

FACTORS THAT IMPACT ACHIEVEMENT AND PERSISTENCE
OF STUDENTS IN DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES
RECEIVING PELL GRANTS AT THE RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

PAMELA MICHELLE DAVIS DIETZ

B.S., Friends University, 1992
M.S., Friends University, 2000

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree

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Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2011

Abstract

A growing body of literature suggested that students who come from poverty have potential risk factors that included: being the first in the family to attend a college, being poorly prepared for the academic rigors of college and requiring remedial developmental coursework. Students from poverty who accessed the rural community college also struggled with rising tuition and fees, as well as the cost of books. Students from poverty had greater struggles with social and personal issues and experienced lower completion rates. Limited research has been conducted with this segment of rural students from poverty backgrounds attending community college in the rural setting.

This dissertation described a phenomenological case study approach to identify the impact of poverty on the achievement and persistence of rural students who access the rural community college. A small community college in the Midwest representing a rural population and a high percentage of poverty students was selected as the site for the study.

The goal of this research was to explore perceived factors by students receiving Pell Grants and in developmental courses while in attendance at a rural community college in order to identify possible strategies to ameliorate barriers in their rural community college experience.

The research found this student population to be at high risk with multiple risk factors. In addition to being developmental and receiving Pell Grants, other scholarships combined with working part-time and often full-time were needed to supplement student finances; poor high school academic preparation and counseling; lacked the computer skills necessary for college coursework; being non-traditional; lack of consistency in tutoring services; and being food short and hungry. These additional risk factors made this segment of the student population fragile.

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Approved by:

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Over 43 million Americans live in generational or situational poverty, and millions teeter precipitously around the federally designated poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). “Higher education is no longer just the most direct route to a middle-class life; it has become essentially the only route” (Hunt & Tierney, 2006). Life, for those in poverty, is a struggle to meet the basic daily requirements of sufficient food, shelter, clothing, and freedom from immediate danger, the basics of human need (Maslow, 1970).

One possible pathway to overcome poverty has been education and/or training (Hunt & Tierney, 2006). Even though education may be part of the solution, for millions of these Americans education has been viewed as unattainable. This study examined factors that impact academic achievement and persistence of developmental students qualifying for and receiving Pell Grants at the rural community college.

Participants for the study were selected based on a variety of demographic characteristics to include: culture, age, gender, Pell Grant status, first generation, and need for remediation. This variety in demographic characteristics was to attain maximum variation in the sample...

Background

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that 43.5 million Americans were living in poverty in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Many of those were living in rural areas and many on family farms. The image of the sustainable family farm has changed; fewer than two million of these family farms remain in operation, compared with seven million farms in the 1930s (Nebraska Studies, 2008; World Hunger, 2008). The total percentage of the American labor force engaged in farming continued to hover at 2% and the classification of *farmer* no longer exists in the U.S. Census (Nebraska Studies, 2008; World Hunger, 2008; Carr & Kefalas, 2009).

Farming Crisis

During the 1970s, due to relaxed trade barriers and record purchases of U.S. grains by the Soviet Union, landowners and farmers experienced record high prices for grain, land values skyrocketed, and interest rates soared to all-time highs (Manning, 2008). Farmers invested in advanced machinery, new technologies, and farming practices that allowed more land to be farmed more efficiently, but the cost was high. The basics of farming, fertilizers, seeds, and crop consulting services, also garnered record high prices (Nebraska Studies, 2008). Farming was the most profitable it had been in 30 years (Nebraska Studies, 2008).

In December of 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and President Carter embargoed United States grain to Russia (Heilman, 1980). The embargo collapsed the United States grain markets. Collapse of the markets and the associated crash of livestock markets triggered a sharp drop in land values (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Nebraska Studies, 2008). Combined, these adverse market conditions catapulted the 1980s into the farming crisis. (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Nebraska Studies, 2008). The farming crisis, the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s, served as the catalyst that began forcing farm families to seek supplemental incomes off the farm, to sell land that had been in families for generations, and to sell out to large corporate farming operations. Many mid-western states experienced rising rates of poverty with farm families having annual incomes of less than \$20,000 (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Nebraska Studies, 2008). The federal government estimated that farmland value dropped by nearly 60% in the Midwest between 1981 and 1985 (Manning, 2008). Without sustainable incomes, farm families abandoned the rural areas. Those with college degrees or advanced training found employment in nearby towns, went to work for large farming corporations, or simply moved to the larger urban areas (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). The result of the farming crisis was a rural population decline that eventually forced the consolidation of schools, a decline in local and

governmental services, and the demise of those agriculture support services that formerly created jobs (Nebraska Studies, 2008; Carr & Kefalas, 2009).

In *Hollowing Out the Middle*, Carr and Kefalas (2009) described the plight of those who stayed in the rural communities: they did not attend college, faced stagnating wages, held jobs with no benefits, and coped with downsizing of those industries that remained in rural areas. Not having an education put them at even greater disadvantage as they faced minimum wage employment and uncertain futures. Industries that remained in the rural areas found the community college to be the avenue for job training, credentialing of non-college bound students, and enhancing rural development (Carr & Kefalas, 2009).

Community College

Over the past few years, the community college populations grew dramatically and became a microcosm of society with an increasingly diverse student population more representative of American society than four-year college and university populations (Cohen & Brawer, 1991; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2008). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, community colleges enrolled a diverse group of students, with varying reasons for going to college, and larger percentages of nontraditional, low-income, and minority students than four-year colleges and universities (2008).

Community college populations represented 44% of all undergraduates and 49% of first-time-in-college students, and included many minority students, those with low socioeconomic status, and non-traditional age students who frequently entered college less academically prepared than traditional students (Phillippe, 1995). NCES (2008) found there were 1,045 community colleges in the United States in 2006–07, enrolling 6.2 million students or 35% of all postsecondary students enrolled that academic year. An NCES report on first-generation

students (Chen, 2005) found that in addition to financial hardship, students from poverty backgrounds were more likely to be the first in the family to attend post-secondary education, to be under-prepared for college study, and to need remediation. First-generation students who entered college without solid high school preparation tended to earn lower grades and were less likely to persist. In addition, the 2005 study reported 43% of first-generation students left college with no degree, whereas students whose parents were college graduates persisted to earn degrees at a rate of 68% (Chen, 2005).

Of this same group, 50% of first generation students took remedial courses, with mathematics being the area of highest need. Starting college with academic deficiencies slowed students' degree track, which contributed to the dropout rate. Students who were on track after their first year were much more likely to graduate than those slowed with academic deficiencies (Chen, 2005).

Community colleges are as diverse as the students they enroll, serving rural and urban populations both large and small. For classification of colleges, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2010) categorizes colleges by enrollments, as shown in Table 1. They used this classification system because, by nature and mission, community colleges generally serve distinctly defined areas (Carnegie, 2010). The community college studied would be classified by Carnegie as a small 2-year institution.

Table 1 Carnegie Classifications of 2-Year Colleges

Very Small 2-year	FTE enrollment of fewer than 500
Small 2-year	FTE enrollment of 500-1,999
Medium 2-year	FTE enrollment of 2,000-4,999
Large 2-year	FTE enrollment of 5,000 – 9,999

Note. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (2010). *Classification description: Size and setting.* Retrieved from http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/size_setting.php?key=790

Poverty and the Community College

As the problem of poverty increased nationwide, a growing segment of the community college student body also suffered from two distinct types of poverty: generational and situational (Payne & Ehlig, 2005). Individuals caught in generational poverty usually take at least two generations to transition upward into the middle class. Once established in the culture of poverty, the climate of poverty adversely affected thinking and learning, making any transition to the middle class very difficult (Payne & Ehlig, 2005). On the other hand, situational poverty reflected a temporary reduction in resources due to obstacles such as divorce, death, or illness. The mindset of the person remained consistent with middle class norms and values (Payne & Ehlig, 2005), thereby having less impact on the individual.

The dictionary defines poverty as “an economic condition lacking both money and basic necessities to successfully live, such as food, water, education, and shelter; the economic condition of lacking predictable and stable means of meeting basic life needs” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 2002, p. 378). For the purpose of this study, the term poverty was used in relation to criteria needed to qualify for Federal Pell Grant financial aid assistance. There has been little controversy that poverty is oppressive and that poverty creates a not-so-subtle class system between the haves and the have-nots in American society. One possible pathway to

overcome poverty has been through education or training (Payne & Ehlig, 2005). Payne and Ehlig (2005) state, “The fundamental reasons for poverty have been lack of educational attainment and disconnection with family and/or community” (p. 5). Poverty brings with it an oppressive impact on individuals, perpetuating their perceptions of having no control over their situation and a reality of not being able to have a vision for a better future for themselves or their families (Payne & Ehlig, 2005).

During the time the community college was emerging as a force for social change, adult education was also grappling with the ideas of social justice and education. Specifically, Paulo Freire and Myles Horton were making their mark with education for social justice equality and a means to eradicate poverty (Horton & Freire, 1990). Freire and Horton both came from backgrounds of poverty as children (Horton & Freire, 1990). Freire lived in Brazil, where the national economic crisis of 1929 plunged his middle class family into poverty. Horton’s parents were teachers who became impoverished and worked as sharecroppers in Tennessee (Horton & Freire, 1990).

Paulo Freire’s philosophy embraced the concept that even illiterate people can become conscious of their oppression, and subsequently, through education and literacy come to reflect on these oppressive forces, and then be empowered as agents for change. He calls this act of putting knowledge into action “praxis,” which means reflection and action (Freire, 1993).

During the Great Depression of 1932, Myles Horton, the founder of the Tennessee Highlander Folk School, like Freire, believed in education’s impact for creating social justice. He believed that education should be grounded in the experiences of the learner, thereby forcing the student to question beliefs about their lives and their social systems (Horton & Freire, 1990). Students would form learning circles where experiences would be shared, questions would come

forward, and discussions could lead to answers and new thought. From these educational experiences, students could become agents of social change in their communities (Horton & Freire, 1990). Freire and Horton, visionary educators, strongly believed in education for empowerment, social justice, and change. As adult education focused on the needs of individuals in communities, the focus of the community became more aligned to this adult education perspective.

Community College Beginnings

Cohen and Brawer, in their 1989 book *The American Community College*, stated “Public supported universities, given impetus by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, had been established in every state. Many of them were agricultural institutes or teacher-training colleges, and provided a lower-cost alternative to private colleges” (p. 2). As demand grew for educational institutions that were more “suited to the ever-changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the entire community” (p. 4) the junior college was established. In 1917 Kansas Law allowed local elections to establish junior colleges with special taxing districts to support them (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). By 1922, 37 of the then-48 states established junior colleges, and by 1950 there were 450 in all the states (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). Enacted in 1965, the Community College Act, originally known as Kansas House Bill 893, made it possible for the creation of a uniform system of community colleges, not to exceed 22 colleges in Kansas (Garden City Community College, 2011). Today there are 19 community colleges in Kansas (Kansas State Department of Education, 2011). All Kansas *junior college* institutions began their first fiscal year on July 1, 1965 with the new moniker of *community colleges*. Community colleges reached out to serve “those who could not afford the tuition; take time to attend on a full-time basis; and whose ethnic background constrained them from participating” at the university level (Cohen &

Brawer, 1989, p. 22). Standing clearly outside of university tradition, the community colleges developed a mission to serve people with access, occupational efficiency, civic and social responsibility, and recreational and esthetic aspects of life (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). In the tradition of Freire and Horton, community colleges opened avenues of education and training for individuals, thereby enhancing social mobility, a characteristic of the American dream. Community colleges promoted the challenge and idealism that society can be better, just as individuals can better themselves within society and become agents of change (Cohen & Brawer, 1991).

Financial Aid

The community college mission to serve rural and poor residents with a quality education and/or training was also recognized by the United States Department of Education and Senator Claiborne Pell from Rhode Island (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Due to Pell's efforts as a senator the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant was put forth with governance and regulation by the Higher Education Act of 1965. The grant was dubbed the "Pell Grant" in his honor. The intention of the Federal Pell Grant Program was to provide need-based grants to low-income undergraduate students, thereby promoting their access to postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Demonstrated financial need is determined by the U.S. Department of Education from information gathered with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, otherwise known as FAFSA (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The determination for aid can then be calculated from the expected family contribution (EFC) to the student's education costs. Taken into account are factors of income, family size, cost of enrollment, and the number of credits a

student anticipates taking, which determines full-time or part-time status (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

In addition to the FAFSA application, the student must have earned their high school diploma or a GED, be a U.S. citizen or an eligible non-citizen, and show the skills needed to succeed within one of the approved colleges or vocational schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The Pell Grant was available to students seeking their first bachelor's or professional degree. For 2010-2011, the maximum Pell grant was \$5,500 and did not have to be repaid (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Data on Pell Grant Programs at community colleges (Baime & Mullin, 2011), low-income students' eligibility for financial aid (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003, 2011), and students' immediate postsecondary enrollment status and persistence (NCES, Special Supplement on Community Colleges, 2008) was examined by the researcher. Data regarding the need for remediation of first-generation students has also been studied in a special publication entitled *First-generation Students in Postsecondary Education* (NCES, 2005).

However, there has been limited research on factors that impact achievement and persistence of students in developmental courses, and the available research was found to not be in relation to those students receiving Pell grants at the rural community college. There has also been little research specific to the problem of rurally situated students from poor families and the students' attendance at the rural community college. Without understanding this specific group of students being studied, rural community college administration and student services staff are unlikely to be prepared to meet the needs of this unique population with programs and services.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to advance understanding, through an exploration of students' experiences during their community college attendance, and to examine factors that impact persistence and achievement of developmental students receiving Pell Grants at the rural community college.

Research Questions

The research questions and sub-questions that guided this study were:

- What factors impacted the academic persistence of Pell Grant recipients in developmental classes at a rural community college?
 - Did financial issues impact student persistence and achievement?
 - Did family support or lack of support impact student persistence and achievement?
 - Did local community circumstances impact student persistence and achievement?
- What factors impacted the achievement of Pell Grant recipients in developmental classes at a rural community college?
 - Did past academic preparation impact student persistence and achievement in the rural community college?
 - Did rural community college support or lack of support impact student persistence and achievement?

Methodology

Type of Methodology

This study used qualitative phenomenological methodology which examined participant narratives of perceptions of factors that impacted persistence and achievement during their attendance at a rural community college; these students were also Pell Grant recipients who had or were participating in at least one developmental course. This type of qualitative study was chosen to examine the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon in a real life setting (Creswell, 2007). Little research was available concerning rural students from poverty backgrounds as they accessed the rural community college, therefore this research was an exploration of this phenomenon. The literature review also revealed that although segments of this population have been studied, the rural students receiving Pell grants in relation to the rural community college had not been adequately examined. It was appropriate to use a qualitative methodology in this context to further gain insight and to gain understanding of this population and their lived experiences (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2007; Berg, 2004) as little research existed about the specific population.

Population

The population used in this study consisted of students in developmental courses and receiving a Pell Grant at a small, mid-western, rural, public community college located in south central Kansas.

Sample

A purposeful sample of ten participants who received Pell Grants and were taking at least one developmental course was chosen from those currently enrolled at the community college (Creswell, 2007). Saturation was achieved at eight, but two additional participants were

interviewed to achieve a more diverse sample. An attempt was made to include participants who varied on the following characteristics: culture, age, and gender.

Procedures

The method used for collecting initial data was a demographic instrument administered to students in developmental courses (Appendix A). Students had equal opportunity to fill out the demographic collection instrument and to volunteer to further participate in the research project. From this instrument and the demographic information gathered, four students were asked to volunteer for a focus group. The focus group was used to test interview questions for depth and clarity, to identify any new themes that needed to be addressed, and to reveal any issues with the interview protocol (Creswell, 2007). Two students were purposefully selected and invited to and agreed to participate in a pilot study. The pilot study was used to ensure both research questions and subject responses were clearly understood (Creswell, 2007). Ten students were purposefully selected and asked to volunteer for the semi-structured interview process (Creswell, 2007; Polkington, 1989). Informed Consent forms were signed and interviews were conducted in the Learning Resource Center, a place with which participants were familiar and comfortable, and that offered privacy. Participants understood that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, and were analyzed by the researcher with results reported in chapter four.

The researcher used field notes (Berg, 2004) and journal entries, as well as member checking (Creswell, 2007). Field notes were the researcher's observations of reactions during the interviews, including but not limited to participant body language and unexpected responses or reactions to the interview questions. Researcher journaling recorded any new discoveries,

additional relevant questions, or issues that surfaced during the process (Creswell, 2007). Each participant received an individual transcript by e-mail and was asked to confirm the accuracy of his or her responses during the interview (Stake, 1995). None of the participants were duplicated from group to group, and each participant received a \$25 gift card for participating.

Limitations

The following limitations were identified for this study:

- The small rural community college setting limited the ability to generalize the research findings to a community college campus of a larger size or to a community college in a more urban setting.
- The community college student population was one of resident, commuter, traditional, non-traditional, in-state, out-of-state, international, and varying permutations of those demographics. While seeking maximum variation in the purposeful sample, it was not possible to represent all perspectives of this widely varied population.
- Absolute elimination of researcher perspective was not achievable; however, a journaling process for self-checking minimized personal bias to the maximum extent possible.

Assumptions

The following assumptions framed this qualitative phenomenological study:

- The participants were truthful in recounting their experiences and perceptions.
- Participants came from diverse cultures and values, and had diverse expectations.
- Interviewees described challenges in relation to attending the rural community college and to attaining a degree or certificate.

Definition of Terms

Culture. For the purpose of this study the term *culture* was used on the demographic collection instrument for the sole purpose of determination of race. There was no attempt to determine through the instrument to ascertain or to define factors of race or lived experiences at home, work, or educational venues or to determine marginality in any way.

Debt load. The level of hardship a recent graduate experiences repaying student loans.

Developmental Courses. Courses designed for students whose basic skills demonstrate need for remediation and need being determined by standardized testing procedures and scores recommended by ACT, ACT COMPASS, or ASSET.

FAFSA. The acronym for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. A student and the family must fill out this free application in order to apply for the Federal Pell Grant or for student loans (Free Application for Federal Student Aid [FAFSA], 2008).

Farming Crisis. The 1970s and 1980s when farmers could no longer stay in business (Nebraska Studies, 2008).

Federal Pell Grant. Educational grant that does not have to be repaid. All students meeting certain Federal criteria are guaranteed aid, with the amount of aid determined by financial need, enrollment level, expected family contribution, and educational cost (FAFSA, 2010).

First Generation. Students who are the first in their families to attend an institution of higher education - more strictly refers to students whose parents have attained education at or below the high school level (Glossary of Education, 2011).

Generational Poverty. Taking at least two generations to transition from poverty into the middle class (Payne & Ehlig, 2005).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Need. A model developed by Abraham Maslow in which basic, low-level needs such as physiological requirements and safety must be satisfied before higher-level needs such as self-fulfillment are attained (Maslow, 1970).

Persistence. A student's postsecondary education continuation behavior that leads to graduation, a degree or certificate, and were still enrolled or had transferred to another institution at the same or higher level (Arnold, 1999).

Persistent poverty. The social well-being of a relatively large number of people is impoverished (Payne & Ehlig, 2005).

Poverty. For the purposes of this study, poverty was used in the context of those students who met federally defined guidelines to determine eligibility for a Pell Grant. Demonstrated financial need was calculated by the U.S. Department of Education from information gathered with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA, 2010).

Rural. Relating to living in the country; rustic (Webster's New World Dictionary, 2002, p. 423).

Situational Poverty. Resources are temporarily reduced due to divorce, death, or illness. The mindset of the person remains with the middle class norms and values (Payne & Ehlig, 2005).

Analysis

Data analysis used to record the participants' responses and identify recurrent themes began with the first interview. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and examined for themes, patterns, or similarities that emerged (Creswell, 2007). The researcher kept field notes and journal entries. The researcher and a peer reviewer identified the consistency of themes using an Excel spreadsheet which allowed for sorting and categorizing. This ability to sort

allowed the researcher to rapidly identify recurrent patterns and themes, as well as to identify new themes that emerged. These methods of triangulation during the study with the focus group, pilot study, and individual semi-structured interviews assured the accuracy of the information, increased the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, and cross-referenced participant perspectives with field notes and researcher journaling (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995).

Protection of Human Rights

This research was conducted in compliance with Kansas State University policy for research with human subjects. Permission to conduct research on human subjects was received April 7, 2011 (See Appendix B).

The president of the selected community college granted access to this student population. The president was presented an overview for the study and signed an agreement to allow the researcher to complete the study (See Appendix C).

Summary

This chapter provided the background for the inquiry into the factors that impacted the persistence and achievement of developmental students receiving a Pell Grant at the rural community college. Students at a small mid-western community college described their experiences while in attendance at the community college, and the effect support systems, a Pell Grant, and developmental coursework had on their persistence and achievement.

Research has been conducted with community college students who were in need of remediation and enrolled in developmental courses (Chen, 2005). Research has also been reported for first-generation students in need of remediation (Chen, 2005). Postsecondary enrollment status and persistence have also been studied (NCES, Special Supplement, 2008).

Data has been collected on Pell Grant Programs at community colleges (Baime & Mullin, 2011), and low-income students' eligibility for financial aid (NCES, 2003, 2011). There was little research available that examined the effects of poverty, the need for Pell grant assistance, and the need for remediation of the rural community college student. This research could assist the field of student services and its practitioners in having more extensive knowledge of these students' experiences at the rural community college and the particular combination of factors that are barriers to their persistence and achievement. The literature of adult education could be enhanced for educating practitioners who work with this particular high-risk population in the rural community college setting.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

In his first political announcement in New Salem, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln affirmed the importance of education. “I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in. That every man may receive at least, a moderate education” (Abraham Lincoln Online, 2011, para. 9).

