I see that student in the hallway, and I have a meaningful conversation with that student." They also noted that a success story is when a student chooses to return to an institution because of positive interactions on campus. Employees 1, 2, 3, and 4 noted the opportunity for personalized student engagement opportunities for student fathers through support groups, focus groups, and learning communities. Employee 3 shared:

I've always thought about whether we needed to have a men's group, but the thing is time. These folks are so busy already juggling the other roles that I don't know if they have time for some kind of a support group where men can come together and just talk about the challenges of trying to juggle all those kinds of things.

Additionally, all three faculty members described interacting with their students at the beginning of their courses by incorporating an activity to understand the students' personal backgrounds, hobbies, interests, and family dynamics. In summary, the student engagement theme emphasized the need for meaningful relationships, inclusive opportunities, and a culture of care that acknowledges student-fathers' diverse backgrounds and needs.

Student-Father Encouragement

Faculty and staff discussed how they actively encouraged and supported student fathers, recognizing their unique challenges and personalized goals. Discussions with staff, specifically with Employees 1 and 3, highlighted the importance of taking a holistic approach to advising students. Employee 1 shared:

At the end of the day, it's about seeing what the student's goals are: their educational goals, their career goals, and having them want to provide a better life for themselves and their families and to break that generational cycle and get that college degree or certificate to advance in their career. Their children see their persistence and motivation in setting that standard and expectations for the next generation and the generations to come.

Additionally, Employee 3 highlighted a specific student father's journey who successfully navigated various life challenges and took advantage of various program offerings to transformative success, stating:

There's a gentleman who currently works in one of the local industries, and I remember when he came in. He was a father who had several kids then he came here, first started in our ESL classes, took ESL, and got his GED. He then came here, got his certificate in construction, got his associate degree, got his bachelor's degree, and now sits on our BC Foundation.

Employee 4 shared advice for faculty and staff as they work with student fathers, noting:

You're impacting how your students view education and your life decisions. So, give them a bit of empowerment. They need to be proud of what they're doing here. Even if they only make it a semester, that's more than some of the rest of their families have ever achieved. If they complete the degree, we need to empower them and cheer them on to the end. It's exciting to watch when they're finally here.

Employee 6 also shared that the pinnacle moment of success for a student father is exhibited at graduation, stating:

Success to me for a student father is, and it may not even be directed towards me, but I saw it at graduation. When you see the whole family is proud that dad graduated, but you can see it in a student's face that he has now shown his kid, you can do it as dad did it.

Student-Father Findings

This section presents the findings from interviews with six student fathers, offering insights into their experiences and perspectives regarding the challenges and support systems that influenced their academic persistence at a Texas community college. The themes are discussed below, with participant quotes included to highlight the key points that emerged.

Academics and Personal Life Balance

Discussing their experiences, students identified a reoccurring theme highlighted the significant challenges they faced in managing the multiple roles they have in life. Specifically, student fathers discussed the balance between their academic and work responsibilities while still maintaining time for their children, Student 5 stated:

I've had to work on the whole work-life-school balance, and it's been tricky. During the week, I usually get home, and I have to juggle doing homework and getting to spend time with them each day. Usually, I'll spend a couple of hours on homework, especially at first during the beginning of the week, but then later on, I have an hour to spend with them before just going to bed and getting ready for the next day. So definitely has been a juggling act trying to get all that together between being able to make sure I get schoolwork done and still being able to spend time with them.

Similarly, Student 4 described a heavy workload during the week, leaving weekends for homework, stating:

I remember I'd be on the computer all week and come weekends, I'd be on the computer all weekend, knocking out the papers, doing research for those two days Saturday, Sunday. Come Sunday, evening or afternoon, I'd shut it down and try and have some actual family time. Enjoy what little the weekend was left because I'd be on the computer all weekend.

Student 3 added to the complexities of balancing responsibilities in the context of a custody battle and unpredictability of parenting, sharing:

It's just once you can get it in line and do it daily and get in the routine then it just kind of sticks, but when something throws it off, it throws a wrench in it like a stomach bug or

sickness or something else. I don't have anybody to watch him, so I have to come home. If he's sick at daycare, I have to come home and watch him, so it's tough.

Academic Flexibility. Student fathers expressed the importance of course and instructor flexibility as they navigate a healthy life balance. For example, Student 1 shared that they can more effectively manage their schedule due to online courses stating, "It's a lot better with the online classes where I can section off my time accordingly." Additionally, Student 2 noted that taking online courses allowed him to ease back into education after a long break. Student 3 discussed both opportunities and challenges faced with online classes, noting:

The positive side for me was being able to do it online and at home and not have to get out and go to school. I could spend more time getting things done. The negative side of it is to me, there wasn't quite enough information to understand how to get to each module or setup because every professor they set up their Virtual Campus different, and I didn't know that.

Additionally, he expressed challenges with connecting with online instructors due to not being able to ask questions in person and delayed responses to phone calls and emails. While course flexibility was important and allowed for some student fathers to pursue their education, they noted that, at times, the experience was not always positive.

Student Support and Resource-Seeking Behavior

When asked about their awareness and use of student support resources, student fathers provided insight into their experiences and thoughts about utilizing student-support resources. While student fathers knew the college offered resources, Students 2 and 4 both shared that they were not comfortable seeking help. Student 2 noted, "I'm pretty independent. I don't like to

reach out for stuff, but there comes a point where you're like, I need help. At that point, I wouldn't have never blinked an eye of reaching out." Similarly, Student 4 shared their initial hesitation in visiting the institution's food pantry, sharing:

I'm not the type to always reach out and seek help. I guess maybe it's an ego thing or I don't know. I'm still like that, but I brought it up to my wife and she was all over it. She would be the one that would come and pick everything because she's the one that cooks. All she needed was my school ID and then she went.

Another student father discussed a positive experience with resources such as the Writing Center and career counseling. At the same time, another noted that they had not experienced a need for student support resources. An important note is that the hours that services are offered on campus may not be compatible with a student-father's schedule. Student 3 noted that the time services are offered was not conducive to his schedule with work and evening classes.

Mental Health Awareness

Student-father participants shed light on the stressors associated with being a student father, including mental and physical exhaustion, external distractions during class meetings, feelings of inadequacy when facing younger peers, and fear of not understanding course materials. Student 2 shared:

There were points where that stress reached a point where I didn't know how to go on. If I had dropped it, I wouldn't have cared, it was just the stress maybe just overwhelmed, takes over and you know, your family doesn't understand what you're going through because you're living a life with them at the same time. It's a life separate. You just feel alone.

Student 2 also noted that he had brought mental wellness concerns to the attention of the institution's Board of Regents during an annual meeting but did not know if resources had been implemented.

Several of the student fathers expressed stressors they encounter as they balance parenthood, work, and academics, revealing a need for mental health resources for this student population. Some students discussed strategies that helped them maintain their mental wellness. For example, Student 6 shared that having discipline in his routine helped him effectively manage his time, leading to lower stress levels and fewer feelings of being overwhelmed with coursework.

Childcare Challenges

Another common theme was revealed when speaking to each of the student-father participants was the challenge of childcare. This theme encapsulated several issues, such as the limited availability of childcare and the financial strains associated with childcare costs. Additionally, the presence or absence of a strong support system played a significant role in managing their various responsibilities.

Student 1, whose children are enrolled in the on-campus childcare program, discussed the financial burden of paying for childcare and tuition, likening it to a "mortgage payment." Student 4 also expressed the financial aspect of caring for a child and prioritizing meeting their child's needs over their own educational aspirations. Several students also discussed the importance of having a solid support system through family and friends who can care for their children while they are taking classes. Student 3, a single father, shared the coordination between him and his mother to ensure that his son is cared for, stating, "If it's a school night, we'll spend an hour together, and then I'll head to school. Mom will watch him, feed him, and put him in bed."