Students from poverty are challenged with rising costs of tuition and stagnating federal financial aid; some of these students live in rural areas. Achievement of the “moderate education” for these students could be a difficult, if not unachievable dream. With these negative conditions, the challenge for educators becomes how to improve access to postsecondary education and to increase success rates among rurally situated students who come from poverty. This literature review specifically addressed: rural poverty, first generation students attending college, need for remediation among this group, and affordability of higher education for those from poverty backgrounds.

Poverty

John Edwards stated that “Poverty is America’s great moral challenge in our time, and it will take all of us to meet it. This is a problem that requires the will and commitment of all of us, working as voters, as citizens, and as neighbors. It requires us to make demands of our leaders and ourselves” (Edwards, Crain & Kalleberg, 2007). Dean Jolliffe, in 2002, defined poverty as “An individual with total income less than an amount deemed to be sufficient to purchase basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, and other essential goods and services is classified as poor” (p. 74-77). The Glossary of Research Economics (Meyer, 2005) defined poverty as the state of living in a family with income below the federally defined poverty line. The official poverty measure was established using a formula devised by Margaret Orshanksy, an employee of the

Office of Management and Budget (Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 1978). The OMB officially adopted the formula in its Statistical Policy Directive No.14. Orshansky's definition of absolute poverty was the threshold below which families or individuals are considered to be lacking in the resources to meet the basic needs for healthy living: having insufficient income to provide the food shelter and clothing needed to preserve health (OMB, 1978). There can be three criteria for poverty: (a) material need such as daily food, clothing, shelter, health care; (b) social need including social exclusion, dependency, ability to participate in society that includes education and information; and (c) monetary need, which is simply the lack of sufficient income or wealth (Payne & Ehlig, 2005).

The Office of Management and Budget annually establishes a set of household income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine poverty. If a family's total income is less than the threshold, that family is in poverty. The official poverty threshold looks at pre-tax income and does not include capital gains or non-cash benefits such as Medicaid, food stamps or public housing (Bishaw and Stern, 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). The poverty threshold in 2003 for four persons in a family unit was \$18,880. By comparison, in 2011 the Federal Register published a poverty threshold for four persons in a family unit at \$22,350 (Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia, 2003; 2011). The 2011 poverty guidelines set by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services are shown in detail in Table 2.

Table 2

Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines 2011

Persons in Family	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$10,890	\$13,600	\$12,540
2	\$14,710	\$18,380	\$16,930
3	\$18,530	\$23,160	\$21,320
4	\$22,350	\$27,940	\$25,710
5	\$26,170	\$32,720	\$30,100
6	\$29,990	\$37,500	\$34,490
7	\$33,810	\$42,280	\$38,880
8	\$37,630	\$47,060	\$43,270
For each additional person, add	\$3,820	\$4,780	\$4,390

Note. Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia. 76 Fed. Reg. p. 3637 (January 20, 2011).

There are two types of poverty, situational and generational. Situational poverty exists when resources are temporarily reduced due to factors such as divorce, death, or illness – but the mindset of the person remains with the middle class norms and values (Payne, 2005; Payne & Ehlig, 2005). Generational poverty was described as being at least two generations away from middle class; i.e., it would take a person in generational poverty at least two generations to reach a middle class level. Once a person becomes established in the culture of poverty, the climate of poverty adversely affects thinking and learning, making any transition back to the middle class very difficult (Payne, 2005; Payne & Ehlig, 2005).

In 2000, the United States had the highest rate of poverty (11.3%) among all the developed nations (McCabe, 2000). Child poverty that same year was 39% and skyrocketed to

42% in 2009 (Kids Count Data Book, 2011). Poverty continues to be a growing issue in the United States with 37 million people classified as being in poverty (Edwards & Biden, 2008). Poverty was also an issue in Kansas. The 2011 Kids Count Data Book research reported that in the year 2009, 18% of children under 18 years of age lived below the poverty line, an increase of 50% from the year 2000 (2011). In Kansas 200,000 people, one-third of them children, received emergency food through food banks (Kansas Food Bank, 2011).

Rural Poverty

Gillet-Karam (1995), in an article for *New Directions for Community Colleges* found that economists reported the proportion of the rural population who lived in poverty was significantly higher than in urban areas and that those living in the most desperate poverty were the rural poor -- primarily women, children, the aged, and minorities. Not only were jobs more scarce in the rural areas but the salaries were disproportionately low.

The path out of poverty through education was and is strewn with obstacles; lack of transportation and quality child care in the rural areas were the top two barriers for women and minorities (Gillett-Karam, 1995; Kasworm, Polson & Fishback, 2002). The next largest obstacle for success was the lack of jobs paying a living wage in the rural communities (Gillett-Karam, 1995; Kasworm et. al., 2002), and the lack of non-farm related employment opportunities (Offut & Gunderson, 2005).

According to Farm Aid Organization (2007), rural areas tended to have higher rates of generational poverty at 23%, while 55% of rural children in female-headed households were living in poverty in 1997. Rural families were more likely to be working and still be poor. In 1995, 60% of poor rural families worked some time during the year and 24% worked full-time (USDA, 2005). The Rural Policy Research Institute (1999) compared urban to rural

communities and determined five distinct differences: (a) higher poverty levels, (b) greater underemployment, (c) lower education levels, (d) lower incomes, and (e) longer distances between home, childcare, and work sites (1998). U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (2007) uses three standards to categorize low-income farm households: (a) the Census Bureau poverty line, (b) USDA's definition of limited resource farmers, and (c) ERS definition of low-income/low wealth farmers. Income levels for farm families can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Definitions of Low-Income/Low-Wealth Farmers

Concept	Definition 2003	Farm Poverty 2003
Poverty Line/Census Bureau	Annual household income less than \$18,600 for a family of four	14% (289,000 farm households)
Limited Resource Farmer/USDA	Direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than \$106,400 in each of the previous 2 years and a total household income at or below the Census Bureau national poverty line for a family of four or less than 50%	11% (230,000 farm households)
Low income/low wealth farmer	Annual income and wealth below median levels for U.S. households, \$44,000 and 90,000 respectively	5% (103,000 farm households)

Note. Definitions applied to farm and household data from USDA's 2003 Agricultural Resource Management Survey. Cited by Offut, S. & Gunderson, C. (2005). Farm Poverty Lowest in U.S. History. *Amber Waves*, September 2005, 20-27. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/September05/pdf/FeaturePovertySeptember2005.pdf>

Significance of Rural Poverty

The term rural evokes images of the family farm, robust rurally-supported communities, small but quality rural schools, and families with sustainable incomes. However, the Rural Policy Research Institute (1999) reported that only 10% of Americans lived on farms and rural persons who relied on farming for income constituted 7% of the U.S. population. The term

family farm disappeared with the farming crisis of the 1980s when United States agriculture policies promoted large corporate farms (Manning, 2008). Corporate farms were designed to stall overproduction, but in the wake of these policies, small family farms could not compete and were forced out of the market. Farms went into bankruptcy and/or land was sold to the larger corporate farm (World Hunger, 2008).

In place of the family farm that produced sustainable family incomes, very large and often corporate farming operations posted net incomes in excess of \$250,000. The Farm Aid Organization (2007) reported that in the 1930s there were close to 7 million farms in the United States and at the turn of the 21st century, 5.9 million people lived or worked on 2.1 million farms, which represented 2% of the total U.S. population (Farm Aid Organization, 2007). Only 20% of rural U.S. counties depended on agriculture for more than 15% of earnings (Whitener & Parker, 2007). The farmers who remained represented less than 2% of the population and “farmers” as a occupational category was no longer part of the United States Census (World Hunger, 2008). Of those who remained on the farm, roughly 565,000 were family operations, farming just over 44% of total farmland. In 2007, Farm Aid Organization estimated that 330 farm operators left their land every week. Farmers who stayed on the land were often faced with being forced to work off the farm (Farm Aid Organization, 2007). The USDA Economic Research Service (2005) predicted in 2004 that 98% of farm operator incomes came from off-farm sources; even though there was a large percentage of off-farm income, for many poor farmers, farm income remained negative. In 2003 almost 60% of all limited-resource households with positive household income had a loss from farming. Only 7% of U.S. families reported having 100% farm income (USDA Economic Research Service, 2010).

Poverty in Rural Kansas

The Rural Assistance Center (2009) reported per capita income for a rural resident was \$27,765 compared to per capita income of \$32,866 for Kansas as a whole. VanDyke wrote in an article for The Kansas City Business Journal,

Kansas' poverty rate increased to 13.4% in 2009, up 2.1 percentage points from the year before. The U.S. poverty rate, on the other hand, rose 1.1 percentage points from 2008 to 14.3% last year. Nearly 43 million Americans lived in poverty in 2009. Those below 50% of the federal poverty level also outpaced the nation from 2008 to 2009. The extreme poverty rate increased 1.1 percentage points from 2008; the rate for the nation as a whole increased 0.7 percentage points.

There were 153,756 Kansans, or 5%, living in extreme poverty in 2009. In addition, the increase in Kansas' child poverty rate nearly doubled that of the United States. Kansas' rate increased from 14% in 2008 to 17.2% in 2009, putting the number of Kansas children living in poverty at 118,029 in 2009" (2010, p. 1).

Poverty and Rural Employment and Training

Rurality assumes that people live at a distance from a metropolitan area. The rural poor faced numerous barriers to meeting the requirements of welfare-to-work programs: transportation to better jobs was non-existent, access to quality child-care was severely limited, and educational and training opportunities were scarce (Weber, 2000). Welfare reform and federal regulations encouraged recipients to work -- and to receive work-related training -- based on the assumption that jobs were available. The programs fell short in addressing the reality that rural area jobs typically only paid minimum wage, had fewer full-time jobs available -- even for those who received required training, -- and that many hourly jobs were tied to seasonal crop

production. Between 1992 and 1997, labor force participation among the poor increased by 8% in urban areas, and 4% in suburban areas, but did not change in rural areas (Rural Policy Research Institute, 1999). Jobs could be found, but jobs that paid a wage that would take a family off public assistance and provide reasonable benefits such as health insurance remained scarce. Government jobs in rural areas were often the large employers: school systems, departments of transportation, U.S. Postal Service, law enforcement, and county and state jobs (Harvey & Summers, 2000). The majority of these positions, however, assumed that the labor market had received training and/or higher education. Adults, in general, attend college to meet work requirements, for professional advancement, or to achieve personal goals in order to secure the future for themselves and their families (Kasworm et. al., 2002; Wlodkowski, 2008). However, the rural adult often struggled just to find a job that could keep them and their families off the welfare rolls. The rural community college addressed the need for access to adult education and retraining programs. However, because community colleges generally serve distinctly defined areas, adults found themselves with few choices of where and when to take coursework, and limited choices in the available coursework/training (Kasworm et al., 2002).

Poverty and Rural Women

Rural poverty, family responsibilities, and lack of sustainable work are all difficult life situations. Compounded by marital breakups, disparity in earning power, and few educational opportunities, and rural women became distinctly disenfranchised (Kasworm et. al., 2002). A congressional research briefing on welfare reform and rural poverty found that over one-third of working rural female heads of households were in poverty (Weber, 2000). Rural women needing access to training and/or higher education self-reported that marital breakups were often the precipitating factors to their need for employment (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule,

1986; Kasworm et al., 2002); Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). Dean Jolliffe (2002) that “Female-headed, non-metro families experienced widespread poverty in 2000 – more than one in three persons who lived in a non-metro family headed by a woman was poor, and single women living in non-metro areas had a poverty rate of 29%” (pp. 74-77). The Economic Research Service reported in 2009 that 40.6% of persons living in female-headed households were poor -- nearly one out of every two (ERS, 2009). John Iceland stated in his 2006 book *Poverty in America*, “Women have higher poverty rates than men. Women generally have fewer economic resources, are more predominately heads of single parent families, are more in minority status, and subject to more labor market and wage discrimination” (p. 89). If this were generally true, then fewer training opportunities and a subsequent lack of living-wage employment were available to women in rural areas.

Additional barriers to the education of women include lack of public transportation (buying and maintaining a car can be expensive or unattainable), limited licensed child care services and health care, and inadequate housing (Belenkey, et al., 1986; Kasworm et al., 2002) and lack of full-time employment opportunities for rural women (Harvey & Summers, 2000; Rural Policy Research Institute, 1999; Ward & Turner, 2006). Rural single mothers with low education were most likely to depend on public welfare. Education and training, essential for successful employment, will ultimately remove the reliance on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families for future economic sustainability. The single most important predictor for sustainable employment is education; the odds of employment are reduced by more than one-third for women with less than a high school education (Ward & Turner, 2006a).

There has been little research on issues related to rural women in the world of work (Martinez-Brawley, & Durbin, 1987). In the field of social science research, the major research

authors and research subjects have been men (Belenkey, et al., 1986). Research is desperately needed and vitally important to overcoming poverty for women. Dujon and Withorn (1996) that “Education is the key ingredient in women’s struggles to survive. Without a college degree, women stand little chance of finding jobs that pay enough for them to support their families alone” and Ruby Manikan (1985) said “If you educate a man, you educate one person: If you educate a woman, you educate a family.”

For working women in general, the U.S. Department of Labor (2007) reported that women earned 77% as much as men for the same work. This disparity in earning power further disenfranchised poor women in rural areas. It would help ameliorate the plight of rural women in poverty if policies could be amended to: (a) increase the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation, (b) provide child care assistance for those seeking job training or post-secondary education, (c) increase health care coverage for low-wage families, and (d) establish a method to reward those who take jobs/volunteer for community service (Weber, 2000). Obama and Biden, in their 2007 Plan to Put College Within Reach, supported an American Opportunity tax credit that would “assure the first \$4000 of a college education is free for most Americans, and will cover two-thirds the cost of tuition at the average public college or university... recipients of this tax credit would be required to give 100 hours of public service a year, either during the school year or over the summer months” (p. 1).

A report issued by the American Association of Community Colleges found that 57% of students enrolled in community colleges nationally were women (Nomi, 1998) and 61% earned associate degrees (NCES 2010). NCES (2010) reported that by 2008 the number of associate degrees conferred to women had risen to over 62%). More women were aware of the need for education and/or training as evidenced by a 2010 NCES report: in 1973 approximately 15% of

female high school completers enrolled in a two-year college immediately following high school completion. By 2008 that percentage had doubled to 31%.

Although the Pell Grant, currently available to qualified low income students, President Obama planned to introduce *A Dream Come True*, a bill specifically to assist single women/mothers in obtaining education and training. If passed, this bill would open up opportunities to help more than 250,000 single mothers/women complete their school studies and even earn college degrees with the support of federal financial aid (Sigmore, 2010).

Poverty, Diversity, and Participation in Higher Educations

U.S. Government Accountability Office (2008) reported that gains were being made in initial college enrollments by minority groups. Over the last 12 years two-year colleges attracted a majority of minority college enrollments: 60% of all Hispanics, and 50% of Asian/Pacific Islander, Alaskan Native, and Black students. White/non-Hispanic students attended two-year schools at the rate of 43% (GAO, 2008). Levine and Nidiffer (1996) that “The traditional path to economic mobility in the United States for the poor – education -- is becoming less accessible” (p. 6). The National Center for Education Statistics found that low income students, by the October after completing high school, participated in higher education at a lower rate than those students from middle and high incomes. In 2001, 43.8% of low income students enrolled in college immediately after graduation. Middle-income graduates enrolled at a rate of 56.5%, and high income graduates enrolled at a rate of 79.8% (NCES, 2003). The same report considered low income to be the bottom 20% of all family incomes, high income to be in the top 20% of all family incomes, and the middle income to be the 60% in between. Opportunities for higher education in America remained unevenly distributed and failed to accurately reflect the distribution of talent in American society. Hunt and Tierney found that not all young people

capable of entering college come from households that can afford an education, and this was particularly true for minority groups. For example, in 2006, 60% of Hispanic and black families earned less than \$42,000 a year and more than one-third of Hispanic and black families had annual incomes below \$25,000 (Hunt & Tierney, 2006). Between 2001 and 2010, two million academically qualified students did not go to college because they could not afford it (Obama, 2007). The net price of two-year college attendance, calculated as an estimate of the cash outlay that students and their families need to make in a given year to cover educational expenses. Net price is calculated as the total price of attendance including loans, minus grants (NCES, 2010). For the 1999-2000 academic year, the price of attending a public two-year institution for a low-income family was \$7600. In 2007-2008 that price rose to \$7,800. This was a small increase primarily due to increases in the Federal Pell Grant (NCES, 2010). For a low-income family of four, the poverty income threshold was \$22,350 (Poverty Guidelines, 2011). It is evident that the \$7,800 price tag makes attendance difficult if not impossible for those at the poverty threshold to afford two-year college attendance. A typical student from poverty must work and go to school, often only part-time. In 1990, 81% of part-time students were employed and 25% of those worked 20-34 hours per week. In 2005, 82% were employed and 26% were working 20-34 hours per week (NCES, 2010).

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that 25- to 29-year-olds who completed at least some college showed overall gains for completion, from 33.9% in 1971 to 58% in 2007 (NCES, 2007). Table 4 illustrates college participation gains across ethnic lines from 1971 to 2009. Black percentages improved from 18.15% in 1971 to 53.4% in 2009; Hispanic percentages improved from 14.7% to 34.5%, while white percentages improved from 36.7% to 68.1% during the same time period (NCES 2005, 2010).

Table 4

Individuals Aged 25-29 Who Completed Some College

Age and Ethnicity	1971	2003	2006	2007	2009
25-29 yrs/w some college	33.90%	57.40%	57.80%	58.00%	59.90%
Blacks	18.10%	51.20%	49.95%	50.00%	53.4.0%
Hispanics	14.70%	31.10%	31.70%	34.00%	34.50%
Whites	36.70%	65.60%	66.30%	66.00%	68.10%

Note: National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *The condition of education 2005*. (NCES 2005-094). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, pp. 160, 211; National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *The condition of education 2007*. (NCES 2007-064). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, p.175; National Center for Education Statistics (2008). *The condition of education 2008*. (NCES 2008-031). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, p.40; National Center for Education Statistics (2010). *The condition of education 2010* (NCES 2010-028). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 214-215.

“Only 12% of Hispanics and 16% of African Americans eventually earned a bachelor’s degree compared with 33% of White students and cost of college and ability to pay is a factor in this disparity” (Obama, 2007). Black and Hispanic ethnic groups appeared to be in the most desperate need of higher education and training, but were the least likely to enroll and graduate, and would, due to poverty, require the most financial aid (NCES, 2008). Orshansky, the originator of the first Federal Government poverty thresholds, stated in the 1963 Social Security Bulletin that the gap between those in poverty and those in middle class continues to grow and severely limits access to higher education by those in poverty (Fisher, 1992).

Poverty and Preparation for Higher Education

One of the first indicators of being on the path out of poverty could be high school graduation (Payne & Ehlig 2005). High school graduation rate gains are being made, but more progress is needed. The percentage nationally of all 25- to 29-year-olds who earned a high

school diploma or equivalent was 87% in 2007, and the high school completion rate has remained between 85% and 88% over the last 30 years (NCES, 2010). The Kansas Department of Education reported completion rates of 87.6% for 2002-03 and 89.1% for 2003-04 (Kansas State Department of Education, 2011). The Kansas graduation rate for 2009 was 86% for all ethnic groups (Kansas Department of Education, 2011). While overall graduation rates seem consistent, disparity in graduation rates was seen in regards to geography. The Rural Assistance Center (RAC, 2008) reported that 16.8% of rural residents had no high school diploma in contrast to 12.2% of urban Kansas residents with no high school diploma. A disparity exists between ethnic groups, although improvements are being seen. Nationally, high school graduation rates for blacks improved from 58.7% in 1971 to 87.7% in 2007 (NCES, 2008). During the same period, Hispanic graduation percentages improved from 48.3% to 65%, and white percentages improved from 81.7% to 93.5% (NCES, 2008). Table 5 reflects high school completion rates by ethnic group.

Table 5

High School Completion Rates by Ethnic Group

Ethnicity	1971	2003	2007
Black	58.7%	88.5%	87.7%
Hispanic	48.3%	61.7%	65.0%
White	81.7%	93.7%	93.5%

Note. National Center for Education Statistics. (2008). *The condition of education 2008*. (NCES 2008-031). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, p.40, p.143

High school graduation is known to be essential for continuing education and training beyond high school. However, access to education and training, the two factors that can lead to social mobility and greater employment opportunities, is no longer discretionary for those who

aspire to full social and economic participation in American life (National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education, 2002). For those who experience poverty, live in rural poverty, are disenfranchised women, are ethnically diverse and/or did not complete high school, this American Dream remains elusive. Also, Hunt and Tierney found that slow gains have been made in opening access; therefore young people and adults who are in the workforce are enrolling in education and training in smaller proportions than they did 10 years ago (Hunt & Tierney, 2006).

In contrast to the findings of Hunt and Tierney, a 2008 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office showed gains since 1996 in overall enrollment in U.S. higher education institutions and an overall enrollment increase of 19%, some 2.2 million students. Full-time enrollment increased from 58%-62%; 83% of all students were enrolled in public schools; and 46% were enrolled in public two-year schools, where enrollment grew by more than 20% over the prior decade.

Clark Kerr, former President of University of California Davis, helped account for this discrepancy between the GAO and Hunt and Tierney. Supporting the findings of the GAO, Kerr predicted the Tidal Wave II, his term for a bulge of high school graduates who were the grandchildren of World War II GIs, pursuing higher education. Post-World War II, soldiers took advantage of the GI Bill and flocked to college campuses. The prediction was that the grandchild wave of students would begin around 1998 and last until about 2010 (Kerr, 2000). “From 2000-01 to 2005-06 total enrollments (unduplicated headcount of for-credit students) at all publicly-controlled Associate Colleges jumped from 7,828,175 to 10,177,702, an increase of 30%” (Hardy, Katsinas & Bush, 2007, p. 23-48).

College Pays

Over the past 25 years, income of workers with high school diplomas or less has fallen, while the income of those who attended and graduated from college has increased. In 2006, college graduates made \$37,000 more a year than high school graduates (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2006). It has been estimated that a college graduate could expect to earn on average approximately \$1 million more over the course of his/her working life than someone with a high school diploma (GAO, 2007). Additionally, his or her children would be nearly twice as likely to go to college (Sagawa & Schramm, 2008). According to *Education Pays*, a 2007 College Board Study by Baum and Ma, people with a bachelor's degree earned over 60% more than those with only a high school diploma. Over a lifetime, the gap in earning potential between a high school diploma and a Bachelor of Arts was more than \$800,000 (Baum & Ma, 2007). Not only can earning potential impacted, but also the availability of jobs themselves. Ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs in the knowledge economy require some postsecondary education (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007).

First Generation

Realizing the need for more education and training, and hoping for financial security, first generation students are increasingly accessing community colleges and universities. To be the first in the family to attend college or training becomes a commitment for the student and for the family. Realizing the need and being prepared for this commitment could be especially daunting for those in rural areas from poverty backgrounds. Karin Hsiao (1992) wrote for the *Eric Digest*, "These 'new students' to higher education often face unique challenges in their quest for a degree; conflicting obligations, false expectations, and lack of preparation or support

are among the factors that may hinder their success” (p.1), and that most first generation students were from low-income and minority backgrounds (Engle (2007).

Karen Hsiao(1992) continued in the *Eric Digest* article:

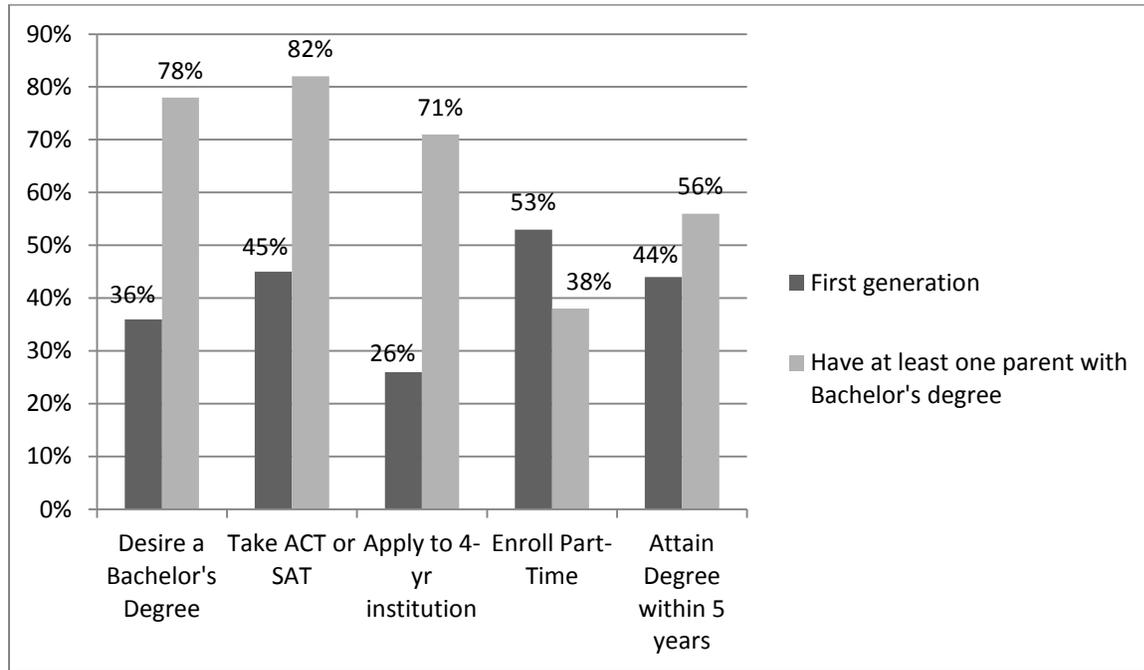
Leaving the culture of home and assuming the culture of the college can put a first generation student into a conflict of cultures. Families who do not understand the demands of college and who are not supportive may be barriers to their student’s success. With the family and cultural pull, first generation students often elected to attend college part-time while balancing family and financial obligations. (Hsiao, 1992, p. 2)

In addition to the balance between the culture of home and college, first generation students often found that they were not prepared academically for the structure of college course work, lacked time management and study skills, and had a difficult time navigating the college institutional structure (Hsiao, 1992; Cushman, 2006). First generation statistics from a report, *Missed Opportunities* by Tia Gordon (1997):

36% (of first generation students) desire a bachelor’s degree or higher, 45% take the SAT or ACT, only 26% apply to a four-year institution. By comparison, 78% of students with at least one parent with a bachelor’s degree desire a bachelor’s degree or higher, 82% take the SAT or ACT, and 71% apply to a four-year institution. First generation students are more likely to enroll on a part-time basis, 53% versus 38% of students with parents who attended college. Most of these first generation students enrolled in community colleges. Only 44% attain a degree within five years compared to 56% of students with parents who have a bachelor’s degree (pp. 1-2). These statistics are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

College Aspirations and Success of First Generation Students



In contrast to students whose parents had college degrees, first generation students tended to be from low-income families, were female with dependent children, and of a minority group – which was also associated with lower college persistence and achievement (Engle, 2007).

First generation, a risk factor all by itself, and compounding this factor, is that first generation students, who typically began at the community college, were part-time students, worked full-time and needed remedial coursework. All of these factors together put the first generation student at risk to drop-out without earning a degree. (Engle, 2007, pp. 25-26).

First generation students also did not receive the amount and quality of encouragement and involvement from parents as did students whose parents had college degrees. If parents of first generation students do not talk at home about going to college, are not involved in the processes of learning about financial aid, going to college visits, and establishing some kind of

college savings account, their student is at greater risk of being discouraged (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999). Low-income parents may expect their student to start work right after high school, and do not fully understand the huge economic advantage that college could afford the family. Parents may discourage their children from attempting college because the parents lack good information and understanding about college costs and the availability of financial aid and scholarships (Hossler et al., 1999). Students from a poverty background, rurally situated, culturally diverse, and first in the family to attend college, find themselves unprepared for the rigors of college and often require remediation at the college level (Engle, 2007).

Rurality and Remediation

The Population Reference Bureau (Devarics, 2005) studied the educational achievement of rural children and found that young rural children were well behind their urban and suburban peers in mathematics and reading skills. The study discovered that “Rural children entering kindergarten and first grade have lower reading and math scores than any other category of youngsters tested -- whether from urban, suburban or small town environments” (p .1). The study also found that in “low capacity rural areas, where educational attainment, income levels, job skills, and community engagement were more limited, these factors can create a milieu that does not place a high priority on education” (p. 2).

The study considered the effects of other factors such as underfunded schools, lack of community resources, rural isolation and inadequately trained teachers that can all contribute to the low achievement of rural children. The study did not discount the positive effect of social networks and parent involvement in increasing achievement in the early years (Devarics, 2005). Rural parents, especially those in poverty, have weak social networks and lack the resources to promote early learning, and have the least postsecondary education among the other adults in the

area. Another concern from the study is that rural families score low in reading to their children at least three days a week. About 78% of rural parents meet this target, compared with 85% of parents from large suburbs and 82% of parents living in mid-sized suburbs (Devarics, 2005). Mary Logue, professor of early childhood education at the University of Maine, said “the combination of rural location and poverty leaves many rural children behind from the preschool years onward and the main indicator is oral language. Kids in poverty come to school with thousands of fewer words” (Devarics, 2005, p.2).

Beginning school with lower scores in reading and math and lower language skills is not a positive precursor for academic success and neither was being first generation. More than half of first generation students required remedial courses and the remediation most needed was mathematics (Chen, 2005). Weak math skills tended to limit the first generation student from considering some majors such as science and humanities. Weakness in math skills also slowed progress toward a degree. Students who were on academic track at the end of the first year were more likely to graduate, whereas 43% of students requiring remedial courses left college without a degree (Chen, 2005). First generation students also face a plethora of risk factors that included poor academic preparation. Taking a rigorous high school curriculum that included advanced mathematics improved the chances of this student enrolling in college (Horn & Nunez, 2000). First generation students were not as likely to take eighth grade algebra, which is the building-block course for advanced high school math, even when it was offered in their school; more than one-fifth of first generation students reported that this course was not offered in their school in the eighth grade, raising an issue of access (Horn & Nunz, 2000; Tym, McMillion, Barone & Webster, 2004).

The National Center for Educational Statistics supports the data for mathematics remediation. For public two-year institutions, in the fall of 1995 and the fall of 2000, 22% of entering freshmen were enrolled in remedial mathematics. For those same years, 16% and 14% of students were in remedial writing and 12% and 11% of entering freshmen enrolled in remedial reading courses (NCES, 2004). By 2010, the numbers deteriorated. The White House Summit on Community Colleges reported that 60% of community college freshmen were not academically prepared and needed at least one remedial course (Adams, 2011), while similarly at the rural community college being studied, 53% of students entering college for the first time qualified for one or more remedial courses (Appendix D). Nationally, the end result is less than 35% of remedial students earned a degree within 8 years. These staggering percentages of students needing remediation in 2004 did not bode well for their prospects of graduation and the prospects grew even graver in 2010 (Bailey & Cho, 2010).

Affordability

In a speech at Macomb Community College, Barak Obama (2009) pledged support for students by raising the amount of the Pell Grant and supported the community colleges when he stated “Community Colleges are an essential part of our recovery in the present and our prosperity in the future”. The Federal Department of Education in the Budget for Fiscal Year 2010 budgeted approximately \$38.6 billion for the Pell Grant Program. This set the maximum Federal Pell Grant for award year 2010-2011 at \$5,550 for each qualified applicant (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b). For those from lower income families, the first step in obtaining a Pell Grant or any financial aid is completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or FAFSA (Student Financial Aid Services, 2010). In addition to this application for Federal Aid, most schools in most states use the FAFSA information to award scholarships

and school-related financial aid (Student Financial Aid Services, 2010). Financial Aid offices will assist any applicant with the form and the process. The ability to qualify for a Pell Grant may temporarily ameliorate hardship toward the attainment of the college degree. Pell Grants are funds awarded to students that need not be repaid. These grants are awarded based on Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) calculated by the FAFSA (Student Financial Aid Services, 2010).

As a student's EFC increases, the award amount decreases (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In other words, the more a family can contribute toward the cost of education, the lesser amount of the Pell Grant is awarded. For the academic year 2010-2011 the maximum Pell Grant for an EFC of zero is \$5,500 for the year, or equivalent of two full-time semesters. Full-time is considered 12 credit hours (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). The Pell Grant allows a working, part-time student to still be eligible for a grant. If a student enrolls in less than full-time hours, the award is adjusted for that semester. Three-quarter time equals 9-11 credit hours, half-time equals 6-8 credit hours, and less than half-time equals fewer than 6 credit hours, allowing a student to attend on a part-time basis (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). The average annual semester total cost of tuition and fees for a Kansas public university in 2010 was \$2,615 and the average cost for community college tuition and fees was \$976.44 for twelve credit hours per semester or \$1,952.88 for the academic year (Kansas Board of Regents, 2010). The lower cost for the community college allows remaining funds to be used for books or to cover childcare and/or transportation expenses.

The National Center for Education Statistics recognizes several risk factors for persistence and attainment among students receiving Pell Grants: not having a high school diploma, delayed enrollment, being financially independent, having dependents other than a

spouse, being a single parent, being enrolled part-time and working more than 35 hours per week (NCES, 2003). NCES also found that students attending a less-than-four-year institution in the 1999-2000 academic year received Pell Grants in the following percentages: 71% of students had high school diplomas; 16.6% had a GED or certificate, and 6.3% did not graduate from high school (NCES, 2003).

Rising Cost of College

“College costs are rising and income inequality between the rich and the poor is growing. For our country’s poorest, the American Dream is dying” (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996, p. 6). Tuition at two-year and four-year institutions increased faster than inflation and faster than family income. In 2006, the median income of the bottom 40% of families was \$20,157 (Hunt & Tierney, 2006). The cost of tuition today for a low income family could easily equal 34% of the total family income (Hunt & Tierney, 2006). The gap in college attendance rates between high and low-income students widened, even among those who were scholastically prepared for college (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). College opportunity for low-income Americans, where affordability is an impediment to college attendance and completion, continued to be a huge national and state concern (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). In 1980, college tuition costs for the lowest income families were about 6% of their total income, whereas in the year 2000, college tuition consumed 12% of the family total income (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). Over the last decade, while the nation’s median family income rose by 6%, tuition at four-year public colleges increased by 44% (Hunt & Tierney, 2006). The 2008 statistics reported by the U.S. General Accountability Office indicated that in the last 10 years, tuition increased the least at

two-year public schools – by \$420 from \$2,091 to \$2,510 -- and increased the most at private four-year research/doctoral institutions by \$7330 from \$19,185 to \$ 26,515 (U.S. GAO, 2008).

The College Board (2009) reported: (a) students could expect to pay more for tuition and fees, depending on the type of college; (b) cost for a public two-year school, \$2,713, was expected to be up by 6.5%; (c) private four-year schools, costing \$26,273, were reported to be up 4.4%; and (d) public four-year colleges cost \$7,605. This was not the total cost. Students still had to figure in costs of housing, food, books, supplies, laundry, etc. Rising costs are a national concern and the Midwest is not immune from rising tuition.

Table 6 compared the tuition rates among three western Kansas rural community colleges, one eastern Kansas rural community college, one major state university, one small state university, and one private university. The information quickly revealed that the best value for the educational dollar was at the community college and it did not matter whether the community was large or small in the rural area (College Board, 2009). Undergraduate students in the 18-24 age group attend community colleges at a rate of 40%. The community college not only attracted traditional students, but also part-time students, working adults, and a variety of other learner demographics (College Board, 2009).

Table 6

Tuition and Fees Per School Type

College Type	Degree Seeking Students	In-state Tuition and Fees	Area Type
Private four-year	1,354	\$18,320	Private/Urban
Public four-year large	18,235	\$ 6,235	Public/Suburban
Public four-year small	4,240	\$ 3,926	Public/Suburban
Public Comm. Coll.	778	\$ 2,190	Rural/Small town
Public Comm. Coll.	1,812	\$ 1,950	Rural/Large town
Public Comm. Coll.	1,837	\$ 1,860	Rural/Large town
Public Comm. Coll.	2,800	\$ 1,650	Rural/Small town

Note. College Board. (2009). *2007-08 College costs: Keep rising prices in perspective.* Retrieved from <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/pay/add-it-up/4494.html>.

Students' financial eligibility for Pell Grants, determined by Federal Financial Aid criteria and other eligibility requirements under Title IV in the Higher Education Act, are as follows:

- The student is officially seeking a degree, has declared a major or stated officially that a major is 'undeclared' or is in a degree program
- The eligible program of study is for credit
- The student has a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or passes an alternatively defined ability-to-benefit test
- The student is making satisfactory progress, for example, earning appropriate grades or progresses through the program at a rate of at least 150% of its posted length

In *The Rising Cost of Education*, Trombley reported that in 2002, 4.4 million students received Federal Pell grants, which paid up to \$4,000 per student. Most recipients came from families with annual incomes of less than \$40,000. In that year, this program cost the Federal

government \$10.7 billion. By comparison, Trombley reported that in 1979 the Pell Grant paid for 77% of student tuition, room, and board costs at a public four-year institution, but now it paid for only about 40% of those costs.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) reported seven distinct characteristics among the 1995-1996 low- and middle-income beginning postsecondary students who received the Pell Grant from a public two-year institution:

- 17.9% had no high school diploma,
- 56.9% had delayed their enrollment (did not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that high school was finished),
- 46.5% were financially independent (in combination with their spouse's earnings, had an annual income in 1994 of less than \$25,000),
- 34.3% had dependents other than a spouse,
- 25.8% were single parents,
- 32.2% were enrolled part-time and
- 23.8% worked more than 35 hours per week.

For many students, the Pell grant was of assistance, but for those with families, attending on a full-time basis to qualify for the full Pell grant was a challenge (FAFSA, 2008). These students may qualify for a partial Pell Grant based on the number of credit hours in which they enrolled: 6 credit hours qualified a student as part-time and could qualify for half of a full Pell Grant (FAFSA, 2008). Choitz and Widom (2003), in a report written for the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation Opening Doors project, found that 87% of working adults whose income was 200% of the federal poverty line were highly concerned with earning enough to support their families. Putting away money for education would not only be a challenge but

would be virtually impossible for this group. The cost of attending college for the adult group was particularly stressful because of direct income loss due to reduced working hours necessary while attending school. Choitz and Widom (2003) also found that a majority of these low-income students only attended part-time because of the need to balance family, work, and school. Hunt and Tierney (2006) identified the challenges to be capping or slowing the rapidly increasing tuition rates and encouraging more public investment in education with special emphasis on need-based financial aid.

One of the contributing factors to non-persistence was the inability to afford summer courses. If students were enrolled full-time fall and spring semesters, this left them with no eligibility (grant dollars) for summer. With the start of summer 2010, new federal regulations allowed two scheduled Pell awards in one award year. Two scheduled Pell awards were designed to reward students who completed 24 credit hours in fall and spring semesters and enrolled in at least six credit hours for summer to be eligible for a second award (FAFSA, 2010). This meant a student could essentially have summer 2010, fall 2010, spring 2011 and summer 2011, all full-time semesters, on one academic year's FAFSA. For the student who would want to take advantage of this extended award year, it would be critical to file the FAFSA application as early as possible in order for the funds to be ready for the summer term (FAFSA, 2010).

The ability to obtain Federal Loans was also a vital part of low income students' ability to access secondary education. Federal loans available to students include Perkins, Stafford subsidized loans, Stafford unsubsidized loans, and Supplemental Loans to Students (SLS). The National Center for Education Statistics reported in *The Condition of Education 2011* that the average loan for low-income students in the year 2000 was \$5,200 and the average grant was \$3,600; in the year 2004 the average loan was \$5,100 and a grant was \$4,300; and in 2008 the

average loan was \$5,200 while grants were \$4,400 (NCES, 2011). Loans in the year 2000 were 43.4% of aid to students; in 2004, 46.5%; and in 2008, 49.3%, growing almost 6% in 8 years (NCES, 2011).

While it was informative to look at the gap between grants and loans over the years and rising tuition rates, it was most revealing to study the NCES (2007) report on the total and net access price of attending postsecondary institutions. According to this report, a definition of the net access price was an “estimate of the cash outlay that students and their families need to make in a given year to cover educational expenses. The net access price is also calculated as the total price of attendance minus grants and loans (p. 175). The NCES also found that in 2003-04 the net access price of attending a public two-year postsecondary institution was \$9,000; the net access price of attending a public four-year postsecondary institution was \$10,600. The net price went up for 2007-08 to \$9,300 for the public two-year and up to \$11,000 for the public four-year schools. The pricing details for both types of institutions are provided in Table 7. It became apparent that the rising cost of tuition and the inability of grants and loans to keep pace with rising costs placed the low income/poverty student at a distinct disadvantage, and possibly priced him or her out of equal access.

Table 7

Total and Net Access Price of Attending Undergraduate Postsecondary Institution

Type of Institution	1989-1990	1999-2000	2003-2004	2007-2008
Public two-year				
Total Price	\$8,000	\$10,900	\$11,400	\$12,100
Loans	\$200	\$600	\$600	\$900
Grants	\$700	\$1,300	\$1,700	\$1,800
Net Access Price	\$7,100	\$8,900	\$9,000	\$9,300
Public four-year				
Total Price	\$10,900	\$1,5700	\$1,7500	\$19,300
Loans	\$900	\$3,100	\$3,800	\$4,600
Grants	\$1,300	\$2,500	\$3,100	\$3,700
Net Access Price	\$8,700	\$10,200	\$10,600	\$11,000

Note. National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *The condition of education 2007*. (NCES 2007-064). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. p. 217; 2010, p. 308; 2011, pp. 296, 297.

Poverty and Persistence

The widening gap between assistance received (grants and loans) and financial need has had an effect on the student from poverty being able to afford to persist and attain a college degree. Low-income students generally had to work more hours than other students to help close the gap between need and assistance, and often were unable to attend full-time because of the need to work. “For too many low-income students the open door to American higher education has become a revolving door” (Tinto, 2008, p. 3). Unable to attend full-time automatically reduced the amount of the Pell Grant, which further exacerbated the problem.