Students 1, 2, and 6 described the balance they have with their spouse to meet childcare needs during class or study times.

Financial Challenges

This theme highlights the role that financial stability and support play in the academic persistence of students with familial responsibilities. Student fathers discussed how their financial situation may vary from those of other students.

Student fathers expressed contrasting views on the financial implications of balancing being a student and supporting their family. Interviews with student fathers indicated that childcare and other life expenses can compete with tuition and other academic costs. Students 3, 4, and 5 each expressed the struggle with balancing paying for their education versus bills and associated costs of raising children. Those who felt the financial impact more had also experienced a life-changing event, such as a change in childcare situations or job loss and pay cuts for themselves or their spouse.

In contrast, Students 1, 2, and 6 felt the financial impact of pursuing their educational goals was manageable and not a stress factor. Student 1 mentioned that what he learned in one of his first math classes helped him become more “financially conscious,” which has made paying for classes a “minor burden.” Students 4, 5, and 6 expressed resources, such as the food pantry, tuition payment plans, and scholarships, alleviated some of the financial burden. Student 4 shared his appreciation for the payment plan options, stating that it “came in clutch plenty of times” and “helped tremendously.” Additionally, Student 1 noted the institution’s affordability was why he chose to continue pursuing his degree there, despite feeling frustrated at one point with the institution.

In summary, the financial impact theme underscores the importance of targeted support and resources to help students manage their financial responsibilities. Student fathers experience different levels of financial strain. Their individual circumstances are unique, affecting the type and amount of support they require.

Student Engagement

Student fathers described their engagement in an academic setting in various forms, including through interactions with their peers and faculty members. Two student fathers noted the age gap between them and other students, which was especially significant for those pursuing associate degrees. Student 2 described his interactions as the following:

I don't understand this younger generation. I don't fit in with them. I can't understand what they're saying half the time. They speak in some weird code. But my viewpoints are different than the younger generation, so if I did connect with anybody, it was only the older generation.

Student 4 noted a significant connection with a faculty member, both in teaching style and on a personal level, pointing out that the faculty member gave him "good life tips" and connected with him before and after class. Student 3 noted that he connected with a faculty member who helped him revise his resume and prepare for job interviews. He also connected with younger classmates, as he felt they looked to him for guidance because of his work experience.

Additionally, Students 2 and 5 shared their experiences connecting with other students, despite being in online courses. Student 2 noted that he had created a disc golf student organization to meet people and make connections. Student 5 explained the effect of being able to join virtual group meetings to "put a face with a name" and engaging through discussion posts

fostered a sense of connection to other classmates. Student 5 also felt encouraged by collaborating with a diverse group of students, sharing:

It's been a lot of fun working with a variety of students throughout these different eight-week periods. Just seeing everyone else's journey while taking the courses and getting an idea of everyone else's background. . . . It's been nice overall, just working with other students.

The meaningful connections that student fathers shared were varied, showing that engagement is not solely based on attending an in-person class or formal programs. Instead, it was the quality of interactions that influenced their academic journey.

Family Dynamics

The theme of family dynamics emerged primarily from interviews with student fathers. Many of the student fathers discussed the efforts among partners and extended family for emotional and practical support, showcasing the importance of navigating the challenge of balancing responsibilities together. Student 1 shared the success both he and his partner have experienced because of their collaborative approach, sharing:

She went through the program before I did. I was always there for her when she stressed out having meetings and everything. Take care of the kids while she was having meetings, and she's done the same thing to help me as well. Both of our careers have flourished from it.

Although most student fathers leveraged the support of partners or other family members to attend class or work on homework, Student 6 explained that he incorporated his son into his assignments, stating:

I work with it; if I have to watch him and he's bored, we'll do some of my school projects together. For instance, I had an art history or art appreciation last semester, and we had to go out in the environment, go out in the forest, and create or find art, so I took him with me, and he really loved it. Then we had to make some drawings. One of my drawings was a human brain, and he wanted to do the same thing. He took great pride in it, and he spent a lot of time trying to make his version of that assignment. It really showed the importance of showing him what I'm doing and engaging him in some of the activities I'm doing because it'll draw him in more.

Additionally, several students noted the shifts of family roles due to changing circumstances like job loss or changing educational pursuits. Student 5 noted:

My wife is a stay-at-home mom, which our roles reversed a little bit whenever I first got laid off because she was able to go and immediately find a job while I was job hunting, so that was super nice. It also made it to where I got to see the other side of things, where it's like, "oh, yeah, I'm the one all the time now."

For partnered student fathers, the support of their spouses was important to their success academically. Student 2 shared that his wife was his biggest encourager throughout his academic journey as a "shoulder to cry on" and pushing him to "shape up, get it done, and don't quit."

Family dynamics are complex and individualized for every student, including student fathers. These dynamics are influenced by their responsibilities as students, parents, and employees. Various factors impact how they balance these roles in their daily lives.

Student-Father Motivation

Based on the findings, the motivations driving student fathers to pursue their education were deeply rooted in their desire to create better opportunities for themselves and their families.

This section examines the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that inspired the participants to persist in their academic journeys. Most commonly, participants shared that their own personal goals for self-improvement drive them. Student 6 noted that he chose to go back to school to enhance his qualifications and open new career opportunities, as he is currently in a technical position, but hopes to move into a leadership position. Student 5 shared a similar motivation, with hopes of being a “better candidate in the future” with a bachelor’s degree.

Another recurring subtheme was the student fathers’ desire to be a role model for their children. Student 2 shared that by achieving his own academic goals, he inspired his son to pursue an education and career, and “that was a reward in itself.” Notably, Student 4 expressed his motivation to continue his educational pursuit and how he viewed his role as a student father, sharing:

It means everything and by everything, setting examples, giving guidance, having to show emotion that generally whenever you are a male, you’re supposed to have this big ego—not cry and stuff—but, having two little boys and a daughter, sometimes you have to show compassion and feelings. And just everything else in life—education, sports. I guess when they’re younger coming up, well, maybe forever, but it’s always going to be guidance and teaching. To be able to help teach and guide your children, you yourself also have to be a learner too.

Student 5 similarly expressed the example he is setting for his daughters on prioritizing their homework. Additionally, Student 3 noted that providing a better life for his son was his motivation, stating, “I just want my son to have the life that I didn’t get to have with my dad. He’s my drive. He’s my motivation.” External support from family and friends was also shown to bolster motivation for Student 3 to continue their academic journey. He noted that a close

friend encouraged him through a career change and academic program shift, helping keep him on track.

Document Analysis

Several findings emerged from the document analysis of the institution's strategic plan, website, Trellis survey, and recent press coverage. These findings included the institution's focus on meeting the needs of student parents. They also revealed the reported effect of childcare on class attendance and outlined the available student support resources.

In the institution's most recent strategic plan, Strategy II.6 emphasized meeting the needs of student parents. The goals included collecting data from students about their families, incorporating this information into an equity dashboard, and conducting a family friendly self-study. The goal of the study aimed to identify resources and services that support student parents and analyze the data to determine potential future improvements. However, the researcher could not identify the equity dashboard on the website and the family friendly self-study was not marked as complete on the strategic plan.

The institution's Fall 2023 results from the *Student Financial Wellness Survey* conducted by Trellis Strategies indicated that 43% of the surveyed population were student mothers or student fathers. According to the survey, 38% of identified student parents spend over 40 hours per week providing care for their dependents, and 24% reported missing at least 1 day of classes due to a lack of childcare. The document analysis revealed that information about a childcare scholarship was on the institution's website but noted that funds were limited and available on a first-come, first-serve basis. As previously mentioned by interview participants, the institution is home to a children's center that serves, in order of importance, students, employees, and the community.

The institution's website provided high-level information about the childcare center with contact information, including the center's mission to meet the needs of the institution's students along with faculty and staff. The childcare center is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. for ages 6 weeks to 5 years. However, document analysis led to recent media coverage revealing the closure of the children's center due to significant challenges with its operations. Recent local newspaper articles announced that the children's center would be closing in January 2025 after over 20 years of operations, citing financial reasons for the closure. Several students and community members have voiced their opinions about the closure and the anticipated impact it will have on the student population and community.

It is notable that the institution's website further revealed many support resources available to all students. Support resources included suicide prevention and mental health resources, a student support fund to assist with emergency financial needs, academic assistance, and a food pantry. Results from the institution's *Fall 2023 Student Financial Wellness Survey* indicated that 59% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that financially supporting their family while in college was important. However, the researcher was unable to locate any student father or student parent support resources on the website, except for the aforementioned childcare scholarship.

Data Triangulation

An overview of the data findings can be found in Table 4.3. The table provides the identified themes and codes that emerged from the interviews by the number of participants who discussed the theme and the number of times the theme was identified by all participants.

Table 4.3. Research Themes

Theme	Number of participants who identified theme	Number of times theme was identified
Student Support	16	154
Academics and Personal Life Balance	15	115
Childcare Challenges	14	38
Student Engagement	12	47
Mental Health Awareness	12	45
Family Dynamics	11	56
Financial Support	11	22
Student-Father Motivation	10	34
Financial Challenges	7	16
Student-Father Encouragement	5	3

Additionally, several commonalities and differences between participant groups and the document analysis emerged from the data which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

An overview of this comparison by theme can be found below in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Comparison of Data Findings by Data Source

Theme	Number of times theme was identified		
	Institutional employee	Student father	Document analysis
Student Support	116	38	2
Academics and Personal Life Balance	49	66	1
Childcare Challenges	28	12	3
Student Engagement	25	22	1
Mental Health Awareness	12	23	1
Family Dynamics	12	44	0
Financial Support	18	4	1
Student-Father Motivation	3	30	0
Financial Challenges	5	11	1
Student-Father Encouragement	4	3	0

Summary

Chapter 4 began with a review of the study's research questions and theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Next, a synopsis of data collection and analysis was provided, followed by an overview of participant demographics. The researcher then presented the research findings,

organized by major participant response groups, then by themes identified during content analysis of qualitative interviews and document analysis. Chapter 4 concluded with an overview comparison of the data findings by data source. Chapter 5 includes a comparison of the findings by data source and the alignment of the findings with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and the literature review. The researcher concludes with the implications of the findings and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 5 begins with a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided the study. The chapter then outlines the methodology, data collection, and data analysis process. Next, the chapter features a discussion of the findings by data source and how they compare to the frameworks and literature, followed by the study's implications for institutions. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Statement of the Problem

Recent data presented by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR; Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021) showed student fathers are less likely to enroll in college and graduate on time, highlighting the unique challenges they encounter on academic journey. Additionally, community colleges are experiencing a decline in the overall male student population. Student fathers must find ways of balancing the demands of parenthood, work, and academics, making them particularly vulnerable to dropping out or failing to complete their degrees on time. A gap in the research exists on how institutional support specifically impacts their academic persistence.

Community colleges are a starting point for higher education, job skills training, and upskilling, offering flexible schedules and affordable options. Understanding the specific needs of student fathers throughout their academic journey is essential. This knowledge can help uncover ways to better support this subpopulation of students in reaching their academic goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the academic persistence of student fathers at a Texas community college.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: How did a Texas community college describe their efforts to support academic persistence of student fathers?

RQ2: What factors did student fathers perceive influence academic persistence at a Texas community college?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation served as the theoretical framework for this study. According to Maslow, human motivation is driven by a hierarchy of needs. Maslow's theory provided a valuable perspective for examining how student fathers balance their academic goals with work and family responsibilities while striving to achieve self-actualization or personal fulfillment.

The conceptual framework used to guide this study is Bean and Metzner's (1985) model for nontraditional student attrition. This model, an adaptation of Tinto's (1975) theory of student persistence offers various internal and external factors that influence nontraditional students. This model provided structure to investigate how various factors influence student fathers' decision-making, academic engagement, and persistence. These two frameworks were the basis for the analysis of the study findings.

Methodology

The researcher used a single-case case study method to better understand the academic persistence of student fathers at a Texas community college. According to Yin (2018), a case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" (p. 15), which, in this study, was the academic persistence of student fathers through multiple lenses.

Data Collection and Analysis

A case study “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 2018, p. 15). The researcher used a combination of semistructured interviews and a document analysis as data sources. Maslow’s (1943) theory of motivation and Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition served as a guide to developing interview questions for faculty, staff, and student fathers. As described in Chapter 3, the researcher identified 10 faculty and staff participants willing to participate in the study. Additionally, the researcher interviewed six student fathers who met the study’s criteria. The researcher also conducted a document analysis of the institution’s website, strategic plan, and survey results provided by the institution. Data analysis was performed using an inductive thematic approach, with the themes emerging from the interviews and documents.

Discussion of Findings and Related Literature

In this study, the researcher examined the academic persistence of student fathers at a Texas community college from both the institution’s and student-fathers’ perspectives. RQ1 focused on the institutional efforts in place to support this subpopulation, while RQ2 centered on student-father’s perception of the variables affecting their academic persistence. This section includes a comparison of the findings by participant group and document analysis, followed by a discussion on how the findings compare to the literature.

Comparison by Participant Group and Document Analysis

As presented in the overview of the data findings in Chapter 4, many commonalities and differences were found among the participant groups. While certain thoughts were shared between employees and students, distinct differences also existed that reflected the unique

circumstances of student fathers and the institution's understanding of the needs of this student population.

Academic and Personal Life Balance

Balancing academics and personal life was a common theme, with both participant groups acknowledging the challenges that student fathers face in balancing school, work, and family responsibilities. The key difference between the participant groups was that faculty discussed course flexibility in terms of how they accommodate the needs of all students and maintain educational standards, and students were more focused on the need for practical solutions to navigate personal and academic pressures. Faculty and staff recognized this challenge and noted specific ways they can support student fathers navigating the balance. The institution's flexible course delivery methods, such as evening, hybrid, and fully online options, highlighted the ability to accommodate students' schedules. Additionally, faculty members noted the flexibility offered in course policies, such as offering lenient assignment deadlines, which would allow a student father additional time in the case of a family emergency. Student fathers positively expressed the value of flexibility in course modalities and online program offerings, but also noted the challenges they have experienced.

Student Support

The overarching theme of student support spanned across all participants. However, the subthemes that emerged from each participant group were notable. Faculty and staff discussed the various support resources the institution has employed to support all students and that student fathers may find beneficial. Staff members easily identified the support services available by the college, but were challenged with identifying who student fathers were, thus creating the inability to respond to specific needs they may have. This idea was further supported by the

incompletion of the student-parent-focused goal in the institution's strategic plan. Additionally, faculty and staff acknowledged that although services like childcare, tutoring, a food pantry, and career services were available, they were not always fully used by student fathers due to a lack of awareness or opting not to use all resources. Faculty and staff also commented on the significance of the community partnerships that are established to provide a wide scope of resources to all students.

Of note, employee and student participants discussed the importance of resource-seeking behavior. The findings revealed a disconnect between these resources and student-fathers' willingness to use them. Several staff members felt that student fathers may not seek out these resources due to a lack of help-seeking behavior. This was confirmed through the discussions with student fathers, noting that they did not use the resources and were more inclined to "figure things out" without seeking assistance. This behavior could be attributed to the student-fathers' level of comfort in seeking assistance, unawareness of resources, or convenience of when services are offered, all of which were factors discussed by student fathers. However, one of the student father participants shared his story of utilizing the institution's food pantry after receiving encouragement from his spouse. This individual shared that it was not because of food insecurity that they sought out this resource but rather to lighten the financial burden of buying groceries.