The 2002 NCES report revealed that students with a high school diploma receiving the Pell Grant persisted at the less-than-four-year institution at a rate of 77.1% (NCES, 2002). Overall, the report found that given the characteristics of students with Pell Grants and their disadvantages, Pell Grant recipients were just as likely as non-recipients to persist at public two- and four-year institutions (NCES, 2002). Persistence meant that these students had earned a degree or certificate, and were still enrolled or had transferred to another institution at the same or higher level. Pell Grant recipients were less likely to have persisted at private not-for-profit four-year institutions overall, but they were as likely to persist if they had completed a rigorous high school curriculum. Hunt and Tierney (2006) had this to say about the educational pipeline:

Out of every 100 ninth graders, only 18 come out the other end 10 years later with a college degree. Only 68 out of 100 ninth graders graduate from high school on time, and of those 68 graduates only 40 enroll directly in college, only 27 are still enrolled the next year; and only 18 of the original 100 ninth graders complete an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling. Eighty-two out of 100 ninth graders don't make it (Hunt & Tierney, 2006, p. 8).

In a 2008 article, Vincent Tinto added poverty to the achievement/persistence mix by his statement:

Among those who started in a public two-year college only 7% of low income students earned a bachelor's degree while over 26% of high income students did so. Of those who began higher education in a public four-year institution only 48% of low-income students earned their four-year degree within six years while 69% of high-income students did so. The net result is that while 6 in 10 high-income students who began higher education

earned a bachelor's degree in six years, only 1 in 4 low-income students did so (Tinto, 2008. p. 2).

In an article for Inside Higher Ed, Jennifer Engel (2008) coupled first generation students and low income students in a term she dubbed the 'double whammy of disadvantage'. These 'double whammy' students were only one-fifth as likely to have earned a bachelor's degree after six years. After six years, just 11% of low-income first generation students attained a bachelor's degree compared to 55% of those who are neither low income nor first generation] (Lederman, 2008).

Debt Load

Financial aid could be a positive contributing factor in persistence and in making the transition from high school to college a process with one less barrier to overcome. In the academic year ending in 2000 the debt amassed by public university graduates was in excess of \$15,000 per student and for private schools it was in excess of \$17,000 (Bannon & King, 2002; Trombley, 2003). Sixty percent of college graduates left college with over \$19,000 of debt (Obama, 2007). Scott Cohn, MSNBC correspondent, reported that student debt at the end of 2010 was nearly \$880 billion and that two-thirds of college students graduated in 2009 with a debt load of \$24,000 (Cohn, 2010). For a middle class student this kind of debt may not be a discouragement for attending college but for a student from a lower-income or poverty family, the prospect of this kind of debt would likely be a deterrent to enrollment and persistence. Family and personal financial resources played a significant role in determining college opportunity. Compared to families 20 years ago, families today devoted a larger portion of their income to pay for college (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2002 report, *Losing Ground*, and

Bannon and King (2002) in their report, *The Burden of Borrowing: A Report on the Rising Rates of Student Loan Debt*, found that increases in tuition at public colleges and universities made college attendance less affordable; federal and state financial aid did not keep up with these tuition increases; more students and families at all income levels borrowed more money to pay for college; the steepest increases in tuition have been instituted during the recession thus causing economic hardship; and even though state financial support of education increased, tuition increased. The use of student loans might be a viable option to help pay for college, but at what level does debt become a deterrent to choosing careers in lower paying jobs in public education, or public service (Hunt & Tierney, 2006)?

In the Midwest, the agricultural center of the nation, the problem was most apparent. Data from a 2002 National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education study revealed tuition and fees increased at two-year schools in 6 of 10 central states, from a low of 22% increase in Nebraska to a high of 56% in Arkansas (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). (See Table 8)

Table 8

Affordability of Higher Education in Ten States

State	Tuition & Fees of two-year schools	Median Family Income	Appropriations per student	State grant aid per student	State aid for low-income students as percent of Federal Pell Grants for State
Kansas	Up 32%	Up 10%	Up 11%	Up 36%	18%
Arkansas	Up 56%	Up 2%	Up 4%	Up 302%	31%
Colorado	Up 25%	Up 22%	Down 1%	Up 73%	47%
Iowa	Up 33%	Up 15%	Up 9%	Up < 1%	66%
Missouri	Down 1%	Up 22%	Up 19%	Up 2%	48%
Nebraska	Up 225%	Up 13%	Up 13%	Up 91%	14%
Oklahoma	Down 2%	Up 3%	Up 3%	Up 22%	8%
N. Dakota	Down 2%	Up 13%	Up 3%	Up 22%	8%
S. Dakota	--	Up 20%	Down 9%	Down 100%	0%
Texas	Up 29%	Up 8%	Up 19%	Up 334%	30%

Note. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. (2002). *Losing ground: A national status report on the affordability of American higher education*. Retrieved from: http://www.highereducation.org/reports/losing_ground/affordability_report_final_bw.pdf (pp. 22-30).

As shown in Table 8, tuition increases outpaced increases in median family incomes in 70% of the states represented. Even though some states attempted to increase funding appropriations per student, the percentage of educational spending going to low-income students was abysmally low or non-existent in 60% of the Midwestern states. The Pell Grant, the nation's largest need-based program for college students, decreased its ability to cover a large percentage

of college costs (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). Nationwide, in the years from 1992 to 2001, overall tuition escalated faster than family income in 41 states and tuition at two-year public colleges increased faster than family incomes in 34 states (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). Phi Kappa Phi reported that about 60% of bachelor's degree recipients borrowed to fund their education and that unemployment rate for college graduates younger than 27 went up to 5.9 % (Nelson, 2009). The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in May of 2009 that the unemployment rate reached a to-date high of 9.4% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

Spending money to obtain a degree doesn't necessarily guarantee a job upon graduation; students take a gamble that they will be able to make timely payments on student loans (Nelson, 2009). Donna Shank, Chair of the Kansas Board of Regents, recently stated "The Board recognizes the heavy financial burden hard-working students and their families bear as students pursue higher education. Tuition enhancements are necessary if our institutions are to maintain the high quality of education that Kansans deserve and demand" (Shank, 2008). Table 9 illustrates the average Kansas tuition rates for 2010-2011 as per the Kansas Board of Regents press release; the average tuition at the four-year university was \$2619 – an overall increase of 3.23% in 1 year (Kansas Board of Regents [KBOR], 2010).

Table 9

Tuition Rates for Kansas Public State Universities 2010-2011

University	2009-10	2010-2011	Increase/Decrease
University of Kansas	\$3706.85	\$4012.45	Increase 8.2%
Kansas State University	\$3434.75	\$3688.00	Increase 7.4%
Wichita State University	\$2733.50	\$2945.00	Increase 7.7%
Emporia State University	\$2187.00	\$2318.00	Increase 6%
Pittsburgh State University	\$2296.00	\$2424.00	Increase 5.6%
Ft. Hays State University	\$1881.00	\$1958.35	Increase 4.1%

Note. Kansas Board of Regents (2010). *Tuition rates for Kansas public state universities 2010-2011*. Retrieved from <http://www.kansasregents.org/resources/PDF/866-0-62410/trlrdsr>

Opportunities of Rural Community College Education

Nationwide, community college costs were typically lower than a state university, private or technical school. The hallmarks of a community college are nimbleness to respond to work-force development needs and the ability to respond to community needs quickly and effectively—all at a relatively low cost. The community college fits a niche in the rural setting by being an agent for societal change, social responsibility, and upward mobility (Coehn & Brawer, 1989). Students who are undecided about their direction, need remedial coursework, or cannot afford the higher university tuition will enroll at the community college at a lower cost of attendance (Smith, 2010). When students become decided about their direction or have completed remedial course work at the community college, the transition to the university is often a seamless process, especially if the student graduated from the community college (Jenkins, 2003). Community colleges served a significant number of truly disadvantaged students who could only afford to attend part-time and these students were drawn by the easy access and relative low cost that community colleges offered (Jenkins, 2003; Smith, 2010). In addition to the value,

community colleges also boast student-friendly environments, student-centered faculty and staff, community engagement, economic development, local and regional workforce training, as well as being the cultural center for the service area.

Challenges of the Rural Community College Education

In the past, the value and affordability of the rural community college has been its comprehensive mission. As reflected in Table 10, the average tuition for a Kansas community college student in 2010-2011 was \$73.37 per credit hour (KBOR, 2010). This represented a state-wide average increase of 5.06% (KBOR, 2010). The current financial plight of the rural community college is many faceted: (a) diminished state and federal funding; (b) heavier reliance on local funding sources for the locally supported community college; (c) widened gaps in student financial aid; (d) less than adequate funding for developmental (remedial) programs in mathematics, reading and writing; (e) unfunded mandate to comply with the American Disabilities Act for students with disabilities; and (f) increased deferred facility maintenance costs (Nomi, 1998). These challenges set the stage whereby the rural community college had to compete fiercely at the legislative level with the larger urban centers for limited funding dollars (Nomi, 1998). Lack of funding continued to present a formidable barrier to education and economic development in these distressed areas. There are pressures to increase tuition rates, limited local job opportunities, and state/federal funding systems driven by student full-time equivalency credits (Nomi, 1998). All these present very real financial barriers to the development of non-credit programs, daycare facilities, transportation networks, individual and family counseling services, and other programs necessary to develop a region's human capital. Although these issues confront community colleges across the nation, they appear to have had a more profound impact on colleges in distressed rural areas (Nomi, 1998).

Table 10

Tuition and Fee Rates for Kansas Public Community Colleges 2010-2011

Community College	Tuition and Fees 2010-2011	Increase/Decrease
Allen County	\$63	Increase 6.82%
Barton County	\$74	No increase
Butler County	\$79	Increase 7.63%
Cloud County	\$85	Increase 8.20%
Coffeyville	\$60	No increase
Colby	\$85	Increase 8.33%
Cowley	\$78	Increase 10%
Dodge City	\$75	No increase
Fort Scott	\$74	Increase 10%
Garden City	\$66	Increase 4.88%
Highland	\$83	Increase 1.92%
Hutchinson	\$76	Increase 9.09%
Independence	\$65	Increase 18.18%
Johnson County	\$84	Increase 6.6%
Kansas City Kansas	\$58	No Increase
Labette	\$72	Decrease -2.38%
Neosho	\$79	Increase 2.27%
Pratt	\$76	Increase 4.4%
Seward County	\$62	No increase

Note: Kansas Board of Regents (2010). *Tuition rates for Kansas public state universities 2010-2011*. Retrieved from <http://www.kansasregents.org/resources/PDF/866-0-62410/trlrdsr>

Shrinking funding and unfunded mandates had the effect of crippling the overall mission of the rural community college, especially in the area of workforce development. Lack of funding for the community college is a high profile issue. The American Association of Community Colleges and the American Association of Community College Trustees chose to

push strongly for increasing Pell Grants and made it a legislative priority during the 2007 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (Hardy et. al., 2007).

The focus of welfare reform was to put people to work, not to provide broad-based general education courses. Welfare assistance recipients were often limited to 1 year of community college, followed immediately by a minimum of a 20-hour workweek commitment in the first year. State and federal training funds are typically not available for developmental coursework, and even fewer funds were available for child care or transportation. Only 1 year of training short-circuited students in two-year training/degree programs and caused a disincentive for new students to enter the community college (Nomi, 1998). Many challenges remain for rural community colleges to find ways to serve poverty-based disenfranchised students/women who struggle with a diverse array of issues, including but not limited to diversity, low-income, few jobs, poor quality childcare, and lack of public transportation. The community college strives to be responsive to the local/regional areas by creating training programs in rural areas where precious few jobs are available, stabilizing family income enough to allow families to come off the welfare rolls. The rural community college faces a shrinking demographic with an aging population and a decreasing number of high school graduates in their service areas (Smith, 2010). They struggle with failing infrastructures, keeping technology current, and difficulty in recruiting faculty to the rural area (Smith, 2010). There is less healthcare access in the rural areas and a typically poorer population with inability to pay for existing healthcare services (Smith, 2010). The rural community college struggles with enrollment management and stiff competition from larger community colleges (Smith, 2010). The state legislatures and local constituencies continually challenge the community college to meet these multi-missions in spite of continuing cuts in their state funding, and expect the community college to keep tuition costs

within the ability of the Pell Grant to cover tuition, all the while striving to maintain quality and accessibility (American Association of Community Colleges, 1998).

In summary, this chapter addressed issues surrounding rurality, poverty, persistence and achievement of the rural community college participant. Issues relative to the research topic were: poverty, first generation, rurality, remediation, persistence, affordability, debt load, and opportunities and challenges of a widely diverse rural population.

The significance of this study was to explore and to understand the factors that impact achievement and persistence of students in developmental courses receiving Pell grants at the rural community college. Additionally this study attempted to discover what challenges and barriers participants faced in the post secondary environment and what support systems were useful and what support systems were lacking. A further goal was to discover students' experiences at a rural community college and what could be done to better encourage and support these participants to be persistent and successful. There has been little research conducted with this population and it was important to recognize the challenges and stumbling blocks perceived and experienced by this demographic. The results of this study could be helpful in development of more services for these participants such as child care, flexible course schedules, financial aid availability and processes, increased need-based scholarships, free counseling services, and faculty training to better serve the array of needs of this rural student population.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter will describe the rationale for selecting phenomenological qualitative research, the role of the researcher and data collection will be discussed as well as the population, the sample, the focus group, the pilot study, interview procedure, analysis and protection of human rights. This research explored factors that impacted persistence and achievement of students at the rural community college who were enrolled in developmental courses and receiving a Pell grant. Data collection was done through semi-structured individual interviews. Interview questions were tested with a focus group and a pilot study prior to the individual interviews. The researcher examined experiences of several individuals to find central meaning in their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). This research explored how these factors shaped the participants' experience, what barriers the participants encountered, and how being a Pell Grant recipient and taking developmental courses impacted persistence and achievement. Finally, the researcher examined student perceptions of support systems and how those systems or lack thereof assisted or detracted from the success and achievement of their academic goals at the rural community college. Participation in this study was both confidential and voluntary.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used for this research. Individual backgrounds and stories afforded the researcher the unique opportunity to explore this particular educational research problem. Participant perceptions “are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to personal contexts” (Stake, 1995, p. 17). New insights, phenomena or patterns of unanticipated relationships from this research process guided the researcher to interpret these experiences and to seek meaning and means to ameliorate barriers to persistence and achievement within “campus concern for all learners, regardless of age and circumstance”

(Kasworm et. al., 2002, p. 161), and institutional processes and programs (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995).

Quantitative inquiry results are generally data in the form of numbers and statistics and seek precise measurement and analysis of numerical data, with the researcher often objectively separated from the subject matter. Quantitative research often can be criticized for being clinical, sterile, and impersonal (Neill, 2007; Stake, 1995), whereas qualitative methods can be criticized as being non-scientific. However, when the study is looking for meanings, concepts, motivations, perceptions, and emotions as the basis of the inquiry, and the researcher is the data-gathering instrument, then qualitative inquiry makes its own case (Neill, 2007; Stake, 1995). Qualitative research also looks for meaning in social settings and how persons interact in these settings and make sense or adaptations accordingly (Berg, 2004). Any one of the five traditions of qualitative research is an appropriate approach to the investigation of factors that inhibit persistence and achievement of Pell Grant recipients at the rural community college (Creswell, 2007). The researcher chose qualitative phenomenological methodology, as described by Van Manen (1990), as it is oriented toward lived experience and interpretation of the texts of lived experiences. “A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept” supports the use of phenomenological analysis which will include the reduction of information, analysis for common statements or themes, and a search for possible meanings (Creswell, 1997, p. 51).

Research Questions

The research questions and sub-questions that guided this study were:

- What factors impacted the academic persistence of Pell Grant recipients in developmental classes at a rural community college?

- Did financial issues impact student persistence and achievement?
- Did family support or lack of support impact student persistence and achievement?
- Did local community circumstances impact student persistence and achievement?
- What factors impacted the achievement of Pell Grant recipients in developmental classes at a rural community college?
 - Did past academic preparation impact student persistence and achievement in the rural community college?
 - Did rural community college support or lack of support impact student persistence and achievement?

Population

The population used in this study consisted of students in developmental courses and receiving a Pell Grant at a small, mid-western, rural, public community college. Students who qualified for developmental coursework made up 53% of the student body. Of those developmental students, 47% received a Pell Grant in the fall of 2010.

Description of community and campus

A purposeful sample of participants who received Pell Grants and who were taking at least one developmental course were chosen from those who were currently enrolled at the community college. The rural community college was located in a county with a population of 9,656 residents who support the operations of the college with property taxes. The county, primarily agriculture based, has a community demographic of 91.5% Caucasian, 5.2% Hispanic, and 1.2% African American. Poverty was consistently around 10% for all ages, and 38.65% of

county children qualified for free/reduced price lunch programs. The college itself employed 40 full-time faculty with no ethnic diversity in the faculty ranks. Sixty-eight staff members were also employed, two of whom were Hispanic (non-Spanish speaking), and no other ethnic diversity on staff.

Unduplicated headcount was 2,350 with 40% male and 60% female. Student demographics were also made up of: 88% white, non-Hispanic; 4% black, non-Hispanic; 4% Hispanic; 1% unknown; 1% Asian/Pacific Islander; 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native; and 1% non-resident alien. Unduplicated headcount was 2,350; with 40% male and 60% female. Forty-seven percent of the student body was in the 18-24 age group; 18% high school students were under the age of 18; 15% were 25-34; and 20% of the students were over the age of 35. Educational objectives of the students were: 37% seeking a degree or certificate; 27% in high school taking concurrent college coursework; 24% seeking self-improvement; and 12% having declared transfer intentions. Students who were full-time comprised 38% of the student body, part-time students 33% and high school students 29%. Students who qualified for developmental coursework made up 53% of the student body. Of those developmental students, 47% received a Pell Grant in the fall of 2010.

This rural community college had 582 students from the home county, 764 students from the six counties in the service area, 796 from other Kansas counties, and 208 out of state or international. Campus housing was available for 394 students. Another 400 were local or commuter, and the remaining students attended online or at off-campus locations.

Sample

A purposeful sample of ten participants who received Pell Grants and were taking at least one developmental course was chosen from those currently enrolled at the community college

(Creswell, 2007). Saturation was achieved at eight but two additional participants were interviewed to achieve a more diverse sample. An attempt was made to include participants who varied on the following characteristics: culture, age, and gender.

Procedures

Demographic Instrument

A demographic collection instrument (See Appendix A) was used to gather data and to assess willingness on the part of the participants to be part of the research study. Information gained from the demographic instrument was also used to purposefully select participants for a focus group, a pilot study, and for semi-structured interviews. The demographic instrument was used as a selection tool for the study participants based on a variety of demographic characteristics to include: culture, age, gender, financial aid status, and first generation. None of the participants were duplicated in either the focus group, pilot study, or semi-structured interviews. The purpose for the varied demographic characteristics was to achieve maximum variation among study participants.

The researcher administered the demographic collection in five developmental classes. All students were given an equal opportunity to complete the instrument and to indicate their willingness to participate further in the research study. The responses were placed on an excel spreadsheet and sorted. Students who indicated an unwillingness to participate further were eliminated from the sample. Students who indicated they were not receiving a Pell Grant were also eliminated from the sample. Students purposefully selected for individual interviews were selected according to gender, age, and culture.

Focus Group

After collection of the demographic information, the researcher participated in a focus group with four volunteer rural community college students who were in at least one developmental class and Pell Grant recipient. The focus group consisted of first semester students. This focus group discussion provided the researcher a sense of the accuracy of the proposed interview questions and the credibility of the research problem and purpose. Based on the information gathered, the researcher adjusted questions and interview techniques to enhance the interview process and understanding (Creswell, 2007). The researcher determined that first semester students could not adequately answer the research questions due to their lack of experience with post-secondary study and with the research institution. At this time the researcher adjusted the interview protocol to include at least second semester students. The researcher, through discussion, insured that the participants understood the problem and purpose of the research. This focus group had at least three primary purposes. This session (a) collected information about the participant's perceptions of factors that inhibit persistence and achievement of Pell grant recipients at the rural community college; (b) gathered comments about the interview questions in order to clarify the intent of any particular question; and (c) used this facilitated discussion to discover additional questions or to adjust interview questions that would be helpful in understanding this phenomenon. Observations and search for common themes, unexpected themes, as well as an analysis, were conducted by the researcher (Berg, 2004).

Pilot Study

Although the focus group was helpful in collecting information, comments and questions about the research topic and research questions, the researcher felt that a pilot study would gain

further insight into the actual lived experiences of this particular student population. This additional insight would help in the refinement of the interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews. A pilot study was conducted with two rural community college student participants who were in at least one developmental class and receiving a Pell Grant and in at least the second semester of study.

The purpose of the pilot study was to better assess the interview protocol, interpretation of the process, and further refinement of the interview questions. The pilot study took the form of individual 30- to 45-minute interviews. The setting was in the Learning Resource Center, a venue with which students were familiar and comfortable, and were provided the opportunity for privacy. Interview questions were tested and presented in an open-ended format to allow participants to express their perceptions and experiences without the interviewer guiding participant responses (Berg, 2004).

Interview Procedure

The selection of interview participants consisted of a purposeful sample chosen from the initial demographic instrument to insure that there would be diverse student demographics. Those demographics included age, culture, and gender. Ten volunteer participants were selected and invited to participate in the one-on-one interview with the researcher (Denzin, 1989). Volunteer participants agreed to the time and date of the interview. Follow-up confirmation of the time, date and place was conducted by phone call and e-mail with each volunteer participant. Individual interviews of 45 minutes to one hour were scheduled with ten participants. Interviews were conducted in the Learning Resource Center, a location familiar to students where they felt comfortable, and where there is availability of privacy. Immediately prior to the beginning of the interview the participant completed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix F). They were

assured that neither their comments nor the interviews would become public and that their identity was totally confidential, as well as any comments, reflections, or opinions. They were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty; that the interview would be digitally recorded; and that the interview would be transcribed to a document for their review and comment. Research interview questions were open-ended to maximize student participation and to control for researcher bias. At the conclusion of each individual interview, each participant was asked to add anything they wished to share that would be important to them personally or relevant comments which were not covered in the interview. This open-ended approach allowed ample opportunity to gather information that was not covered during the interview process. Each participant was given a \$25 gift card at the end of the interview process.

Unanticipated themes that emerged were addressed as probes in the remainder of the interviews and more focused questions were used to validate these themes with other participants. It was anticipated that by the tenth interview, the researcher will have reached saturation (Denzin, 1989).

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher reviewed and analyzed the interview transcripts for common themes. A summary was prepared and sent back to the participants for a member-check. The researcher kept a record of field notes following each interview and kept a journal. All transcribed interviews and field notes will be kept in a secure safe in the possession of the researcher for the period of five years as required by Kansas State University. The triangulation of the focus group, the pilot study, the individual interview, member checks, field notes, researcher journaling, co-rater and peer review of the research added to the credibility of the study (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 1998; Berg, 2004).

Analysis

The responses from the sample of Pell Grant students who were taking developmental courses at the rural community college were used to examine perceptions of how these factors affect persistence and achievement. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a certified court reporter. A copy of each individual interviewee's transcript was prepared and returned to the participants for a member-check. The researcher kept a record of field notes following each interview and kept a journal. All transcribed interviews and field notes will be kept in a secure safe in the possession of the researcher for the period of five years as required by Kansas State University.

The researcher reviewed and analyzed the interview transcripts for common themes. Hand-coding of responses, key words, and experiences were tracked using an Excel spreadsheet that allowed for multiple sorting and analysis (Patton, 2002). After each interview, field notes were written by the researcher, as well as notes in a researcher journal about the individual research experience. Observations about non-verbal behavior, any emotional affect of the participant, the researcher impressions about the interview, and any other significant observations were so noted (Berg, 2004).

The process of analysis began by reading through the interviews multiple times and review of the researcher notes and journal entries for each interview subject. This analysis method also enabled the researcher to categorize, classify, label patterns, clearly identify contradictory responses, and to identify new themes that emerged.

Standards of Quality and Verification

The triangulation of the focus group, the pilot study, the individual interview, member check, field notes, researcher journaling, co-rated and peer review of the research questions

added to the creditability of the study (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 1998; Berg, 2004). The focus group and the pilot study participants were students who were Pell Grant recipients in a developmental course, but who were not included in the purposeful sample for the final interview.

A copy of each interview subjects; testimony was sent back to the interviewee for verification and accuracy. There were no disagreements with the transcripts.

The researcher kept field notes and an interview journal throughout the research process. This process had the effect of giving the researcher a valuable tool that could provide additional insight to the narratives of the interview subjects and to have the ability to detect subtle reactions to themes that might not emerge strongly in the interview process.

Co-rating of the transcribed narratives helped assure the quality and accuracy of the results and how those results were obtained. The co-rated also assisted in identifying and developing the themes as part of the data analysis process.

Peer review of the research questions and protocol provided a means to focus the research questions to assure quality of results. The peer review also provided sub-question review thereby enhancing the ability to obtain focused responses.

Protection of Human Rights

The study was conducted in accordance with the Institutional Review Board of Kansas State University. Permission to conduct research was received April 7, 2011 (See Appendix B).

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the methodology that was used in this study. The purpose of this study was to examine factors that effected persistence and achievement of rural community college students receiving a Pell Grant who were taking developmental courses.

Qualitative inquiry was chosen for this research to allow an opportunity for understanding of participants' perceptions and points of view. The focus of the research surrounded the issues of financial support, family support or lack thereof, and community circumstances that impacted persistence; past academic preparation and rural community college support or lack thereof that impacted student achievement. A demographic collection instrument was used to gather data and to assess willingness on the part of the participants to be part of the research study. Information gained from the demographic instrument was used to purposefully select participants for a focus group, a pilot study, and for semi-structured interviews. The demographic instrument was used as a selection tool for the study participants based on a variety of demographic characteristics to include: ethnicity, age, gender, financial aid status, first generation, and need for remediation. None of the participants were duplicated in either the focus group, pilot study, or semi-structured interviews. The purpose for the varied demographic characteristics was to achieve maximum variation among study participants.

Triangulation was used to collect and analyze the information collected; semi-structured interviews, field notes, journal entries, member check, a certified court reporter and a co-rater assured the accuracy of the data collection.

Chapter 4 Findings

Chapter four is divided into five distinct areas: the focus group, the pilot study, the characteristics of the sample, overview of the research participants, and an analysis of the themes that emerged from the transcripts. The interview subjects are often quoted in order to lend a better understanding and richness to the themes that surfaced during the interviews.

Focus Group

The researcher, in a phenomenological research study, is considered the primary instrument to gather the data (Stake, 2007). The researcher took field notes during the focus group and kept a journal post-session. The focus group consisted of four students from the rural community college who were taking at least one developmental course. The focus group was held in the Learning Resource Center, a venue with which students were familiar and comfortable. None of the participants in the focus group were included in the final research interviews or results. As a result of the focus group, procedures were refined, questions were prioritized, and sub-questions were developed. The focus group study participants described in their own words their backgrounds, support systems, finances, their preparation for college study, and any perceived barriers to their success.

Pilot Study

The pilot study consisted of two students from the rural community college who were taking at least one developmental course and were recipients of a Pell Grant. These students were not included in the final research results. The pilot study was held in the Learning Resource Center where students were comfortable and in familiar surroundings. The session lasted one

hour. The researcher took field notes and made journal entries. As a result of the pilot study, procedures were refined and the interview protocol developed.

The pilot study and focus group made it clear that first-semester freshmen did not have the experience or depth of perspective needed to reply to the questions. The researcher determined at this juncture to purposefully select students who had at least one semester of the rural community college experience.

Sample Selection

The sample consisted of ten participants, purposefully selected from the population of students in developmental courses who voluntarily responded to a demographic instrument that identified student characteristics of: culture, age, gender, recipient of Pell Grants or other scholarships or financial assistance from the community college. Ten students met for semi-structured interviews with the researcher. All of the subjects were at least second semester freshman status.

Each interview began with casual conversation where the researcher provided a brief explanation of the purpose of the research. Informed consent forms were completed, signed and witnessed. The student volunteer was informed that a recorder would be used. Each of the students agreed to be audio recorded. The interviews varied in length from 30 to 60 minutes. At the end of the interview, each participant agreed to read his or her own transcribed interview and ensure it was accurate. Each participant was given a \$25 gift card.

Characteristics of the Sample

Names of the participants were changed for privacy and protection. For the purposeful sample, it was required that all participants be at least a second semester freshman at the rural community college. As a result of the focus group, it was determined that those interviewed

needed to be at least second semester freshmen. The sample also required that all participants be classified as developmental, requiring at least one developmental course. The sample required that all participants be Pell grant recipients. To achieve maximum variation, the participants' ages, genders, and cultures were to be as varied as possible, consistent with the demographics of the selected institution.

Ages ranged from 18 to 64; six were traditional age students, three were non-traditional in age; and one was of senior citizen age. Five male participants and five female made up the sample. Of the research participants: four were Caucasian, two Hispanic, two African American, one American Indian/Alaskan, one Asian. Working status of participants was: five were not working, two were working 10 hours a week, and three were working 5 hours a week in the Federal Work Study Program. Pell grant recipients made up 100% of the sample; six had an additional scholarship through a sport or activity and one had an additional student loan.

Rural Community College Volunteers

Anna

Anna was an 18 year old single, American Indian/Alaskan, female student and was one of six children in the home. This rural community college was her second attempt at school. She initially attended school in Denver, seeking the activity and the thrill of a large city. The charm of the big city soon wore thin, and she chose a smaller, rural college for the smaller town and community. Rodeo was her sport, and her brother attended school here also. She was a first generation student, neither parent having attended college. She was confident that she could succeed on her own. Her parents supported her educational efforts, stayed in contact, and checked with her often concerning grades. Anna liked their involvement. She did not declare a major, choosing to focus on class work and rodeo. Anna's challenges were dealing with some day-to-day

anxiety about grades and staying eligible to keep her financial aid, her scholarship and student loan, as well as her eligibility to compete. There has been enough money from the Pell grant and loan with a rodeo scholarship, but she worried about how much she was going to have to work in the future to pay back her student loans.

Juanita

Juanita, an 18 year old single, Hispanic, female student, born in Mexico, has been in the U.S. from the age of two. She was one of three children in the home. She is a first generation student and her mother was the person pushing her to get an education. Juanita was in contact every day with some member of her family. She chose this rural community college because it was small and located in a small town. She had a Pell grant and a cross country scholarship, and she worked 20 hours a week as a waitress and occasionally cleaned houses. She could not attend college at all if it were not for the Pell Grant. She chose Business as a major, with a goal of getting an Associate of Science in Business degree, then attending cosmetology school, and opening her own hair salon. Juanita's challenges were adjusting to doing things for herself, making decisions and being independent. Although highly organized, she faced other challenges such as balancing school, track, and work, as well as the peer pressure to "go out and not study."

Kent

Kent was a 20 year old Caucasian, male student. He lived in a large town and a very small rural town. He found that this rural community college reminded him of home, when he was a kid. He liked the way people go out of their way to help and the genuine caring of people in how they treated him. His parents divorced and he has a younger step-sister. Kent was on the wrestling team, and that scholarship combined with the Pell Grant and work study got him through. His father helped a bit financially and he was in contact with parents about three times a week. They

were supportive of his educational goals. He chose Health Education and wanted to be a wrestling coach. He suffered multiple concussions, and was not allowed to compete at this time. However, he was functioning as a volunteer student coach with the team. Kent's challenges were balancing classes, the wrestling team, and time to study. He realized that his lack of computer knowledge is a problem now, and that he needed to get up to speed quickly. He was typical of most students in the beginning – not focused, little effort, not taking advice from anyone, and was placed in developmental mathematics. He said that now, his education is everything to him.

William

William was a 66 year old, Caucasian, male student. William was a first-generation student, one of six children in his family. Education was a priority for him. He started college two other times and these efforts were interrupted with a stint in the military and then the obligations of a family that kept him working in construction, plumbing, and electrical for many years. His wife recently passed away, and William was looking forward to a new, less labor-intensive career. He chose counseling as a major where he can use his mind more than his body. The Pell grant and the college's 62+ *Scholarship* are funding his education. William also qualified for some credit hour assistance through the college Credit for Prior Learning Program. He initially intended to attend a bible college, but learned that the local community college could provide him with the first two years of his education at one-tenth the cost. His challenges have been the transition into college as well as his lack of computer skills. Mathematics was and will continue to be his most difficult course, but he planned to meet with a tutor religiously. He assimilated well into the fabric of student life by building sets for the theatre, being a member of the choir, and work as a bus driver for some of the athletic teams.

LooLei

LooLei was a 24 year old, Chinese, female student. She came here from China 8 years ago. One of three in the family, she was also a first generation student. The core of the family remained in New York, but her older brother had a restaurant in a rural town 35 miles from the college. She chose this rural college because of the size, the low cost, and the reputation of the nursing program. In addition to the Pell Grant, she worked in her brother's restaurant. LooLei's mother was her inspiration, as she wanted at least one child to graduate, and supports LooLei's efforts. She chose nursing as her major and was taking her pre-requisites. She was a good student, but the language challenges placed her in developmental reading and writing. Currently, her challenges were balancing school with her job and the daily commute. She readily admitted that her natural shyness was a barrier to her success, but making friends and participating in a study group helped with communication and with her confidence. Her next challenge will be after graduation when the family will insist that she return to New York and the cultural pressure to become married.

Linda

Linda was a 34 year old, Caucasian, female student. Linda was a single parent with one daughter. She had been working in manufacturing and has been out of work. A friend told her about Pell Grants, scholarships and students loans. She refocused and realized that she really was good at business and chose accounting as a major. She desired a clean professional office position where she could wear nice clothes and have her nails done. She was a first generation student. Her mother was supportive once she learned that financial aid was available and her father has been supportive from the start. She chose this college because of her friend, and because the school was not too large and had a lot of opportunities, was easily accessible and affordable. It was difficult for her to be in school with those just out of high school, as she feels the younger

students do not appreciate the opportunity they have at this school. She worked hard to keep her financial aid, as she has just enough money for tuition, books, travel, and living expenses.

M.J.

M.J. was a 28 year old, Caucasian, male student. He was not married, but has a girlfriend and a baby on the way. There were six people living in one house and sharing the rent. He studied mostly at the college because the household was too hectic. He has been working in the roofing business with this father. He was unhappy with the pay and with his quality of life. He did not want his kids to grow up in poverty, and he desired a better quality of life for his family. He had also been in rehab, and did not want that for his children either. M.J. wanted to get out on his own with a landscaping business or property renewal. He realized that he did not have the skills to run his own business; therefore he is back in school. M.J. is a first generation student whose father was not supportive in any way of his return to college; however he received emotional support from his mother, girlfriend and the girlfriend's family. The financial aid enabled him to work part-time during the school year. He admitted that he now understands the relevance of the courses and that the degree is "for the learning not just the grade." Poor high school performance placed M.J. in developmental math. He realized that he is behind not only in math but in computer skills, which he will need for his business. M.J. chose this college because it was affordable and was located in his home town.

Jack

Jack was a 19 year old, African-American/Hispanic, male student. He came to this rural community college from the blue light district in Baltimore, Maryland. He was one of two children and a first generation student. Jack's father had been out of his life since the fifth grade. They text occasionally, but he is not a factor in Jack's life. His sister works at a juvenile detention

home, and his mother and grandmother have a small home construction business. These women were very supportive of his educational efforts. Jack learned about this small rural college from his high school basketball coaches. His challenges have been living in such a small community with little to do outside the college, and a small town populace not being used to a big town inner-city student. Jack was social and friendly, and learned early to make friends outside the basketball team, which helped with having varied activities. Additionally, a local host family has helped his transition. He tried to do well in high school and loved math, but still was placed in developmental mathematics classes at the college level. He had good high school teachers, but poor high school counseling. The financial aid and basketball scholarship pay his tuition; he also worked as a Resident Assistant in the dormitory and was a weight room manager. His career goals were to be a coach or a police officer.

Jackie

Jackie was a 19 year old, African American, female student. Jackie grew up a military kid. She has a sister and formerly lived with her dad and step-mother. Although college was not expected of her, her family was supportive of her efforts. A first generation student, she stayed in contact with her father. Jackie chose this college because she had a friend who was attending, so Jackie and her sister decided to come, and they were also roommates. Jackie's goal was to become a high school counselor because her own counselor was so poor and did so little to help students in her high school. Her counselor did not prepare her for college; however she was in an Upward Bound Program with a counselor who provided quality guidance. She knew it would be a long road, but her desire was strong, even though she started out in developmental mathematics. Her challenges were being away from home and learning to make decisions for herself. In addition to financial aid, Jackie was a Resident Assistant and worked five hours a week as a work study

student. She sees the largest barriers to her success are finances and a job market for teachers/counselors when she graduates.

Benny

Benny was an 18 year old, African American, male student. He was a first generation student with an absentee father. Church and his mother provided him with emotional support for his educational efforts. He came from a family of two brothers and one sister, and his mother raised the family alone. Benny used “no dad” as an excuse for failure while in high school. The high school passed him through because he was a good athlete; therefore he got behind in math. The Pell grant, athletic scholarship and work study take care of his college expenses. Benny also worked 40 hours a week at the local pizza restaurant. His goal was pre-engineering. He realized that there is a lot of college ahead of him and courses that are math-intensive. In high school his teachers were of good quality and taught him time management and study skills. A few select teachers turned him around and helped find him a college who would take him and his poor grades. He understood the largest barriers to his success would be mathematics, and finding a career when he graduates.

Findings in regard to the Research Questions

Research Question One

What factors impacted the academic persistence of Pell Grant recipients in developmental classes at a rural community college?

This research question was answered by information gathered during the interviews. The interviewees stated that sustainable finances were critical to persistence and loss of financial support would adversely affect their ability to stay in college. All of the interview subjects stated that they were Pell grant recipients and all but one student commented about family support. In

addition to the Pell grant, six of the interview subjects were receiving an additional scholarship and one had an additional scholarship plus a student loan. Half of the students were working. Two worked 10-40 hours a week. Three other students were in the work study program (5 hours a week) and resident assistants. Two were also working as assistant coaches with no pay. Continuation of financial aid was a major factor in the students' perceptions of being able to persist and achieve their goals. Also, family support, either emotional or financial, was important to their persistence. Only one student had financial support from a family member, whereas the other nine were totally reliant on the Pell grant, scholarships, and work to support their college attendance. Staying in contact with family was also important to their ability to persist. Nine of the students were found to have emotional support from at least one family member. The following are direct quotes from the student interviews concerning finances and family support.

Finances

Most students described juggling numerous jobs to cover their financial needs.

William:

I am using the Pell grant, theatre scholarship, and the 62+ scholarship. It all helps and since I'm on limited income. I'm on Social Security income is what I've been living on and getting by on, it requires, you know, close watch on the finances. This school was one-tenth the cost of a private school for the same general education classes. I also drive the bus for some of the athletic teams and still do a little handy-man work.

LooLei:

I applied for financial aid – it help me a lot to pay for the tuition and the school fees. Also, I have a part-time job so it will help me better. I also work in my brother's restaurant

sometimes when he needs me and on the week-end. I still can get some money back from the financial aid for my textbooks, the rest is for my gasoline since I have to drive a lot.

Jackie:

Financial Aid and I really like being an RA. They pay a salary, \$337 once a month. I also have work study, so it was decent.

Benny:

I have been blessed with an athletic scholarship for wrestling and the rest of it I use federal financial aid-Pell grant. They have put me in a work study program for a few hours a week. I currently work at Humble Pie, the pizza place here in town. To start out, I was working like 20 hours a week, but slowly about a month into the job I started taking on more responsibilities and working 30, 35, then 40 hours.

Jack:

Basketball scholarship and I'm an RA and work in the weight room. I help out anybody, like teachers, staff members. I'm just always around. If I'm in the gym or studying, here or anything.

Some described extra expenses related to their scholarships but not covered by the Pell Grant or loans.

Anna:

I am getting financial aid and loans and I have a Pell grant as well. The scholarship is for rodeo. It is expensive to board the horse, and to buy feed. And to be on the team you have to buy your NIRA card which is \$250 and each rodeo you enter it's a \$50 entrance fee and that's without travel expenses. There are only so many selected that are actually on the team because they get like a hundred dollars to travel with and pay their fees, but not

everybody gets selected, so it gets really expensive. I have just about enough, not too much over.

Others describe not having enough money to have needed technology.

M.J.:

I paid with my tax return this year and I have financial aid, Pell grant, so I was able to pay my rent off my financial aid and my tax return for the semester. I'm way behind on technology. Running a computer just (to apply) for financial aid was the tough part.

Those interviewed do not report parents as a source of substantial financial support.

Kent:

My dad pays about 25% of it, but then I got to pay the rest, which I can't complain. My mom is a little more financially shaky on stuff because of the situation she is in right now.

Pell Grant and wrestling scholarship and work study.

Juanita:

My mom hasn't paid anything yet because I've had my job and so I've been paying for everything, but my scholarships and my grant and my Pell grant have helped me a lot. I probably don't think I would have come here if it wasn't for the Pell grant and all that it helped me pay for. I only have a hundred and some to pay a semester, which I'm thankful for. I work at 54 Diner and I'm a grill assistant/waitress and I also clean houses for some people every once in a while. I work 20 hours a week.

This non-traditional student feels confident that she has woven together a reliable financial plan.

Linda:

I've been wanting to go back to school for quite a while. I've been out of high school for over 15 years and the money was never there and the opportunity was never there because I was always working, and then about a week before Christmas I got laid off. I have financial aid, a scholarship through the business department, work study and a small diversity loan. I am also a work study for 10 hours a week. I've got the money ahead of time and I know what I'm doing.

Family Support

Although parents may not impact student persistence financially, their emotional support is necessary and vital.

Anna:

My parents just want me to get a good education so I can have a good career down the road. They're very involved. I talk to them all the time and they're always asking about my grades. With my tests they will tell me good luck, and just being really supportive through it all. I talk to my older brother and sister a lot. They are pretty supportive, as well. If I didn't have their support, I'm not sure that I would have the will power to want to do it.

Juanita:

My parents are really old fashioned. So my dad, all he does is really work, work, work, work, and he'll come in every once in a while, but my Mom pretty much runs the family. I usually talk to them every day. I tell my mom all about my classes and she always asks. She pushes us to do better or to have good grades and continue with schooling.

Kent:

Me and my dad, we text about three time a week and I talk to my Mom about, like, once a month and both my parents will be here for my graduation. They are divorced, but they're still good friends.

LooLei:

My parents live in New York right now. They like New York because there's a big Chinatown there so it's easier for them. My mother is the inspiration. She wants at least one of her children to graduate from the college because in the family history there are none of the grandchildren who have graduated from college. She cares a lot about my school stuff. After we moved to America, she believe me can do it well for my college stuff. She still asks a little bit, but not often right now.