The findings revealed a disconnect between the support institutional employees believe is available and how student fathers perceive its accessibility or effectiveness. Employees may overestimate the visibility and utility of student services. Meanwhile, student fathers may not be fully aware of these resources or feel comfortable accessing them.

Mental Health Awareness

Both groups of participants were aware of the significant mental wellness challenges facing student fathers and recognized the need for better support systems and mental health resources. Although employees understood and advocated for support mechanisms, their approach may be viewed as more theoretical as compared to the direct, lived experiences of stress and isolation felt by student fathers, which could indicate a disconnect between how the institution views its effectiveness of support systems and the actual impact felt by students. Students primarily discussed what they are currently doing individually to manage their situations, which included personal coping systems rather than institutional support. Although mental wellness was a strong theme throughout the data, a lack of promotion of institutional mental wellness support was evident. The document analysis revealed that some resources were available, but students were not aware of these resources or opted not to use them.

Childcare Challenges

The findings were clear that childcare is a critical issue affecting student fathers and their academic performance and persistence. Although institutional employees focused on the availability and funding limitations, student-father participants highlighted the day-to-day challenges and personal impacts. Additionally, staff discussed the resources available to student fathers, but student fathers noted the inadequacies of these resources in meeting their needs, especially pertaining to flexibility and the financial burden of childcare. This comparison reveals a significant gap between the support provided by the institution and the actual needs of student fathers.

Financial Challenges and Support

The financial support systems in place by the institution were the focus of the discussions with faculty and staff, but student fathers spoke about the financial challenges they face daily and the effect it has on their academic progress. Employees were generally aware of the financial challenges but did not express a full grasp of the depth or specific nature of issues student fathers may face. Additionally, several of the student fathers noted the use of resources such as financial aid or the payment plans offered by the institution, reinforcing the awareness and effectiveness of the institution's financial support services for this sub-population.

Student Engagement

Notably, student engagement was an important theme for institutional employees and student fathers, with both participant groups understanding the importance engagement plays in academic success and persistence. A key difference between the two participant groups, however, was the approach to engagement. Institutional employees focused on formalized programs and structured interactions, but student fathers expressed significant value in informal, spontaneous, and self-created interactions with faculty members. This difference indicates a potential employee lack of understanding of the importance of faculty–student interactions. Additionally, students in the bachelor's program noted the positive impact of group work on their abilities to network and build connections with fellow students.

Family Dynamics

Though not discussed at length by institutional employees, student fathers discussed the effect that their academic pursuits had on their family dynamics, including the loss of time with their partners and children. Although this was briefly discussed by institutional employees regarding academic and personal life balance, student fathers were much more vocal about these

effects. Students shared ways that they worked through these challenges by incorporating their children into their coursework or by setting specific time aside for their families. Important to note is that one staff member did have a strong comment about student fathers' time sacrifice with their children, in which he also referenced the relationship with his own child, thus revealing that perhaps he had a deeper understanding of this sacrifice due to his own family dynamic.

Student-Father Encouragement and Motivation

Faculty, staff, and student fathers recognized the value of education in transforming lives by opening doors to better career opportunities and improving family circumstances. Although the encouragement faculty and staff provided to student fathers through empowerment and systemic support was important, it was not the only factor. Student fathers also discussed personal fulfillment, familial encouragement, and the positive impacts on their children's attitudes towards education as key intrinsic motivators. This comparison reveals a layered understanding of how institutional supports are perceived and how they align with the personal motivations of student fathers.

Comparison to Literature

The findings from student-father and institution-employee interviews identified various challenges student fathers face during their academic journey, many of which aligned with either or both theoretical or conceptual frameworks. The following findings are presented by the major themes in relation to the literature. These themes offer insights into the unique obstacles student fathers encounter and the support structures that may be necessary for their success.

Academic and Personal Life Balance

As previously noted, student fathers identified their academic commitments with personal responsibilities, specifically family and work, as one of their most significant challenges to achieving their academic goals. Several student fathers noted the difficulty managing coursework while being a parent, expressing the sentiment that one area of their life always seems to lack. Navigating this balance can lead to high stress levels and time poverty—a concept identified in the literature. Time poverty refers to insufficient time to fulfill all responsibilities effectively, leading to trade-offs between coursework, work, and family time (Whitford, 2018). Furthermore, IWPR found that balancing day-to-day obligations was a factor in students stopping out of classes (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruze, 2021). The rigidity of traditional course schedules can force students to choose between attending class, working, and meeting family obligations, leading to absenteeism and academic setbacks. Absenteeism is addressed by Bean and Metzner (1985) but with little to no supporting research specifically for nontraditional students. As noted in the literature review, several Texas women recently offered their experiences with keeping up with coursework when their child was ill (McGee, 2023). The researcher's conversations with student fathers revealed that this challenge is not specific to student mothers but also to student fathers, as specifically mentioned by Student 3.

Additionally, according to Bean and Metzner (1985), the level of academic advising a student receives increases their chances of staying enrolled in courses, aligning with the comments from Employees 1 and 3. Faculty also suggested that student fathers be realistic with their families about the potential impact of taking classes on their family dynamics. Additionally, Employee 1 discussed the importance of understanding students' life commitments while planning their schedules. Those who provide advising services to student fathers, as well as the

student-father participants, made no mention of having uncertainty about their program selection, which was noted as a factor of academic persistence in a study of parenting students (Women Employed, 2011).

Student Support

Understanding and addressing the needs of student fathers was another prominent theme revealed by participants. One student noted the use of the institution's food pantry, which was also mentioned by many faculty and staff, aligning with literature findings regarding food insecurity. Overall, however, food and housing insecurities were not an area where student fathers expressed need, which differed from previously explored literature focusing on student mothers noted that food and housing were a significant concern (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020).

A subtheme of student support focused on resource-seeking behavior specific to male students, which aligns with literature findings. Savoie-Roskos et al. (2023) noted the associated stigmas with asking for help, which was mentioned by faculty and staff. However, conversations with student fathers revealed that lower levels of self-efficacy may be the contributing factor, which was also mentioned by Lim et al. (2014).

Mental Health Awareness

When examining Maslow's hierarchy of needs, student fathers did not express any concerns about meeting the lowest level of physiological needs. Rather, in alignment with the second level of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, safety and security, mental health emerged as a critical factor affecting persistence. Student fathers and institution employees pointed to increased levels of stress and anxiety that come from juggling multiple responsibilities. Some student fathers described feeling stressed and isolated from other students, with one student

expressing that they had spoken to the Board of Regents about needing mental health resources. However, the faculty and staff did not mention mental health resources when asked what resources the institution provides, indicating that faculty and staff may not see where student fathers would use mental health resources or that the offering of services may not be robust. Student-father participants discussed these impacts in relation to their mental health and self-identity, where Estes (2011) explained the inner self-conflict of being a good student and a good parent and the associated stress that occurred.

Childcare Challenges

The study's results revealed the importance of childcare to community college student success strategies, supporting the literature findings. One student father shared an experience where he had to leave class early due to a sick child and noted the empathy his instructor shared for his situation. Childcare, as noted in the safety and security needs in the second level of Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation, is essential to the success of student fathers. Each of the respondents provided examples of the impact of childcare on their journey, whether it be through spousal support, family and friends, or paying for childcare, aligning with findings from both Miller et al. (2011) and Hess et al. (2014).

Financial Challenges

Financial challenges were consistently cited as a significant barrier to persistence, which were noted by Bean and Metzner (1985) as an environmental variable affecting a student's persistence. All student-father participants were employed, either full-time or part-time, and the balance of living expenses and tuition, textbooks, and childcare could create an additional financial strain. However, many of the student fathers felt as though the financial impacts were limited. A small number of responses noted the use of financial aid or payment plans, indicating

that this particular group of student fathers was financially well-established or knew how to access available resources when making the decision to pursue their educational goals, which supports the findings from Zhan and Pandey (2004).