M.J.:

My mom is supportive. She has always wanted us to go to school and always wanted us to get good grades. It is my dad, a high school drop-out and a self-made businessman, he discourages school because he had a bad experience. My girlfriend and her family are very supportive.

Linda:

Dad has been (supportive) since the beginning. Mom was hesitant, now she is on board with it now that she sees that I'm able to do it and it's not a struggle with money and then when I got the scholarship and knowing that I'm going to have the grant, she was really excited that I wasn't going to have to worry about that. That was definitely a big, big step when she got on board with it, too. It makes it a lot easier.

Jackie:

I lived with my dad and step-mom. It is not an expectation. My parents, they would like us all to go to college, but if we want to do something else, they'll still support us and still love us. It's wise to go to college. I try to call them at least once every week or once every two weeks. If I need money, I can call and ask them and they'll send me *some* money.

This non-traditional student describes his children's support as important to his persistence.

William:

My wife passed away and school started about five weeks later. This, and school - several transitions going on within my life. My children are supportive and proud of me.

Some describe support from the larger community.

Benny:

My father isn't in my life. I used my dad not being around as an excuse for failure. My church helped me through everything that kind of pulled me down or pulled me back and helped me move forward. My mom is raising me and my two brothers and my sister. My mom, my church, and my high school counselor support me.

Jack:

I come from the Blue Light District in Baltimore, Maryland. I lived with my mom, sister and aunt. Dad lives in California and the last time I seen him in person, probably was fifth grade, but now I talk to him here and there. He got me a cell phone so he can text me. I stay in touch through Facebook and MySpace with them and about five close guys I can call up anytime. Support from friends, family is a plus. I have a host family here. That's real nice, like, I want dinner any time.

Impact of the local community and the college

The school population studied in this research project was located at a rural community college. It is important to understand student perceptions and reasons for choosing this particular college. Students chose the college because of the small size, closeness to home, an opportunity to escape the big city and the distractions of the big city for an environment where they could focus on academics and athletics, and the lower cost. Although the community was small, the students remarked about the friendliness of the community and the staff of the college. The responses showed that four students chose the college because it was “small”, three chose it because it was close in distance to their home, two chose it because of an opportunity to play sports, and one chose it because of the low cost. The challenges are the smallness of the community and little “to do” for the students off the college campus.

For those who chose to come to a small town, the choice appeared to have a positive impact – they knew what they were getting in to.

Kent:

Well, I’m from Hastings, about 30,000, but I was born and grew up until high school in a town, Pierce, Nebraska, it’s like 1,500 and so I was pretty used to it. Kind of made me feel like I was back home when I was a younger kid and I kind of just got used to the people because it reminded me back home just going out of the way to make sure your stuff’s done. And so I just liked the caring people and the way they treat you made me draw to here and I noticed that on my visit because everybody was being nice to you, like asking all questions and I just liked the environment.

Anna:

It was a smaller college and I was interested in that because I started off in Denver, Colorado, and so this really interested me and the rodeo team also interests me. I just

wanted a smaller town and smaller community. After I left Denver and I came here, I was way happier and it was a lot better for me, just more in my element.

Linda:

I thought about going to Hutch. I had thought about going to WSU. WSU was, I don't know, kind of to me scary, because it was so much bigger. I mean, in my opinion it's bigger than the campus I was in 15 years ago down in Northwestern. Hutch would have been okay. My biggest reason for coming here is, well, my girlfriend and her step-mom and just the smallness of it. The fact that it's not too big, but it's got a lot of information. It's got a lot of opportunities. So it was – it's been a really easy choice to come here.

M.J.: (this was his home town).

Juanita:

Well, I'm from a small town too, and I figured it's far enough, but still close enough to come home.

Having family located close by eased the transition from New York to a rural area for this student.

LooLei:

Because my brother runs a restaurant in Kingman, so they ask me to come here for helping. That's why I move to Kansas and Kingman. Since I'm living in Kingman, I had to drive back and forth every day.

Suggestions and encouragement from coaches and friends influenced some students.

Jack:

I was playing in a little summer league, and two coaches told me about it. I talked to Coach ____ and he said it was a real small town, really nothing to do. I knew that would

be a better chance to go the year out of high school for me, so, get me a chance to be by myself, meet a little bit of friends, nothing to do for. I'm not, like going to the city spending money, so focus on school work, basketball, meeting people. Coming out here to a small town, small community, there is a campus here, not like at home. They have supporting staff, helpful community. I know if I went to a community college at home you just have to live as you get it. I would have had to spend more money than out here where it's just basketball. I got the campus, food, depends on how much I eat, so that's fine. Coming out here than going to school at home, I think I made a better choice here.

Benny:

Wrestling scholarship. This was one school that would take my bad high school grades.

My counselor and coaches found this school for me.

William:

I thought I was going to go to Barclay College being a four year school and several people have said, 'Well why don't you check out ___?' Well, for some reason I just hadn't and such, but about two weeks before enrollment I thought, well, I haven't got anything to lose. Let's just check it out. So I came out and checked out and found out that, yes, I could start out and do the same things here that I would be doing over there at a tenth of the cost. So that was a no-brainer at that point.

Jackie:

We had a family friend that came here and he suggested it. I thought there was nothing here. It was like, oh, my gosh. When I did the college tour, I liked it and then when I actually stayed here, I was like, wow.

Choice of a place of attendance for these students was reported as being influenced by being recruited for a sport, a friend was in attendance, recommendation of others, closeness to home and nearby family seemed to have a positive influence on these students ability to persist.

Campus Climate–Positive Responses

Students reported satisfaction with the campus environment. In the interviews they cited the friendly and helpful staff as the number one point of satisfaction followed by satisfaction with Financial Aid, Recreation Center, Learning Resource Center/Library, and Study Halls. Other points of satisfaction were with the cafeteria, student nurse, coffee shop, bookstore, advisor, ease in making friends, and the ability to have a job and attend school at the same time.

Anna:

I was really confused at first, but everyone is so nice that you can just ask anybody and no one is going to reject you. They help you in any way, because I've got lost a bunch and sometimes I didn't even ask and people could tell that I was lost and so they would try and direct me in the right way.

Financial Aid office is really good. If I have any questions I can always go there and talk to the secretary lady and she'll answer anything, because sometimes I get all confused with what money is what and where does it come from and what do I have to do with it, like and how much I have to work with and then what period of time and stuff. So it is helpful to know instead of just having money tossed at me because that's money I'm going to have to like, pay back. So it's kind of nice to know what's going on there financially.

But having, like, the cafeteria here on campus really helps a lot because you don't have to go out and buy a bunch of groceries and stuff so that makes a big difference. Any little expense that you can cut helps out a lot.

I like to play a little bit of the games (in the Recreation Center) because it's nice because I really don't have much in my dorm so it's fun and good to know that you can go over there. The whole time I've been here (Learning Resource Center) this semester I've only been in probably a handful of times, but it's always been open and they've been helpful if I need to look for something and I can't find it, so I'd say the hours are pretty good and I'm surprised that it stayed open as late as it did actually.

The school nurse I'd say, I had to go there a couple times and it's been really helpful and nice and sometimes I know if she's in there daily, like, every day. I got to know her pretty good and she's really nice and, so I've helped her out and just hung up posters around dorms and stuff for her, just do odds and ends stuff. And I've sat in the cafeteria for her so people could do drawings and stuff.

Kent:

I like the way the financial aid office works, because well, if I have a question I'll go up there and they can give me a direct answer. If they don't have an answer for you they'll tell you exactly where to go and who to talk to.

The only time I go to the rec center is about, like, if we do have, like, an hour before practice a lot of us go down there and play ping pong or play pool and it's just a fun time, blow off some steam or just kill some other time.

Yeah, well, at first I didn't really think (study hall) was that important. But after awhile I realized that it was helping me a lot with my studies because it would be like an hour, hour and a half and you really didn't have much choice because they would be breathing down your neck telling you to get your work done, but I really liked the new study hall program

because it really helped me get my studies done. I like to go to study hall with the team just because you have people to talk to about stuff.

Linda:

It's been very easy. I've been in the financial office quite a bit here the last couple of weeks and any time I've got questions they're ... you know, if they don't have the answer right then, they'll say, 'Ok give us a couple of days and get back with us and we'll try to get the answer.' The bookstore ... they're real helpful with things. They're kind of the same way, you know, if they don't know something they'll try to find out. Having the cafeteria with the meal tickets has been a big help being able to purchase them and have them so you don't have to worry about having cash on you, that's helped.

M.J.:

_____ was my advisor and, like, she did everything really good I thought as far as telling me where to go and the books office as really friendly, but I know everybody around here, too. That helps out a little bit, but yeah I didn't have any troubles getting back into it.

Jack:

The janitors and security work together and extend the gym time from closing at 10:00 to 12:00, so if you have more than five people with you, so that's always not a problem. The weight room, since I'm staff in the weight room now, I can always go in there whenever since I'm on duty. So that is never an issue. My coach is my advisor and I can always talk to the athletic director about anything, and also one of the recruiters.

Jackie:

All of the offices here ... I love everybody that works here. Most of them know me and I try to be as polite as I can. I don't want a bad reputation. My parents taught me not to be rude to adults. So, I mean, like I appreciate all the offices here.

Benny:

As far as good things I can say that a lot of, a lot of the employees here at the college, like, as far as the librarians, or the ladies in the mail office, or the people at the front office, I mean, I just kind of talk to them. Janie works in the front of the athletic office, I just kind of talk to her and just express myself to her sometimes, which is nice to have.

Juanita:

The study hall program, it's good to put it in with our classes as a class. I think I've done a lot better with that. I'm glad because it gives me time to do my homework, like, instead of just study halls randomly, because it fits into my schedule. I started realizing that if I sat by myself other than with the other people that I know in the class, I pay attention a lot more. So I just put myself away from everybody else and it's just me.

Students and friends were important to some students.

LooLei:

The students, because if I have questions, the first person I will choose, is like, my friend, who is very close to me. She can help me to figure out what I was going to do. If I cannot find a friend, I just go to ask the teacher's advice.

The other things is like in college time you can do both, you can have a part-time job. It would be much easier for a college student, because in China I still have friends, their

tutions their parents have to pay for yet, so they don't have part-time. They just work on their studies.

One of the non-traditional students described enjoying interaction with the younger students.

William:

I kind of got back into the swing of things, began to feel more comfortable. I found I could hold my own with the rest of the student body. Began to feel more comfortable with the young people and feel accepted by the young people. So, you know, it was a good start and it was, you know, it was in the right direction.

I've used some of the resources available through the library, you know, books, that type thing.

The closest thing to (a non-traditional student group) that is the coffee shop you know.

First semester there was three, four of us that met every morning down there for coffee.

You know, we'd study and we'd discuss and we'd do this and we'd do all the things that other people do and that was beneficial.

Students in the research study were generally pleased with the campus climate. Cited as strengths were the friendly and helpful staff and office personnel, the ability to make friends, the study hall program and interaction with students of different ages contributed to students' persistence.

Campus Environment – Negative Responses

Students were not as satisfied with offices closing early, lack of adult tutors for non-traditional students, lack of non-traditional student activities, communication issues that plague international students, the lack of printing access in the dorms, students being hungry late in the

evening after cafeteria hours, and students not being serious enough about their studies and educational opportunities.

The non-traditional students spoke of the need for a non-traditional age tutor who might better relate to the developmental course needs of the older student; the challenges of being a commuter student; the need to stay focused; and the need to communicate to others when in need of assistance.

William:

The biggest, hardest part for me is the Algebra and that's going to continue to be the hard part for me the way it looks. I may be the oldest student that has ever had trying to pass math. I know for the younger people if it comes natural to them it seems so simple and easy. They can't understand how come an old guy like me can't understand.

It has been suggested that I, perhaps try to find out if one of the high school math teachers would be available to tutor. I think a qualified instructor might help me more than another student.

Most of the junior college in the transition period is actually geared for the high school students coming out of high school and more of them are going to be dorm students as well. So for the rest of us, it is just kind of – well, I haven't found a whole lot of anything for us. A non-traditional organization could be a plus, you know, for married students and non-traditional students. I think that could be a plus, because it allows people of like mind and like nature to experience the educational process in a more meaningful way.

Linda:

Weather has been a hindrance, but that's not, you know, that's one of those that you can't really fix that one. Driving in, you know, you get 90 mile an hour winds across the road and, oh, my gosh.

M.J.:

I felt like I'm too old ... because I'm 28, but I'm just not a traditional student, so I just try to come to class and plus that helps me focus to steer clear of the student body too, you know, so that I'm not wrapped up in kind of the high school aspect of it.

LooLei:

The communication. That and also because my personal... it's kind of too shy to ask. You have to organize everything by yourself. Maybe you need help when you need help you just go ask and you'll get help. The first thing is to just go ask help when you need it. Otherwise it will be kind of closed yourself.

Traditional age students were concerned with the hours of operation of the campus offices, the inability to print in the dormitories or on campus after hours, the need for food after hours for students who were food-short and hungry, and the poor reputation of the wrestling program in the community.

Anna:

I was kind of surprised how quickly everyone kind of shuts down for the day, because one day I was in here and it was, like, 2:30 and it was hard even finding, like, getting anybody to help me, like because I had to get some papers signed and seems like after 1 o'clock it's hard to find the people you need sometimes.

Juanita:

My classes have been difficult. I didn't have a schedule like this, so I have three classes a day, or a class every day and, then, class just Tuesday, Thursday. When you are in a sport, they own you, so getting used to doing what coach says, and having all these rules that aren't your 'parents' rules.

Jack:

We could do better with printing. One of my teammates, he have a printer, so printing is not an issue for me. Now, other students who are in different sports, baseball, all that, they probably have a problem. We have computers in the dorms so maybe they finish a paper at 10 o'clock and need to print it. That's an issue right there. The library opens at 8:00 when you have your class at 8 o'clock, so that's an issue trying to get in, but you got 10 kids coming in, one printer. Problem right there.

Jackie:

I was one of the people who was getting sick around here. I was throwing up for, like, a whole day and I think it might have been because of the cafeteria and that's a big problem I had. Out of everything else that's the big problem I have about _____.

The cafeteria. I wish their food was a little bit better, but their workers are good.

I think the school should have, like a food stand or something, like, at night because here's a lot of students that are hungry. We have to do like McDonalds runs and stuff. So I'm like, I think they should have some food on campus so student's don't go in and out of places and cause trouble, especially at Wal-mart. So I think it would be better if we have, like, maybe the Beaver Café was open to 10 o'clock. Vending machines would be fine. With food-food, not with soda and maybe a candy bar. I mean, I don't know if that would

fill anybody up. I know some students who are hungry. Some of them text me, oh, like, do you have any food? I'm like, no. I'm actually looking for food, too. Just sitting there hungry and, so, and not a lot of the students on campus have jobs to where they can go get food. I think for the week-end the cafeteria closes a little early so I think everybody still is hungry.

Benny:

It's kind of hard to stay focused, because of negativity that is not only the college, not only people at the college, but individuals around the town have about wrestlers. Wrestlers haven't built up a good reputation for themselves here at this school, here in this area. Sometimes I feel like it would be better if there was more people taking it seriously, but I understand that this is a junior college, so I can't really know how serious people take it. I take it seriously because I'm trying to move on to the next level. This is not the end of the road for me. It is for some. It is for many.

There were specific concerns with the campus environment that affected the non-traditional student: tutors in their age range, and an expressed desire for non-traditional student activities. The traditional students found office hours and printing availability to be problematic as well as community perceptions of the athletic program. However, a new theme emerged from the interviews; some students were food-short and hungry on campus.

First Generation

First generation students typically have lower persistence rates due to the fact that parents and family support systems are not knowledgeable about financial aid and the opportunities that a college education or training can open up for their student. Often cultural stigma "pulls" on the

student's attendance and study requirements are a negative factor toward persistence. Of those students in this research study, seven were first generation students.

Juanita:

Yeah, my sister and I are the first. Well, my mom, she wants to see me with my degree. She was real excited when I got my high school diploma because she didn't. She came back to school here in Liberal and got her GED. But my sister graduated from a Juco (community college) and now she's going to a four-year. I did it for my mom because I want to be successful.

Benny:

I'm the first of my siblings to go to college. My older brother he decided not to go to school. My father didn't go to college either. We struggled quite a bit. I'm trying to do the things that I know that are right to make things better for my life and for the people who are around me and give a better example for my younger brother and sister

Linda:

I'm the first one of all of us to go to college. Dad did not graduate high school. He dropped out shortly before graduation. Mom did finish high school. Dad's from Hutch-Haven. Mom's from Kingman.

William:

Mother and father had an eighth grade education. I don't think mom quite finished eighth grade.

Anna:

It makes me feel good that I can just go off on my own and be able to do it.

LooLei:

When I was in China, my mom hope for me, I can get into the college and finish the college, get a degree. So she hope, at least, there's one of her child can graduate from the college because in a family history there's no one of the grandchildren graduate from the college.

M.J.

Dad is a self-made businessman, a high school drop-out. He had a bad experience because he was dyslexic, and like, back whenever he went to school they didn't know dyslexic was a 'thing.' So he is turned off by school because he feels he had it unfair.

Summary of Findings: Research Question One

Although financial support from parents or family was non-existent for nine of the ten research subjects, the ability to put together a web of additional financial resources to support themselves and their related college expenses was necessary to being able to persist. The combination of the Pell Grant, student loans, federal work study, other scholarship awards, working part-time and full time while attending class were all critical to continued attendance. This segment of the student population was found to be so financially fragile, that any failure or lack of access to additional resources would spell disaster for their potential to persist.

Research Question Two

What factors impacted the achievement of Pell grant recipients in developmental classes at a rural community college? Interview participants recounted experiences with high school preparation for college and high school counselor support. Only three of the research participants felt that their high schools had prepared them for college study. The majority of the participants were actively engaged in an athletic sport/team. The only problematic issue that surfaced in regard

to this level of participation was time management and self-management. Participants understood that sports participation was an integral part of their ability to afford a college education. The majority of non-traditional students had family, work, and commute time to campus that constrained their ability to participate in campus activities.

Past Academic Preparation and Counseling

This research question was answered by information gathered during the interviews. The interviewees talked about past academic performance and the effectiveness of the high school counselor who prepared or did not prepare them for college study. Three students reported feeling that they were prepared for college and six felt that they were not adequately prepared. Two students reported excellent to adequate high counseling, while six reported less than adequate to poor high school counseling services. The following are direct quotes from the interview subjects concerning high school preparation and high school counseling.

High School Preparation

Three students in the study felt that they were not well prepared by their high school for college. The reasons varied from being bored with high school, to curriculum that was not challenging.

M.J.:

I was bored with it, like, because, I don't know, school has always been easy for me to pass, but it wasn't really, I don't know, like, I didn't feel very challenged and so it was just kind of boring to me and I've never been, like, a straight A student, but I've always known what I could get away with and, you know, and I always passed, but I don't necessarily get the best grade that I could, you know, so that's - it was just - I felt it was too easy and it was boring, I guess. Other than it was _____ High and it wasn't that challenging, I didn't

think. For, I don't know, they didn't challenge the students that much, really, I didn't think. It was just kind of because I didn't know why I was going to use math, you know, going through school and then I did machining for awhile and I was expected to know Geometry and Algebra, lots of Algebra, and then I didn't really know it, you know, but it's just like I didn't understand the importance to have all those skills and had I been instructed in that way, you know, like, kind of explain like a math problem to build a part for a car you need to know this so, you know, then it would have been a lot more interesting, because then I was just, like, why do I need to know why A equals X.

Juanita:

I would say one class out of every year. Actually just a couple, but not — I went to high school and I didn't ever really have to study and for all my tests and coming here you have to adjust to studying more often or else I wouldn't do so great.

Some teachers were tough, I had pretty good teachers, but some I wish they would have prepared me. They kind of let the students overtake them. I always have problems with math, and the tutors for that they have down in the study hall room, like, sometimes will help me when he's not working. So I'm thankful for that.

Kent:

Well, I really wasn't the student to try too hard in high school. I don't think I really studied for much. I just was there to be there. If I would have done what they said it would have helped me a lot, but just organizational skills and stuff. It took me awhile to get organized when I came to college and I didn't really like it that well being disorganized. I didn't listen to nobody saying how important high school was before you go to college and I wish I would have done that.

Other students reported that high school provided more rigorous course offerings and faculty that were helpful and encouraged students to do well.

Anna:

I felt like I was pretty well prepared. The school I went to was kind of, had tougher requirements for most schools around that area. So I felt like I was pretty well prepared, because the teachers weren't, I mean, it was kind of stricter and we always had challenging assignments and stuff. So I felt comfortable when I came to college.

I've not used the tutors, but I've used, like, my advisor a lot to help with a lot of my questions about classes or if I have a question. If I'm looking to go to a university if it will transfer, like, the advisor has been really good to go to.

LooLei:

The first year in high school we just study. At the beginning of the second year we are going two separate two ways, one is like consider about – I don't know how to translate because one career is (inaudible) you only need to study, like, English, Chinese history. Some classes, that would be main class, but you still need to know some basic math, but it's not required. And the other way is kind of all about the science. We are separate two weeks; after that is kind of you have to make a choice about what kind of career you are going to. At the end after you ... at the end before you taking the final test to graduate. They also give us a form of all different kind of college. You have to choose what kind of college you need to go to.