Faculty and staff acknowledged these challenges and provided information on financial resources such as financial aid and scholarships, specifically noting a scholarship for childcare. One student father noted in his interview that the cost of childcare was comparable to a home loan payment, which compares to similar findings from a study of single mothers in college (Kruvelis et al., 2017). The complexity of navigating financial aid processes disproportionately affects nontraditional students, specifically those needing help completing paperwork outside of regular business hours, as one student father noted. Additionally, federal financial aid requirements could negatively impact student fathers due to the length of time it takes this subset of students to complete a degree because they are enrolled part-time while working (Bradley, 2013), which is true of each student-father participant.

Student Engagement

Student engagement was another key idea mentioned by both students and institutional employees. Bean and Metzner (1985) discuss social integration variables in relation to Tinto's (1975) student persistence model, with the key difference being that nontraditional students at a community college may find student engagement through different means, such as faculty engagement. Compared to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) findings that nontraditional students increase engagement through classroom interactions, student fathers mentioned that connections with faculty members were impactful to their journey, each noting a specific faculty member who had engaged in deeper, meaningful conversation outside of normal class time and offered support through their educational pursuits.

Family Dynamics

As student fathers struggle to find the balance between their various life responsibilities, family relationships and dynamics may be impacted, as presented by Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010). Bernard (1981) observed that modern expectations of fathers include contributing emotional support, providing childcare, and assisting with household chores, which was corroborated through interviews with student fathers. These evolving expectations place additional pressure on student fathers as they navigate their academic, professional, and personal commitments.

Motivation as a Driving Force

Motivation emerged as a powerful theme, with student fathers driven primarily by intrinsic factors such as providing a better future for their children and achieving personal fulfillment. This motivation aligns with Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation, where student fathers strive for self-actualization through educational attainment, despite their various challenges. The data shows that this group of student fathers were meeting their lower-level needs and striving for personal growth. Several student fathers also noted the importance their children played in motivating them to pursue their academic goals, aligning with Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) findings that children whose parents have a postsecondary education are more likely to attend college. The level of encouragement student fathers received could affect their academic performance, which relates to Maslow's (1943) esteem needs and the outside encouragement part of Bean and Metzner's (1985) model. The encouragement student fathers discussed was both internal and external. Many student fathers found encouragement from family members or spouses, a similar finding to interviews with California community college

student parents (Attar Flores, 2013). Others said that their encouragement came from within, citing their own drive to succeed or their faith in God.

Other Literature-Related Findings

As mentioned in the literature review, recent Texas legislation from Texas House Bill 1361 focused on supporting student parents. During interviews, institutional employees were unable to offer a systematic way of identifying student fathers, thus emphasizing the college's need to address the tracking of this student sub-population. This gap underscores the challenges in fully understanding and addressing the needs of student fathers.

Implications for Practice

The study provided an opportunity to open the doors of conversation with student fathers, while also exploring the institution's idea of the support they provide. Based on the findings, the researcher identified several implications for practice. These implications highlight areas where institutions can better align their support services with the needs of student fathers.

Interconnected Barriers and Flexible Learning Options

Many of the barriers student fathers face are interconnected. For example, financial concerns, such as higher bills or childcare costs, may force student fathers to work longer hours, reducing the time available for academics and family, thus further complicating the balance issue. As academic, work, and family balance continues to be a significant challenge for student fathers, institutions should consider options to alleviate the strain of navigating this journey.

The availability of online programs would allow student fathers to better balance their responsibilities. Offering more programs fully online, institutions would give student fathers more flexibility with program choice. Another consideration would be the expansion of fast-paced credentialing. Institutions should tailor their marketing efforts to the student-father

population, ensuring that program benefits are communicated in a way that resonates with their unique needs and experiences.

Institutional Gaps and Tailored Outreach for Support Services

The data analysis revealed a clear gap between institutional efforts to support student fathers and the actual impact of those efforts. Although the institution has efforts in place to provide resources, their effectiveness is limited by the lack of awareness, poor communication, and insufficient tailoring to the needs of student fathers. Through more robust data collection, which must be in place, per recent requirements by Texas legislation, institutions will be able to justify resources and tailored support to student fathers.

The current approach to student services assumes that all student parents face the same challenges and will engage with support services in the same way. However, the experiences of student fathers, as noted through the participant interviews, are distinct, thus requiring more targeted communication and outreach to feel included and supported. A more inclusive approach to communication strategies specifically aimed at student fathers will increase their awareness and encourage help-seeking behavior for support services such as childcare, mental wellness resources, and tutoring.

Institutions are encouraged to investigate the accessibility of their support resources to those students who may be balancing several roles, such as being a parent, student, and having a job. A look at virtual support options or extending services beyond normal operating hours would benefit several student populations, including student fathers. These adjustments would provide more flexible and inclusive support for those with complex schedules.

Institutional Childcare Offerings

The findings from the study and associated literature identified consistent, reliable, and affordable childcare as a barrier for student fathers. Although the institution offers structured support through a childcare center and scholarships, the practical needs of students, such as evening care and more substantial financial support, are not fully met. The reliance of students on personal networks and the response of integrating their children into their coursework indicate areas where institutions could be more responsive to the real-world scenarios student fathers face. This suggests a need for a more flexible, comprehensive approach to childcare support that aligns more closely with student schedules and financial realities. Although the financial challenges of running an on-campus childcare facility have been noted as a concern, institutions can explore other childcare models through third-party partnerships with corporations, other childcare centers, or a modification to the childcare tuition model.

Leveraging Motivation Through Mentorship and Engagement Programs

As previously mentioned, motivation emerged as a powerful theme. The institution recognizes the importance of this motivation, noting that they believe student fathers are highly driven by their desire to be role models for their children and improve their families' economic sustainability. However, that motivation alone may not be enough to ensure persistence. Intrinsic motivation keeps student fathers engaged, but institutional support and encouragement must align with their needs, including policies and procedures that help reduce external barriers to persistence.

Considering Bean and Metzner's (1985) model for nontraditional student attrition, the need to develop social networking opportunities for student fathers could impact their academic persistence. As suggested by several staff, institutions can establish mentorship programs for

student fathers that could connect them with faculty, staff, or successful alumni allowing them to learn, network, and be supported during their journey. Connecting student fathers could also provide an outlet for increased peer encouragement, study groups, and engagement. When facilitating this type of student engagement, institutions should consider modality and timing, with consideration given to online connections or around common class times when students are already on campus. In addition, encouraging and facilitating more student-led initiatives and recognizing the value of informal interactions could bridge the gap between institutional intentions and student experiences, making engagement efforts more effective and appreciated.

The findings revealed that student fathers addressed interactions specifically with faculty but not with staff, suggesting they may feel more comfortable or see greater value in engaging with faculty. This indicates a need for targeted efforts to enhance student-staff interactions through intentional communication or training staff to engage this population proactively.

Establishing Targeted Support Through Identification and a Dedicated Liaison

In response to Texas House Bill 1361, Texas higher education institutions must establish targeted support for student fathers by implementing an identification process and appointing a dedicated student-parent liaison. Although the institution may already have begun implementing this, the liaison is not easily identifiable or noted as a priority by the interviewed faculty and staff. A lack of visibility suggests the need for clearer communication and greater emphasis on the liaison's role at all institutions.

Including a mechanism for identifying student fathers in the application or through new student advising forms would be beneficial for institutions. Information could be tracked and updated in the student information system to easily identify this population of students. The student-parent liaison would serve as a central point of contact for student fathers, connecting

them to academic, financial, and personal support services tailored to their needs. Effectively communicating the role of the student-parent liaison to faculty, staff, and students is crucial to ensuring student fathers are directed to the appropriate resources. This information should be easily found on institutions' websites.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the study's results, several recommendations for future research can be considered to further understand and address the academic persistence of student fathers, specifically at community colleges. These recommendations would fill existing gaps in the literature and contribute to effective strategies for supporting this unique student population. By expanding the research focus, institutions can better tailor their resources and services to meet the specific needs of student fathers.

Comparative Studies Between Student Mothers and Student Fathers

Future research could explore the differences and similarities between male and female parenting students regarding their academic persistence, resource needs, and levels of engagement with institutional support services. A study of this nature would highlight gender-specific challenges and lead to a more personalized approach for both groups. This comparison could inform more equitable and targeted policies for parenting students across genders.

Longitudinal Studies on Academic Persistence

A study structured to follow student fathers designed to track students over time would provide insight into how their needs may evolve over the course of their academic careers. This study would provide insight into how a student-father's academic performance may shift over time due to various life events and the impact these changes may have on their ability to persist

and succeed at their academic goals. Long-term data would allow for the development on ongoing support systems that adapt to the changing needs of student fathers.

Examination of Institutional Policies and Their Impact on Student Fathers

Future studies could assess the effectiveness of institutional policies designed to support student parents. A particular focus could be on how these policies and procedures may affect student fathers. This could include examining how flexible course options and dedicated student-father support systems influence their persistence.

Intersectionality and Diverse Identities Among Student Fathers

Investigating how demographic factors, such as ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and relationship status intersect with the experiences of student fathers would relate directly to Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition. Such an analysis could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by this group and how specific demographics relate to those challenges. For example, single-parent student fathers may face additional difficulties balancing academic responsibilities with parenting, financial strain, and limited access to support systems. These findings could help institutions develop more targeted support strategies for student fathers from diverse backgrounds.

Role of Community and Peer Networks

Additional research is needed on the role of peer and community networks in influencing the academic persistence of student fathers. A study could explore how formal and informal networks, within and outside the institution, contribute to student-fathers' motivation and academic persistence. A study of this type could consider career networks, social connections, and learning communities.

Impact of Mental Health on Academic Persistence

Given the importance of mental health identified in this study and its relation to Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation, future research could focus on the specific mental wellness challenges faced by student fathers and how these challenges may impact student-father academic persistence. If mental health services are offered on campus, a study could also evaluate the usage and effectiveness of these services in addressing student-father needs. Additional studies could explore student-fathers' methods to manage their stress levels.

Exploration of Nontraditional Educational Models

An opportunity exists to explore the impact of nontraditional educational models, such as accelerated programs or short-term credentialing for student fathers, like the program mentioned in the interview with Employee 3. Researchers could look at how these models align with the needs and schedules of student fathers and their success outcomes. Understanding the effectiveness of these models could inform institutional practices to better support nontraditional students.

Effects of External Economic and Social Factors

A more in-depth look at Bean and Metzner's (1985) external factors, such as economic and social, could provide a deeper understanding of how economic instability and labor market trends affect student-fathers' ability to persist in college. This would provide a broader context for supporting this sub-population as it mitigates external barriers. Such research could highlight specific economic or social trends that disproportionately impact student fathers.

Institutional Data Collection Practices

Data collection for student parents is still being explored. Once methods are in place, a look at the effectiveness of these collection methods would provide a view of how well

institutions can continually track their student parents and assess their everchanging needs. This data could also guide institutions in designing more targeted and responsive support services.

Policy Analysis and Government Support

As Texas institutions react to recent legislative changes, future research could focus on analyzing these policies that affect student fathers, particularly regarding financial aid, childcare, and work-study programs. Such research could help identify gaps and challenges these students face. The findings could lead to policy recommendations that better address the needs of student fathers pursuing their educational goals.

Conclusion

Student fathers represent a unique subpopulation of students pursuing a postsecondary degree. As noted from the study, each student father brings their own experiences and family dynamics into the work–school–family balance, creating the need for personalized support. Through the study, the two research questions were answered by examining multiple perspectives, including interviews with institutional employees, student fathers, and document analysis. This approach provided a comprehensive view of the challenges student fathers face and the perceptions of the current institutional support available to them. The study revealed that many of the challenges student fathers were experiencing were understood by the institution, but a slight disconnect existed between the challenges faced and support services that were offered. Additionally, the findings indicated a need to promote awareness and resource-seeking behavior among this subpopulation. Pursuing the recommended areas of future research will offer a more inclusive understanding of the factors influencing student-fathers’ academic persistence. This deeper understanding will enable college and government leaders to create more effective strategies to support student-father academic success and beyond.

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Appendix A - Alignment Table

Research Question	Literature Findings	Interview Questions	Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks
RQ1, RQ2	Academic Variables: study habits, advising, absenteeism, major certainty (Contreras-Mendez & Reichlin Cruse, 2021; Green, 2013; McGee, 2023; Preston, 1976; Sallee & Cox, 2019; Women Employed, 2011)	BS3, BS3a, BS7d, BE4, BE5i	Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition
RQ2	Background and Defining Variables: Age, ethnicity, gender, enrollment status (Alfred, 1973; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Bernard, 1981; Dotterer et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Peterson, 2014; Sbrega, 2012; Terenzini et al., 1995)	A1, A2, A3a, A4, A5, A6,	Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition
RQ1, RQ2	Physiological Needs: Food and housing (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Kruger et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2017; The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021; Wahl, 2018)	A7, BE4g, BE5b, BE5h	Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation
RQ1, RQ2	Safety and Security Needs: mental wellness, childcare, transportation, economic security, (Estes, 2011; Hess et al., 2014; Miller, 2010; Peterson, 2014; Shenoy et al., 2016; Zhan & Pandey, 2004)	A7, A8, BS3, BS4, BS5, BS6, BS7, BE4g, BE5	Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation
RQ2	Esteem Needs: Self-worth, accomplishment (Reid, 2013)	BS2, BS8	Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation
RQ2	Motivational Factors	BS1	Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation

	(Estes, 2011; Hess et al., 2014; Lovell, 2014; McClusky, 1970; Wahl, 2018)		
RQ2	Self-Actualization (Colby et al., 2022)	A3, BS9	Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition
RQ1, RQ2	Environmental Variables: Finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities (Bradley, 2013; Grubb and Lazerson, 2004; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Lovell, 2014; Peterson, 2014; Ray et al., 2000)	A5, BS3, BS7, BS8, BE4i, BE5e	Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition
RQ1, RQ2	Social Integration Variables/Social Needs: family relationships, social networks (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010)	A7a, BS7a, BS9, BE5f	Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition
RQ1, RQ2	Resource-seeking Behavior (Lim et al., 2014; Savoie-Roskos et al., 2023)	BE5d, BS7b	Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition

Note. Data collection is formatted into two sections. Part A, Appendix B, Electronic Student-father Participant Intake Form, includes questions to build the student-fathers' demographic profile. Part B, the semi-structured interview questions in Appendix C, Protocol and Interview Questions, focus on developing the institutional employee perceptions and the student-fathers' experience as it relates to academic persistence. In the alignment table, questions are formatted as Part A or B – section of the interviews, Participant E (Employee) or S (Student) Question number in section.

Appendix B - Electronic Student-father Participant Intake Form

Participant Intake Form

An Examination of Academic Persistence of Student Fathers

Full Name *

First Name

Last Name

Phone Number *

E-mail *

example@example.com

Please state your age.

What is your race/ethnicity?

Describe your current educational or career status:

What is your current educational or career goal (for example, certificate, degree, etc.). If you have recently graduated, please indicate your degree or certificate achieved.

Are you currently enrolled part-time (two classes or less) or full-time (three or more classes)?

- ☐ Part-time
☐ Full-time
☐ Graduated within the last year

When did you begin your studies and training at [REDACTED]?

Were you a parent when you began?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Are you currently employed? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what is your occupation?