Linda:

Actually, yeah. When I was in high school I was actually wanting to major in something dealing with math or science. I was more ... that was where my interests were back when I

was in high school and, so, I had applied to Northwestern Oklahoma State University down in Alva and I went there for a year with the intention of having a major in math.

Jack:

High school was really good. We had a lot of teachers that wanted you to do well.

Actually, I had a math teacher, and that is why I fell in love with math. I always put myself out there, make sure I know all the teachers, not being a suck-up, but just let them know that I care. They taught me a lot of things.

Jackie:

The high school was pretty big, pretty crowded. The classes, they did help me a lot. It was mandatory, we had a mandatory class called LOYO, which is called Live on Your Own, and it taught us about, like, about rent and buying a car, forming lists-budget lists and stuff so I believe that actually did help me.

Benny:

Most definitely, most definitely. That's one thing I can say, especially for this particular school, I mean, the seriousness. I actually graduated from _____ School. I'm from Ohio, and they definitely, like, the teachers were really serious on making sure the students knew that college was not going to be something you could just mess around with. They told you that you had more free time, but you had to use it wisely. So I had to build good study habits, especially since high school is scheduled, like, six- or seven-hour day.

High School Counseling

High school counseling was a weak link in student preparation and planning for college.

Five of the students reported poor to non-existent high school counseling and four reported good to

quality counseling experiences, and one student commented on an upper-bound program that assisted with counseling for college.

Anna:

I was not impressed by our high school counselor. I mean, the rest of the, like, faculty was really good and really loved their jobs, but the guidance counselor really didn't do much. He was just there, like, if you had to get some paperwork, or anything, but he never really pushed, or offered too much, so that was kind of a let-down. You pretty much were on your own. You had to figure out where you wanted to do and what you wanted to do kind of on your own. My senior year we would take, like, not really a quiz, but something along those lines to, like, show what you'd be most interested in, like what type of field, but we only did, like, one of those and it was toward the beginning of the year. So I don't really remember much besides that. I found it helpful at the time but then by the time graduation came around it was I was just kind of clueless again.

Juanita:

I didn't really talk to my counselors unless it was about dropping a class or changing my schedule. They didn't really advise me as well as I think they should have. My sister was more my counselor than my counselor was.

William:

He was very poor. Dad died while I was in school. So I could have gone to college then on a Social Security benefit. And my education would have been paid for. For some reason, that was never communicated to me. I just had either some very, very poor counseling or no counseling at all to actually help me go from high school to college.

M.J.:

No, not really. Well, actually a counselor did have us do like a computer program that would tell us what we would be good at or whatever, but since high school that, I mean, that has changed a lot because it told me I should be a physical therapist, which, you know, is not at all what I would really be interested in doing.

Jack:

Know my counselor? No, not really, but there was enough staff members that could help me out. Can't even remember her name to this day. Them other teachers, I can remember everybody's name except the counselor, even the principal. I talked to the principal more than my counselor.

Kent:

Like, we had four different, like, the whole school had four different counselors and it was based on your name, your last name and, so, my counselor was from _____, Kansas, and she got me interested in _____ Community College because they had wrestling and then I talked to my head coach and he said I don't want to go there. Come here. And so she helped me out with my college selections a lot. Like, she had me fill out like about five applications for just like some Kansas schools and surrounding Nebraska schools that had wrestling. They took an interest in what you wanted to go into and then they would give you a list, a couple of lists of schools and you would come back, talk to them some more and they would just break it down for you. Like, asking what your major wanted.

LooLei:

Umm, actually they have ... they talk about those things, um, at the end.

Linda:

He was pretty decent. Any time we had problems and stuff he was ... He always had an open door. I mean he helped us with anything.

Benny:

Actually, pretty good. His name was _____. I went to him for just about everything, whether it be family situations, or anything that was pretty important. I mean, I talked to him when I was not doing so well in classes and he'd give advice on what I needed to do, or what a specific time was to meet with somebody to study and I think he played a big part in why I'm a better student because between him and a few teachers, a few select teachers that really helped me. Well, the thing about it is, it was more personal because to start high school, to start my junior year, I had less than a 1.0 GPA because I was a horrible student. I skipped school quite a bit. I was very irresponsible. I got involved with people I shouldn't have been and he sat down and talked with me, that's what I mean on a personal level. Like he was, like, 'you can sit here and make poor decisions for the rest of your high school career and then you get to college and not be, not amount to anything for the rest of your life' and that was a big thing with me, because personally, I mean, though I don't know too much about my dad any more, I don't talk to him that often, but I don't want to amount to a father not taking care of my kids or something like that, I mean, because things happen and things come up and I want to be prepared. That was a big thing Mr._____ helped me with as far as getting back on the right track because it takes a lot to stop missing school and stop skipping class and wanting to hang out with friends and just walk around town and go to the game stores or whatever I decided to do that day and when I look back I'm, like, wow, I was really immature and I regret it, but I wasn't an academic

qualifier for a lot of universities that I wanted to get into because of that. So now I'm here trying to get my GPA up so for me to make sure that when I move on to the next level I'm prepared and they won't look at my grades and think, like, hey, what is this? This is horrible! Because to graduate high school, I think my cumulative was maybe 1.8, 1.9, and that was consistently not getting less than a 3.0 for the entirety of the rest of my high school career, from my junior year to the end of my senior year. I don't think I got less than a 3.1

Some students in need of guidance and counseling for college found resources outside of their high school in youth and community programs.

Jackie:

No, but I was part of an upper-bound program which they were kind of my counselor a little bit. We'd go to K-State and they'd sometime they do help us study. They helped me a lot, but as far as from the school, no not really. You'd have to go see them and talk to them rather than them requesting you. That's one of the reasons I wanted to be a counselor, so I could be better than that and get into the kid's life because my counselor wasn't all that good. She didn't really do anything.

The interview participants did not report any perceptions as to the cause of poor high school counseling. Causes could be related to large case loads, shift of focus from counseling to state mandated testing administered by counselors, or possible overload with discipline issues. There is not enough information in student testimony to find cause.

Declaration of Major and Sports/Activity Affiliation

The results of the interviews were that nine of the students had declared a major; one had not declared a major. Five of the students were attached to a sport; one was on a scholarship with

an activity; one attended activities and functions with no scholarship tie to those activities; and three did not participate in sports or activities or campus functions.

Anna:

Major:

I haven't figured it out yet. I've just kind of been taking some general classes to see what I'd be interested in.

Sport:

The rodeo team interests me. Goat tying.

Juanita:

Major:

Business administration. I want to go into cosmetology school. So I figured if I come here, get my gen eds done, and have my business administration degree, go to a cosmetology school afterwards and I'm already going to have my business administration, so own my own business if that fails I could always go back and my gen eds are already done.

Sport:

I'm here on a scholarship for soccer and I ran cross-country after soccer season last year and made it to Nationals. I'm a long distance runner.

Kent:

Major:

Now my major is in health education and the reason I chose that is because I want to end up being a coach. I really don't want to be a high school coach necessarily, but just a college coach and my major...that's why I chose my major so I can get more background in the sports and the way the body works and everything.

Sport:

Wrestling. Well, I kind of got a real eye-opener, my freshman year. I suffered a concussion in wrestling and I 'wasn't able to concentrate in classes and so my grades dropped a lot and, then, I also really didn't try that hard my freshman year. I'll throw that out there. The concussion wasn't the main reason. And then my sophomore year I got another one that is probably, like, one of my worst ones that I suffered and I had to be put on, like, muscle relaxer medication to help me concentrate and stuff and teachers really didn't find that as a legitimately good excuse of why my grades were dropping. So I got threatened to get kicked out of school and I went and talked to the guy I had to go talk to about my situation and stuff and he said they'll give me one more shot and that kind of made me realize that it could be – my education could be taken away that quick and I kind of turned it around after that and took summer classes and my freshman year my GPA was a .89 and I finished with a 2.45. My coach took me in as a student coach after I got hurt and it kind of made me want to go into coaching even worse than I did before just because I got the taste of it now.

William:

Major:

Psychology or social work. It really is the beginning of a new career for me. You know, having put in some 40 years plus in the construction industry and working in the trades, the body was starting to tell me things that it didn't like me doing that anymore and while I'm in relatively good shape there's certain parts of it that just are a lot harder and I decided it was time for a change. And, you know, I've always considered myself being a person-oriented individual, and you know, seen in the construction and remodel industry I felt that

was a service of helping people to achieve things they wanted done or needed to have done. So this is kind of an outgrowth of all of that as I see it. It allows me to use the mind more and not be so dependent upon the strength of the body and as we have visited a little bit prior, you know, that the body could deteriorate considerably and yet as long as I have the mind, I could still counsel and still help people that maybe have a need that I could help.

Sport/Activity:

I got a scholarship in theatre production which I, you know, help build the sets and build the big stuff and everything for the plays this year and maybe I build it too well because I thought it was just temporary and now they're wanting to leave it permanent. So if they, in fact, want to keep it and utilize it that way, then we need to go in and tweak a couple of things. I'm involved in the choir and participate with the young people there and then I'm also a bus driver.

I did attend a couple of things, you know, a couple of sessions at the Student Center. I kind of felt that they were geared more for the younger students and more or the dormitory students too.

LooLei:

Major:

My major is nursing. I try to get my associate degree of nursing first. Probably I will go to work first, then get some experience. Maybe I will go back to college again to get a higher degree. I'm thinking from the accounting degree because that is kind easier like in nursing. Just in case if I cannot did very well ... do very well in nursing maybe I will change my major to an accounting.

Sports/Activity:

I like to, but I don't have any activities here right now. I was tennis player in high school.

I like activity, but since I had a part-time job so I don't have too much time to do my activity. If I have the chance I stay once to do.

Linda:

Major:

Accounting. Yeah. The work load will be a little bit bigger because I've got 16 credit hours this semester. Everything is going towards my accounting. Uh-huh. Yep. It's... I've been wanting to do it for years. I like working with numbers. I like doing calculations and stuff like that. I've, I used to work a couple of different cash places and it's always been simple for me and I enjoy it, so, I thought it would be a good idea. Yeah, I've worked... well, basically manufacturing. So it's always been something manufacturing. So it's nice to be able to say, you know, I want to do something, where, one, I can wear the nice clothes and, you know, I can have my nails done and don't worry about being dirty all the time. I'm kind of looking forward to that.

Sport/Activity:

No, I live off campus. I live in Kingman, so it's an hour drive every day pretty much to get here.

M.J.:

Major:

Business. Just my pay and my quality of life I don't feel is like up to par to what I want it to be and to accomplish my goals, like, because I want to be an entrepreneur and to accomplish my goals I have to have a degree and not necessarily the degree, but the, like,

the knowledge that goes into the degree and so this time school is different because I'm actually trying to learn, rather than make the grade. I'm thinking property, like, real estate, like fixing properties, damaged properties, or landscaping, maybe not even fixing a whole property, but just the landscape aspect of, like, renewal real estate kind of. I'm wanting to learn (computer skills) for business ... how to use Access and Excel for business purposes.

Sports/Activities:

Oh, no, no.

Jack:

Major:

Right now probably, like, just a police officer. I know probably when I transfer I'm going to learn some more things, probably like CIA, FBI. Coming from the city, especially Baltimore, the inner city was, like, top ten in crime rate. I have a good, how do I say, street mind, you know. I know what a criminal may do or may think. So I know you could put me as an undercover cop, always catching them. Of course, I put my life at the risk...that's why I like it, like, course when everybody born everybody want to be a doctor or a nurse, course you know that's not going to happen. But the adrenaline that caught my attention just the rush. Fast life, exciting. Help a lot of people.

Sport/Activity:

Basketball, it's my scholarship.

Jackie:

Major:

I actually want to be a high school counselor, but in order for me to do that I have to teach for two to three years, so this is preparing me to be what I actually really want. I do want to become a teacher, but I really, really, really want to be a counselor.

Sport/Activities:

I participated in most all of the activities. I might have skipped some because I had, like, to study, or do homework, but for the most part I was there most of the time. I think when you first come here I think you should be involved so you know who you're going to be with and you're going to see all these people for, like, almost a year, so you need to know who you're around and you can form friends so then when you do have homework you have friends who can help you study, or put yourself out there a lot more.

Benny:

Major:

I'm actually here at ____; I'm trying to get my associates in pre-engineering. Yeah, and science to go into civil engineering as a major at a four-year school. I know it's a little tougher road because engineering involves a lot of math and science, which are subjects that sometimes can be hard even, I mean, I like most of the subjects, but sometimes they can be, they can start to get difficult and stressful, but once I understand it I understand it and I can get through it.

Sport/Activities:

I've been blessed with scholarship here, athletic scholarship for wrestling. Not only do I not have time (for activities) because even if I wanted to try to find time sometimes the

students here are not, not mature enough to socialize with, or sometimes just hang out with. I mean, the one friend I do, the one real friend I hung out with pretty often he's from Arizona and he was more of a mature person and I could talk to him about things and stuff like that. But a lot of the guys here get involved with drinking things that aren't very admirable for, I mean, it happens. It's college, I understand, but there's a certain level of extreme that you need to stay behind. I mean, there's a line where it becomes too extreme and it becomes an every night thing and kind of puts a damper on things as far as making friends because it's hard to make friends when there's not very many, I guess, young, young men or women that are, that are trying to be extremely serious, because, like, is not a very difficult school, but it's - it's a different thing, because you do find yourself often times bored because there's not a lot of stuff to do in the town, or things like that. That's why I knew I needed, like it would be a good idea for me to find a job because if I was making some extra money and using my time and getting paid for it, then, I'd much rather do that than sit in my room and search the Internet or doing whatever, just hang out, I guess.

The interview subjects did not mention whether having declared a major helped them with or detracted from their academic focus. The interview subjects did not comment as to whether being involved in athletics made an impact on their achievement, but they did report difficulty in time management and managing their personal schedules. They also remarked about hard decisions concerning the allure of going out to 'party' when there was a pressing need to study. Non-traditional students did not have time for sports or campus activity participation primarily due to the need to work, the commute time to campus, and family obligations. Only one of the non-traditional students was involved in campus activity.

Community College Support with Tutors and Advisors

Three students talked about using tutors, one student did not use the tutors, and six did not mention using tutors. Two of these students expanded on their experiences. One student found that using a different tutor each time for math was confusing to him, and he discovered that finding a consistent time and using the same tutor was of greater benefit. Another student, non-traditional, found that student tutors were not working for him. He found that the student tutors were not as tolerant of his needing tutoring services as they were with their traditional aged peers. He intended to find an adult tutor or a math instructor.

William:

Tutors:

I have. I have used the study hall, not as much to my advantage as I would like. So this next semester I'm definitely going to advertise and do whatever it takes to hire a tutor to where we can really sit down and work one-on-one and get to the issues that bother me that, you know, are a hindrance to me so I can figure out why they are. Several people have suggested that I, perhaps, try to find out if one of the high school math teachers would be available to tutor. And so I think I will go ahead and check in on that and see what, what I might do, you know, I think a qualified instructor might help me more than another student. Because of the different teaching skills that they have and have acquired.

You know, and for the younger people if it comes natural to them, you know, it seems so simple and so easy to them, you know, and, well, how come an old guy like you can't understand what I'm trying to say? Well, obviously, if I could understand it I wouldn't be in here asking questions from you.

Benny:

Tutors:

In math I used several tutors, actually. I went five days a week because they have different tutors throughout the week. So I went five days a week probably for four or five weeks in a row just to make sure my grade went up. So I was kind of happy that I ended up with a C. Yeah. They, some of the tutors started confusing themselves because I would learn one way one day from one person, and, then, another way from another person and, then, they do try to measure the two ways and I'd get to the test and not remember which method to use and start mixing methods for different problems and then it started, that started becoming an issue for me. So I started only going on the days that I knew a certain person was there or two people because they taught the same way.

Juanita:

Tutors:

One of the guy tutors that, I always have problems with math, and the tutors for that, they have down in the study hall room, like, sometimes will help me when he's not working. So, I'm thankful for that.

Anna:

Tutors:

Umm, I've not really used the tutors.

Five of students spoke of having positive experiences with their campus advisors. Some used coaches as their advisors while others chose faculty or the advisors located in the Student Success Center.

Anna:

Advisor:

I've used, like, my advisor a lot to help with a lot of my ... if I have questions about classes, or what I, if I have a question, like, if I'm looking to go to a university if it will transfer, like the advisor has been really good to go to. I've double-checked just to be sure, but now I'm pretty comfortable with her.

Juanita:

Advisor:

I used my regular advisor, which is my coach and he's done a lot for me. I'm thankful because I probably wouldn't ... with the insights that he's given me about my future were and have been really helpful.

Kent:

Advisors:

Two different advisors. She wasn't as lenient. She got fed up with my shenanigans and my not doing well. The other one is was more understanding. Would take her time with me and talk to me about the professors. I felt like she know my personality and like my learning style more than the other advisor.

Linda:

Advisor:

(The advisor) has been wonderful. It was nice being able to sit down with her and, you know, discuss it and she's been real helpful on, you know, where I need to go with what classes and everything.

Jack:

Advisor:

My coach is my advisor, so we talk daily, especially, with the new coach we're like best friends. The other coach, the other head coach we had good relations, real good. I ever needed something, I, of course, talk to him. Call him on his cell phone after hours.

Transition to college

These students were second semester freshmen at the rural community college. All of them were in at least one developmental class, all were Pell Grant recipients., Themes that emerged from the interviews were the transition into college, self-organization, and some interesting and reflective perspectives from the interviewees. Not every interview yielded response to all three themes.

Anna:

Transition:

Probably, um, just mainly for me is trying not to get too aggravated because it gets kind of old doing the same routine every week in the same classes, but, I mean, I'm not the biggest fan of school, so ... but being around a small campus has helped me out a lot. The people, I mean, the teachers are really great, kind of reminds me of high school in a way because it's not too much. I'd say rodeo has helped me keep not so dull and bored with everything.

Juanita:

Transition:

It wasn't too bad because I'm pretty independent. It's just how I was raised to do everything myself. At first, not having my parents tell me, you know, clean this, clean that, or go do this or go pick up your brother. I just miss being around them or having them

around all the time. And just pretty much getting to know new people, not knowing if you're able to trust anyone or not, you don't know, you know, everybody is from a different place ... just being able to adjust to different personalities that I haven't encountered.

Kent:

Transition:

I didn't know my roommate before I came. For about two or three days we really didn't say much to each other and then we kind of started opening up because we didn't really have a choice. You either sit there and stare at each other, or start talking. And we ended up being pretty good friends. He is a wrestler. I think one of the main reasons why I didn't drop out is just because I was in the sport and just the environment here.

Jackie:

Transition:

Town is so far away and stuff you have to walk to get anywhere. I have a car. My roommate was my sister. It was cheaper so we didn't have to buy like two refrigerators, only buy one and we share. We get along pretty well. It was stressful because I'd never been away from my parents for that long, but as I started to get, I guess, more mature and okay with it, I realize sometimes you have to, like, branch off and become your own person, rather than let, you know, let your parents be that person to always make your decisions. So I realized ... a lot of tears were shed because, you know, I wanted mommy and daddy to make decisions for me, but since I'm away I have to make them for myself mainly...because I'm an adult.

Non-traditional students reported difficulty in transition to college.

William:

Transition:

We started classes about five weeks after my wife had passed away. And I found that the first three weeks were actually the hardest for me as far as getting back into the swing of classes, of study, of homework, all of the things that go along with that kind of a shock therapy type thing that I went through.

Linda:

Transition:

I applied to Northwestern Oklahoma State University and I went there for a year with the intention of having a major in math. I moved out-of-state and being my family wasn't so close it was really hard for me to adjust to being away from the family and so I didn't end up continuing. I came home and started working. I've been out of school for 15 years.

Coming back has not really been a difficult transition. I thought it was going to be because of, you know, being out of school for so long and, you know, all the responsibilities of home and parenting and everything, but it's actually been a pretty easy adjustment.

M.J.:

Transition:

I was kind of nervous about starting because I wasn't for sure. I've been out of school for 10 years ... because I didn't know what I still remembered from high school but yeah, that was probably the biggest feeling I had was just nerves.

Students from the urban environment had difficulty in transition, but seemed to make friends and campus connections more quickly than their rural counterparts.

Benny:

Transition:

This past semester things started, I started slacking a small, small portion because I allowed myself to get distracted by things that were not very adult-like. I guess I could blame my job or my girlfriend or anything like that but there's not necessarily any excuse because I know that I'm here to get my education, so putting things that aren't shouldn't be first, that's what I found myself doing quite often.

I'm a firm believer in getting the best that I can out of what I can and if I can get some money to go to school and further my education and wrestle for a little longer, or whatever future has for me, I definitely want to do that, because that would be a real blessing for me to do, I mean it's a fun thing.

Jack:

Transition:

My first roommate was from Virginia, so we had a connection right there. Then my next roommate he was from New Jersey, so we had a bond from there. Coming here, don't hang up with the basketball team, your teammates all begin the school year. Basketball season we're always going to be together. Meet new people. Like, I'm real good friends with the whole baseball team lineman program, regular students here, baseball softball, so you just got to get out and explore for real.

Self-organization was discussed by six of the interviewees. This was a common theme in adaptation to college for all students and for establishing independence for the traditional student.

Juanita:

Self-organization:

It was a little difficult at first semester because I do my job and I had bills that I had to pay that, it was kind of hard to manage at first, but once I found a system to do, it got a lot easier. I use post-it notes everywhere, just reminders, and I leave them everywhere, places I know that I'll be, on my mirror, and stuff, reminder to pay this, or pay that, or you have to do this and do that. And the planner, I use my planner a lot.