How many hours do you work per week?

What is your normal work schedule?

Describe your current family information and living situation:

How many children do you have? *

What are the ages of your child(ren)?

	Age
Child 1	
Child 2	
Child 3	

Child 4

Child 5

Child 6

Describe your current living situation:

What is your current relationship status?

☐ Single

☐ In a relationship, not married

☐ Married

☐ Other

If married or in a relationship, does your partner live with you?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not partnered

If you share custody of your child(ren), do you have primary custody?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you share custody of your child(ren), what is the custody schedule?

Childcare Information:

What resources do you utilize to meet your childcare needs? Check all that apply

☐ On-campus childcare

☐ Off-campus licensed childcare facility

☐ Family or friends

☐ Other

Scheduling:

Please indicate best days and times for an interview (i.e. day of the week, evenings, mornings, weekends).

--

Please give reference of any two people whom you feel may be interested in participating in this study:

	Full Name	Address	Contact Number
1			
2			

Submit

Appendix C - Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview for my research study. No identifying names or participants, institutions, or family members will be included in the study. Please know that you may withdraw your consent to participate at any point in the interview.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of Texas community college student-fathers in academic persistence. The findings from this study could provide value to college leadership and policymakers.

The interview is expected to take approximately 45 minutes. I would like to video and audio record this interview. You will have the opportunity to also review this transcript to ensure the accuracy of your responses. All recordings will be kept confidential and in a secure location.

Do you consent to me recording this interview?

Faculty and Staff Semi-structured Interview Questions:

1. Describe your position.
2. How long have you been in higher education and how long have you been at this institution?
3. Can you describe your experience in working with student parents at the community college level?
4. For faculty:
 - a. How do you know that you have student fathers in your classes?
 - b. How do you approach accommodating the needs of student fathers in your classroom?

- c. What proactive measures (if any) do you take to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for student fathers?
 - d. Have you ever had a situation where a student father asked for flexibility with deadlines or attendance due to their family responsibilities? If so, how did you handle it?
 - e. Have you ever received any feedback from student fathers regarding their experiences in your class, specifically relating to being a parent?
 - f. In what ways do you encourage student fathers as they navigate balancing their academic responsibilities with their parenting duties?
 - g. Are you familiar with any resources this institution offers to support student fathers?
 - h. How do you stay informed about current research and best practices in supporting student fathers, and how do you incorporate this knowledge into your work?
 - i. Do you have any advice for a student father interested in or currently working toward earning a degree or certificate at this institution?
5. For staff:
- a. How do you know when you are working with a student father?
 - b. What specific challenges do student fathers typically encounter while pursuing their education, and how does your department or position assist them in overcoming these challenges?
 - c. Can you share examples of programs or initiatives that have been particularly successful in supporting student fathers at this institution?

- d. How do you ensure that student fathers are aware of available resources for academic advising, career counseling, and other support services essential for their success?
- e. How do you ensure that student fathers are aware of financial aid opportunities, scholarships, and other forms of assistance available to them?
- f. How do you encourage on-campus engagement to create a sense of belonging for student fathers?
- g. How do you provide resources and support to help student fathers balance their academic responsibilities with their parenting duties?
- h. How do you address the unique needs of student fathers who may be facing additional challenges such as housing insecurity or food insecurity?
- i. How might an advising session be tailored to support a student father?
- j. What role, if any, might you play in advocating for policies and practices that benefit student fathers, such as flexible scheduling options?
- k. How do you stay informed about current research and best practices in supporting student fathers, and how do you incorporate this knowledge into your work?
- l. How do you collaborate with external stakeholders, such as local childcare providers or government agencies, to enhance support services for student fathers?
- m. How do you measure the effectiveness of your support services for student fathers? Can you provide examples of success stories or testimonials from student fathers who have benefited from the support services provided by your department?

- n. What improvements or enhancements to student father support do you envision for the future?

Student-father Interview Questions

1. Describe your motivation for pursuing a college education.
2. What makes you feel accomplished or successful?
3. How do you think being a father affects your academic performance?
 - a. How does being a student and a father affect your class attendance or your ability to study?
 - b. How do you balance being a student and a father?
 - c. What makes you feel valued as a father who is striving to achieve their educational goals?
4. Security is defined as “freedom from anxiety or fear.” Can you describe what makes you feel secure as a student and as a father?
5. What are your biggest stressors as a college student and father, and how do you manage that stress?
6. How would you describe your economic status? What effect has this had on you as a student and as a father?
7. Other than the on-campus childcare center, tell me about the support and services you utilized as a student father at your institution.
 - a. How often did you use these services?
 - b. How do you feel about reaching out for these services or support?
 - c. Describe how they contributed to you achieving your educational goal.

- d. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many colleges began offering more online courses and additional resources. What impact has this had on your academic journey, if any?
- 8. Who has been your biggest encourager during your academic career?
 - a. Tell me about anyone at the college – faculty, staff, or student – who has influenced your academic journey. Please describe.
 - b. What does being a father mean to you?
 - c. What advice would you give to a new student father enrolling at this college?

Interview Conclusion:

Thank you again for your participation in this interview. I will be in touch in the future to send a transcript of the interview for verification of its accuracy.

Appendix D - Kansas State University IRB Approval and Modification Approval



TO: Margaretta Mathis
Educational Leadership
Manhattan, KS 66506
Proposal Number IRB-11993

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 02/01/2024

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Lived experiences of student fathers in academic persistence at Texas community colleges."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 01/24/2024

EXPIRATION DATE: 01/23/2027

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 02/01/2024 4:35 PM ET

TO: Margaretta Mathis
Educational Leadership
Manhattan, KS 66506

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 04/15/2024

RE: Proposal #IRB-11993, entitled "Lived experiences of student fathers in academic persistence at Texas community colleges."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #IRB-11993, ENTITLED, "Lived experiences of student fathers in academic persistence at Texas community colleges"

EXPIRATION DATE: 01/23/2027

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 04/15/2024 2:50 PM ET

Appendix E - Participating Institution IRB Approval

DocuSign Envelope ID: FF8FD752-F2CB-408E-97A7-77367E774770

<u>4/16/2024</u>		IRB Form #2
Date Submitted	Institutional Review Board	06/2024
		File Number

IRB REVIEW PROTOCOL SUMMARY FORM Application for IRB Approval for Projects not requiring Full Committee Review

Federal Regulations mandate that all human subject protocols receive continuing review and approval **not less than once per year**. In order to comply with this policy on research involving human subjects, sufficient information must be collected to allow the IRB to conduct a review. This application is to be completed when a project does not fall under the guidelines requiring a full IRB completion. If it is determined after review of the following that additional information (or completion of the full IRB packet) is needed, the Chairperson of the IRB will contact the principal investigator. Therefore, in order for the  to comply with this and other directives and to grant continuing approval of your project, the following information is required:

An Examination of Academic Persistence of Student Fathers: A Case Study Analysis of a Texas Community College
Title of Research Project

<u>Lauren McCormick</u>	<u>Kansas State University</u>
Principal Investigator/Project Director	Agency/College/Other

Mailing address/if not BC faculty or staff

<u>979-264-6912</u>	<u>mccormicklau@k-state.edu</u>
Phone Number	Email address

Projected Duration of Research: 6 months months Projected Starting Date: May 1, 2024

Other organizations and/or agencies, if any, involved in the study: N/A

Has this research been approved by another IRB? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If approved by another IRB: Name of IRB Kansas State University Date Approved 4/15/2024

Please provide a brief description of the project, including the method of collection of data and the purpose of the project. If any questionnaires, tests or other instruments are to be used include a brief description and a copy of such instrument (Use back if more room is needed).

This research study will use a case study to seek to understand the fundamental basis of academic persistence of student fathers from multiple perspectives at one Texas community college. Interviews will be held with community college faculty and staff to collect data about their experiences with student fathers in academic persistence. The interviews will include semi-structured questions to guide the discussion, allowing the researcher to ask clarifying questions and adapt the conversation. The researcher will use the data collected from the interviews to conduct two focus groups with three to five student fathers in each focus group. Lastly, the researcher will use public resources to conduct a document analysis of documents pertaining to student father persistence.

- A. This project involves [REDACTED] students
☒ College Student ☒ Faculty ☒ Staff ☐ Administration

Other (describe):

- B. Human Subjects from the following populations will be involved in this study
☐ Minors ☐ High School Students
☒ Elderly ☐ None of the above

C. Total number of subjects to be studied: approximately 19 participants

(Use back if more room is needed for any of the following)

Who will be the research subjects? How will they be solicited or contacted? Include any recruitment letters or other recruitment materials with this document. (See attachment)

What steps will be taken to ensure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What, if any, inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation? (See attachment)

Describe the methods to be used to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained, including plans for publication. (See attachment)

<i>Lauren McCormick</i>		4/16/2024	
Investigator/Project Director Signature		Date	
DocuSigned by:			
Signature of IRB Committee Chair: [REDACTED]		Date: 4/26/2024	
IRB Chair: Check 1 box:		☒ Approved ☐ Approved with Restrictions ☐ Tabled ☐ Disapproved	

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Appendix F - Introductory Email to President

Dear Institution President,

As you may be aware, I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Kansas State University. I am writing to request the participation of [REDACTED] in my research study to better understand the academic persistence of community college student fathers through interviews with selected faculty and staff, focus groups with student fathers, and document analysis.

I plan to interview the following individuals from [REDACTED] e:

- Two to three faculty members who self-identify as having taught student fathers
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] self-identify as having worked with student fathers.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

Each interview will be approximately 45 minutes, audio recorded in a semi-structured format. I have attached an introductory email and informed consent letter to be sent to these individuals requesting their participation in the study.

Additionally, I will hold interviews with 6-10 student fathers. I request the assistance of the director of the [REDACTED] Children's Center, [REDACTED], or the director of student life, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to identify student fathers. Attached is the introduction email to the childcare center

director and the director of student life, as well as the introduction email/informed consent form that will be sent to all participants.

Lastly, I will conduct a document analysis of [REDACTED] strategic plan, website, program documents, and other resources will be performed to compare and contrast interview and focus group findings.

I appreciate your consideration for [REDACTED] employees and students to participate in the study. I will follow up to learn from you how best to proceed and to answer any questions you may have about the study. It is my hope and plan to share the findings with you.

Thank you for your support,

Lauren McCormick

Doctoral Student

Kansas State University

Appendix G - Introductory Email/Informed Consent

Dear Mr./Mrs. _____,

My name is Lauren McCormick, and I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Kansas State University. You have been identified as a potential participant that may contribute to my doctoral research study. As a result, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to better understand the academic persistence of student fathers at [REDACTED]

Study Benefits: I hope that you will agree to participate, as your feedback will be valuable in further understanding the experiences of student fathers working to achieve their educational goals.

Confidentiality and Consent: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may decline or stop participation at any time. Your information will be confidential and anonymous throughout the entire study. To protect confidentiality, you will be identified by an assigned letter and number. There are no penalties or consequences for participating or refusing to participate. Your consent is only for participation in the described study.

Potential Risks: Potential risks may include examining personal or sensitive information in the participant intake form or the interview and invasion of privacy for yourself.. Specific measures are in place to minimize risk for participants, such as having the opportunity to withdraw at any time, confidentiality of information, and ensuring that subjects have the opportunity to review interview transcripts for accuracy.

Potential future use of data: Identifiers might be removed from the identifiable private information, and after removal, the information could be used for future research studies by another investigator for future research studies without additional consent.

Interview structure: By agreeing to participate in this study, you agree to complete a 45-minute in-person, audio-recorded semi-structured interview with me.

Please indicate below if you choose to participate in the study or not.

_____ I have read the above, and I choose to participate in this study by completing an in-person audio-recorded semi-structured interview with the researcher.

_____ I choose not to participate in this study.

If you choose to participate in the study, please print and sign this consent form and reply with a scanned copy of the form and your availability to schedule an interview or provide the best time to discuss your availability.

Participant Signature

Date

If you have any questions, you may contact me, Margaretta Mathis, Principal Investigator, at xxxxx@ksu.edu, or the following representatives from Kansas State University: Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (XXX) XXX-XXXX; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lauren McCormick

Doctoral Student

Kansas State University

XXX-XXX-XXXX

xxxxx@ksu.edu

Appendix H - Introductory Email to Childcare Center Director and Director of Student Life

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

As you may be aware, I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Kansas State University. I would like to invite the students of [REDACTED] to participate in my research study to better understand the academic persistence of student fathers at [REDACTED].

I am seeking your assistance in the identification of student fathers to participate in focus groups. I plan to include at least six student-father participants from [REDACTED] e.

Attached you will find the introduction email with the informed consent form that will be sent to the identified student-fathers. Please let me know if you have any questions about my study or recommendations for the invitation and student-father focus groups.

I appreciate your assistance in identifying student fathers to participate in this study and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your support,

Lauren McCormick

Doctoral Student

Kansas State University

Appendix I - Student-father Recruitment Flyer

Are you a father currently taking classes? Volunteers Needed for Research Study

We're currently looking for fathers who are currently enrolled in classes or are a 2024 graduate from [REDACTED] to participate in a short, hour-long interview to help community colleges better serve you!

**\$25 Amazon
Gift Card for
participation**

Requirements

- 18+ years of age
- Currently enrolled in classes or a 2024 graduate from Brazosport College

If you are interested in participating, scan the QR code or email mccormicklau@ksu.edu



This study is being conducted by a doctoral student at Kansas State University for the betterment of community college student fathers.

Appendix J - Introductory Email/Informed Consent of Student-father Participants

Dear Mr. _____,

My name is Lauren McCormick, and I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Kansas State University. You have been identified as a potential participant that may contribute to my doctoral research study. As a result, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to better understand the academic persistence of student fathers at [REDACTED]

Study Benefits: I hope that you will agree to participate, as your feedback and story will be valuable in further understanding the experiences of student fathers working to achieve their educational goals.

Confidentiality and Consent: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.

You may decline or stop participation at any time. Your information will be confidential and anonymous throughout the entire study. To protect confidentiality, you will be identified by an assigned letter and number. There are no penalties or consequences for participating or refusing to participate. Your consent is only for participation in the described study.

Potential Risks: Potential risks may include examining personal or sensitive information in the participant intake form or the interview and invasion of privacy for yourself or your family. Specific measures are in place to minimize risk for participants, such as having the opportunity to withdraw at any time, confidentiality of information, and ensuring that subjects have the opportunity to review interview transcripts for accuracy.

Potential future use of data: Identifiers might be removed from the identifiable private information, and after removal, the information could be used for future research studies by another investigator for future research studies without additional consent.

Interview structure: By agreeing to participate in this study, you agree to complete a participant intake form and a 60-minute in-person audio-recorded semi-structured interview led by me.

Please indicate below if you choose to participate in the study or not.

_____ I have read the above, and I choose to participate in this study by completing an in-person, audio-recorded semi-structured interview with the researcher.

_____ I choose not to participate in this study.

If you choose to participate in the study, please print and sign this consent form and reply with a scanned copy of the form and your availability to schedule an interview or provide the best time to discuss your availability.

Participant Signature

Date

If you have any questions, you may contact me, Margaretta Mathis, Principal Investigator, at mbmathis1@ksu.edu, or the following representatives from Kansas State University: Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (XXX) XXX-XXXX; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lauren McCormick

Doctoral Student

Kansas State University

XXX-XXX-XXXX

xxxxx@ksu.edu