Kent:

Self-organization:

I tried to use a planner but it only worked about a week or so and the, I just put notes, like, in my notebook like on the front page. And I kind of have, like, kind of like Radar of MASH 4077 kind of got my own way of organizing stuff. If I have to do something I'll write it down and then when I write something down it seems to stick in your brain a little easier and I put little post-its up in my room. I find that a little easier than writing a journal, but that's just my organizational skills.

Jackie:

Self-organization:

Well, I make sure when I work, I work on certain days where I can get my homework done or usually as an RA we have to sit in the lobby from either 7:00 'til 12:00 or 9:00 to 12:30 and in that time I can do my homework. And then, like Saturday and Sundays I hang out with my friends and go to the club, I was in Christian Challenge, you know, get time to relax and just I think I balanced it pretty well. At times it was stressful, but I made it through it.

Self-organization was also an initial issue for four non-traditional age students.

William:

Self-organization:

I prioritize my life so that education came first, you know. I'm here for a reason and that is to better, better myself in whatever way I can and to get the most out of it that's possible.

I've set the classes that are most necessary, or highest priority, you know, I try to get those first and do that. I try to do my homework every day and stay ahead of, you know, the curve so that I'm not always rushing and cramming at the last minute and I have held pretty faithful to that. There have been a couple of times that I've got lazy and sloppy and kind of let some things slide, but not to any major detriment. I realize in my case it's a hard row to hoe.

LooLei:

Self-organization:

I don't make plans. I try to make plans, but it doesn't work too well. I just follow my daily life because my daily life is kind of very simple: just go to school, then to back straight home. Then most of the time just stay at home to study or do something what I want to do. Then if the restaurant need help, I went. I don't think too many about extra activity, so that's why I'm making my life as easier and very simple.

Linda:

Self-organization:

I have a planner that I make a list of all my assignments in. If I forget my planner I'll write whatever the assignment is for that day in my folder. I (like?) to stay pretty organized. I have an area at home that when I get home, my school bag goes to this spot so I know

where everything is at. My mom-she's offering, because I don't have a complete area for studying, because I have a little apartment, so mom has decided after I'm done with school and she's got a couple of days where she doesn't have anything going on she's going to come in and help me kind of rearrange everything and see if we can get it set up to where I've got a spot for studying to where it's more organized.

M.J.:

Self-organization:

I was horrible at the beginning. I was missing assignments, but I was taking human relations and at the beginning of the class, they talked about organizers and calendars and stuff like that and so I started using an organizer just like a hand-held organizer and putting daily assignments and stuff in it. That helped a lot. That's basically how I organize everything.

Making Success Difficult

Students responded to what would make their success difficult. The following are their responses:

Anna:

Probably just you get a lot of anxiety just through day-to-day and having so much to worry about, like, with your, like, finals coming up and making sure you get good enough grades so you can compete on the rodeo team and keep your scholarship.

Juanita:

If I let my school guard down. All the kids like to go out instead of study and the people that influence you here sometimes ... it's kind of difficult, but you have to just be an adult and choose the right thing.

Jack:

No. With the support I have, the IQ I have, no. Going to keep my head straight on. The girl assistant coach says 'you can adjust to anything.' Best skill I have. Glad I have it.

Jackie:

Let's see, well, probably like I said earlier ... I have to make a lot of decisions for myself, so that means if I mess up, I have to deal with it myself, or, I mean, if I do good I'll deal with it, also. But it's more of an impact if I do something bad or if I do something wrong I am going to have to fix it myself I think that's one of the problems I have. Plus, I don't know, sometimes I think about it, if there will be any job openings. Finances. You got to find a job for me to be, before I, you know, like buy an apartment and buy all this stuff for myself so I don't live with my parents for the rest of my life. I think it's finances.

Benny:

Honestly, I guess, maybe the economy. Maybe looking for the job in my field that I want, engineering, I don't know how available jobs are, or where the jobs are. I mean, that will be the biggest thing as far as finding a career of my choice, or finding a job in the career of my choice, whether I have to move states to find it, or whether I'm fully qualified because it's hard, I mean, it's a lot easier when, when you have experience to get a job and I won't have experience when I'll be fresh out of college I'm sure. I have to do a year of apprenticeship, which I guess qualifies as experience, but that's unpaid, or low paid job, which is not going to cut it as far as trying to be on my own, but once, once I get the hang of things if I can find that and stick with it I'm sure I'll be successful, but that's my biggest worry sometimes. It's, like, yeah, and, also, I mean, right now in college I guess my biggest worry is fully getting through it because I know that, I mean, it was tough math this

year and I personally feel like it was the instructor, but, I mean, not his fault. The work is the work. Math is simply numbers and that's, that's numbers and letters and equations, but as far as moving on to higher levels of math and things like that I feel like that might become difficult, but that's not anything I can't work through. So it's mainly just finding a career and depending on what it is where we'll be and who I, I mean, if I wanted to bring, bring my woman with me, or anything like that I'd want to be able to do that and that's sometimes my worry, but not too big right now. My biggest thing is staying focused on what's important.

William:

Last semester the computer applications was a class that was completely foreign to me and I started out on the very first exam and I think I had a seven. So I had a ways to go and I had no idea what PowerPoint was and a lot of things like that. I mean, they were just some terms that I'd heard people talk about once or twice, but what they were and how they worked I had no idea and had to, you know, no training or experience in a lot of those things. I used a computer in my business to do the things that I had done and knew how to get the results that I needed, but entirely different after going through the applications class. Had I known some of those things earlier when I was in business on my own it would have made some things so much simpler for the accounting and just a number of things like that.

LooLie:

Probably is after I graduate I'm not sure where I am going. But I think I will go back to New York with my parents, but I would not stay with them for a long time, probably stay there one or two years and I have to just go somewhere by myself. So that is a difficult problem because I just think about to graduate from the college first, then to think about

where I am going ... still planning right now. Always hard for adult to go back home. But after I graduate after I got my nursing degree probably my mom would ask me to marry. That will be next thing after the graduate. From marriage I don't know because I don't think about that very often, because I think just live by myself is pretty good choice, but that will not be successful because I know my brother get married when he almost 28 years old. Before that my parents always just called him very often to ask him to get married. Probably I will be in the same situation after I graduate. So sooner or later I have to get married. Right now some of my family members, like my uncle, my aunt, all some friends they ... every time when we talk on the phone they always say it's time to get married or it's time to find a boyfriend or like that. Right now probably school first, then career, marriage ... marriage is kind of like the parents because that is what they want. I'm not sure what I'm going to do.

Linda:

The biggest barrier would probably be, if something would happen to where I would lose my financial aid. As long as I can keep my financial aid, I think I'll be okay or you know, a major medical issue. As long as my financial aid is still there I think I'll be good.

M.J.:

Past habits I've had. I've been to rehab. Whenever I was 25 I went to rehab, so that was a major drawback, but, then, I don't feel like that's a drawback to my success in the future because I feel it will almost make me, like, if I have employees and people under me, then I'll be able to pick out problems that they're having in the same areas that I've had, so I don't really see it as a drawback, really. It is a drawback on the time period, you know,

whereas I would have succeeded if I hadn't done that sooner, but as far as the long term I don't feel it really hurt my progress towards success.

The researcher found the research participants very open and honest in their assessment of barriers to their success. The primary barrier was financial. Keeping their current Pell Grant, the ability to keep a job, the possible loss of ability to participate in sports for the sports scholarship and a fear of living in poverty in the future were of great concern. Secondary concerns surrounded the economy coupled with concern that jobs might not be available after graduation. Past personal problems was an issue for one student while cultural pressure to complete her degree and then be married was a source of angst for another student.

Perspectives

Research participants also had an opportunity to talk to the researcher about their perspectives concerning being in college at this particular school, attending at this time in their lives, or any additional information they were willing to share. The following comments were recorded as part of the research.

Juanita:

I think that most people come here don't appreciate what they have sometimes. It's really frustrating because people that work really hard, like my parents have worked tremendously to get to the point where we are, and people that don't take advantage of getting full rides to big universities and they don't have to pay anything, they don't take advantage of it. If I would have had that opportunity I would have gone to a university. But the money just isn't there.

Kent:

Well, just from my experience I felt like giving up about five times in the first semester just because it wasn't going that well and not knowing anybody and you just kind of got to open up and be yourself and people are going to like you, people ain't going to like you, just kind of how the world turns. And I'm a firm believer in if you just act yourself around everybody and not change who you are around certain people then everybody is going to like you. The people who won't like you are going to like you a lot more than other people would and you just kind of got to come out of your closet if you're a shy person just to get out there and get to know everybody.

William:

Well, for the most part it's been good. It's been positive. I've met a number of the instructors now and met a number of the different philosophies and the psychologists and the nature of the teachers. For the most part I think they're positive. Some could like anywhere else, could probably use some readjustment, but personality being what it is, that's probably not going to happen too much, either. You know, and in a junior college everything, I gather, is kind of a somewhat faster pace in that we've got two years to accomplish something and then we're done, figuratively, at least, and so the instructors are kind of under a gun, so to speak, because, again, they only have a limited time to deal with a student and try to get us to a point where we can achieve whatever it is they're trying to teach. Whereas in a four-year school, there's a little bit more time, there's an extra couple years to actually bring a student along on a given degree course.

Linda:

It's kind of been more having a hard time, and I can't think of the word, being on the same level as a lot of the other students because, you know, I'm looking at these I know a lot of them, like, yeah, I'm looking at these kids. These are high school kids, you know, straight out of high school, two years out of high school and a lot of them, you know, I see in a couple of my classes it's ... they come in and they don't pay attention and like in my English class they will be on the computer instead of paying attention to the instructor and I'm, like, you know you guys are going to regret this, you know. So I see a lot of them, you know, that was me 15 years ago. Yeah, I see myself. It's like, you know, you guys are going to regret this. You want to pay attention, but they're kids. They're going to learn. I think it's a maturity thing. I think it's just one of those things where they have to learn from the mistakes, you know, always hear people say, you know, telling their kids learn from my mistakes, but when it's something like this, you know, okay, yeah, you can tell them that, but they're going to see all of these opportunities and all of this different stuff that, you know, it's like, okay, well, yeah, I can learn from your mistakes but it looks fun to make them, so I want to know from my own experience. I think that's where a lot of them think, you know, it's their learning experience, and it's I think or a lot of them it's good for them to learn it.

M.J.:

I'm not looking to take away friendships and not that I'm shallow, but I just want to stay focused and get in and go on because, I mean, I've got a baby on the way and I've got to get going. Just because I don't want my child to do without, so I want to make sure that by the time my child is old enough to know what poverty is – that they're not in poverty. Big

thing to me because I don't believe anybody should be raised in poverty because I've been around a lot of people that were. They're further behind, for sure.

Benny:

I'm a Christian and I thought about the things that I reflect and I'm, like, is this something that not only my mom or anybody else would be proud of, something that God would be proud of? Something that Christ would be proud of me more when he look at my life and say, I mean, my ultimate, ultimate goal is to be somebody that God can say, that's my child. And I look at my life and I'm, like, what I'm doing now is not something that I'm even proud of. So I can't say that God would look at me and be proud of it. So I think that's a big part that helped. I had to get some counseling from some of the ministers at my church and things like that.

Summary

Common themes emerged from the analysis of the subject interviews. In response to research question one, the common themes surrounded: finances, family support, rural community college opportunities and challenges, positive perceptions of the campus environment. the ability to find new friends, and being able to work and attend college, and affordability. In response to research question two, the common themes surrounded: high school preparation, high school counseling, the student's declaration of major, affiliation with a sport or activity, support from tutors and advisors, transition to the college, self-organization and perceptions of barriers that would make achievement difficult, and again the critical need for maintenance of financial aid, scholarships, student loans and work opportunities.

During the interviews both negative and positive aspects of the college experience emerged. Attending a rural community college either by choice or by opportunity had some drawbacks. The primary drawbacks discussed were:

- the smallness of the community
- the lack of “things to do” outside the college campus.
- The lack of hours of operation of campus facilities/services and after business hours accessibility to students was a negative.
- No access to printing in the dormitories
- Language barriers for international students
- Traditional age tutors for non-traditional students
- Food short and hunger issues

Positive comments were:

- the friendliness and support of staff and faculty was consistently mentioned
- an overall atmosphere of caring for the students’ success
- a high level of willingness to help students and answer their questions.
- the community was characterized as being friendly and providing work opportunities for students.
- tutors and advisors were used by these students and these services were found to be useful and supportive.

All but one subject had declared a major and the majority of the subjects were involved in a sport or were tied to a campus activity with an additional scholarship. All but one subject had aspirations to graduate and transfer to a four-year university.

The interviews revealed that high school preparation for college study and quality high school counseling were severely lacking. Without the intervention of a coach, select faculty, a church, and an Upward Bound program, four of the subjects felt that they would not be attending college.

Subjects voiced the importance of making friends early and becoming involved in campus life, thereby assisting in the transition to college. Several spoke about the need to develop self-organization skills early. Respondents mentioned their awareness of making decisions on their own, becoming an adult, and making correct choices in regard to “going out” or choosing to study.

The major barrier to achievement/success was overwhelmingly tied to the continuation of financial aid, loans, and scholarships. Half of the respondents held jobs either in the community or on-campus as a work study or as a Resident Assistant that supplemented their financial aid and scholarships. The only respondent with a student loan was concerned about her loan and how much she would need to borrow to complete her degree.

Only one respondent expressed concern that his choice of a major course of study would require a large amount of math and science, and admittedly, this was his area of academic weakness. None of the respondents expressed concern that being in at least one developmental course was a barrier to achievement. One subject experienced cultural pressure to complete a degree so that she could then be married. None of the respondents expressed concern that being a first generation student might pose a barrier to achievement or persistence. Being a first generation student was a point of pride with all of the subjects.

Three unexpected themes emerged from the interview process:

- One respondent voiced being food-short on the week-ends and after cafeteria hours, and another mentioned a host family who provided a few extra meals.

- The lack of computer skills was perceived as a barrier to early success in college courses by three respondents.
- Two respondents experienced minor anxiety concerning the availability of jobs after graduation.

All subjects acknowledged the importance of their family and friend support systems, and each subject described the make-up of their support system. Quotations from the subjects were used to provide accuracy and depth of meaning in their experience.

Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion

Overview

Included in this chapter are a restatement of the problem and a discussion of findings and conclusions. Also included are implications of the study, recommendations for additional studies and research, and a reflection of additions that might have made the dissertation research more effective.

Restatement of the Problem

Data on Pell Grant programs at community colleges (Baime & Mullin, 2011), low-income students' eligibility for financial aid (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003, 2011), student's immediate postsecondary enrollment status, and persistence (NCES, Special Supplement on Community Colleges, 2008) was reviewed by the researcher. Data regarding the need for remediation of first generation students was also studied in *First-generation Students in Postsecondary Education* (NCES, 2005). However, there has been limited research on factors that impact achievement and persistence of students in developmental courses, and the available research was not in relation to these students receiving Pell grants at the rural community college. There has also been little research specific to the problem of rurally situated students from poverty who attend the rural community college. Without this specific group being studied, rural community college administration and student services staff served this specific population with programs/services that were not fully cognizant of the population's unique needs.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

The research was based on information collected from interviews conducted with students in developmental courses who were receiving Pell grants at the rural community college. This

research reported student responses concerning their experiences with the rural community college that were both positive and negative.

Research Question One

What factors impacted the academic persistence of Pell Grant recipients in developmental classes at a rural community college? Interview participants spoke about the importance of continuation of financial stability, family support, opportunities of the rural community college and the positive campus environment being critical to academic persistence.

Finances and Family Support

All ten subjects reported being the recipient of a Pell Grant and/or a combination of a Pell Grant, other scholarships and student loans. Federal Work Study was being used by three of the students. Only one student reported any financial support from the family and that was only 25% of the cost of attendance. Students remarked that without significant financial assistance, their attendance at the selected rural community college, or any college, would have been impossible.

The College Board (2009) reported: (a) students could expect to pay more for tuition and fees, depending on the type of college; and (b) cost for public two-year schools was expected to be up by 6.5% and private four-year schools were reported to be up 4.4%. This was not the total cost. Students still had to figure in costs of housing, food, books, supplies, laundry, and other living expenses. Rising costs are a national concern and the mid-west is not immune from rising tuition. For 2010-2011, Chief Financial Officer (K. A. Adams, personal communication, September 19, 2011) at the rural community college in this research study, reported that the college received and awarded \$1,565,996 in Federal Pell Grant funds; \$1,070,921 in Federal Student Loan funds; \$16,677 for Federal Work Study; \$14,965 in Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant funds that are applied according to need to the students with the lowest EFC (Expected Family

Contribution); and \$14,255 in Academic Competitiveness Grant funds. This amounts to a total of \$2,683,059 in Federal Funds at this community college.

A student's eligibility for a full Pell Grant of \$5,550 is determined by Federal Financial Aid criteria and other eligibility requirements under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b). The student must be officially seeking a degree, have declared to be "undeclared," or be in a degree program. The eligible program of study must be for credit; the student must have a high school diploma or a GED certificate or pass an alternatively ability-to-benefit-test; and the student must be making satisfactory progress through the program at a rate of at least 150% of its posted length. Nine of the 10 interviewees declared a major. The other subject was officially an "undeclared" student.

Ability to obtain Federal Loans was also a vital part of low income students' ability to access secondary education. The National Center for Education Statistics reported in *The Condition of Education 2011* that the average loan for low income students was \$5,200 (NECS, 2011). In 2007 the national average price of attendance at a public 2-year institution was \$12,100 (NCES, 2007). The average semester total cost of tuition and fees for a Kansas public university in 2010 was \$2,615. The average cost for the community college tuition and fees was \$1,952.88 for the academic year (Kansas Board of Regents, 2010). This cost covers tuition and fees only, and does not take into account campus housing. At the researched rural community college, in-state tuition and fees plus housing and a 19-meal plan was \$4,972 for the academic year. This would leave \$528 in loan money to cover other expenses. If the student were fortunate enough to receive an additional athletic, departmental scholarship, or other institutional scholarship, there would additional resources from the Pell Grant to cover childcare, books, and travel expenses (K.A. Adams, personal communication, September 19, 2011).

It was apparent that the rising cost of tuition and the inability of grants and loans to keep pace with inflation placed low income/poverty students at a distinct disadvantage. One student reported the necessity of obtaining a loan, and expressed concern about loans for the future. Another student remarked the the tuition at this research college was one-tenth the cost of a private church-affiliated school. The overall lower cost for the community college allowed remaining funds to be used for books, housing, child care, and transportation expenses. The lower cost of attendance at this rural community college allowed for the Pell Grant to cover the majority of expenses, tuition, fees, and housing, without the necessity of student loans. This is a plus for the Pell Grant students, allowing them a grace period to postpone student loans until transferring to a more expensive university. The testimony of the students concerning cost of attendance was supported by the literature. This low-income student functioned so close to the margin of financial disaster and experienced the additional burdens of balancing time for classes, homework, athletics, and work just to keep themselves functioning and meeting normal daily expenses. Students also reported concern about the economy and the availability of jobs when they graduated. Again, they were concerned that if any of the financial support systems were to be jeopardized, continuation would be impossible.

First Generation and Family Support

A developmental student receiving a Pell Grant is a high risk student academically and constantly on the precipice of financial disaster. Complicating their already fragile situation is the student who is also first in the family to attend college. First generation is a risk factor all by itself, and compounding this factor is that first generation students, who typically began at the community college, were part-time students, and who worked full-time “All of these factors

together put the first generation student at risk to drop-out without earning a degree” (Engle, 2007, pp.25-26).

This research study found that seven of the subjects were first generation, and three had at least one parent who had attended some college. The subjects who were first generation did not feel that being a first generation student was a detriment to their success, in fact quite the opposite. They regarded being a first generation student as a point of pride and an incentive to be successful. Families who do not understand the demands of college and who are not supportive may be barriers to their students’ success (Hsiao, 1992; Hossler, et.al., 1999). All of the interview participant responses supported the literature: family support was important, if not critical to their persistence. All the participants had at least one family member who provided encouragement and emotional support of their college attendance. Many reported that their parents and families anticipated their success and were emotionally if not financially supportive. One interviewee’s mother, somewhat reluctant at first, now offered to assist in re-organizing the family apartment to create a study area solely for the student. One student has a baby on the way and is determined that his child will not grow up in poverty. Others also reported extended family support, support from their friends, and support from their church or a community group.

Cultural differences can also compound the challenges of the first generation student. “Leaving the culture of home and assuming the culture of the college can put a first generation student into a conflict of cultures” (Hsiao, 1992, p. 2). Two of the interview subjects spoke about their culture. The Hispanic student had been in this country since the age of two, and did not express any difficulty with assimilation into the college culture. However, the Chinese student had been in American only 8 years. The family settled in New York City in the Chinatown area. Language and communication were the largest barriers for this student. As a nursing major, with

these barriers, the chances for her to persist in that particular degree track did not appear hopeful. She admitted to being naturally shy, and reported that her shyness made it difficult to seek out and make new friendships and to approach faculty or college staff for assistance. There was also considerable pressure for her degree completion, because the family expected her to marry upon achievement of her degree. Although the student with the American Indian/Alaskan culture did not speak directly concerning cultural differences, she had been assimilated into the community by working as a waitress and occasionally cleaning houses.

Two students were from large inner-city populations. Both came to the rural community college for the opportunity to be active in competitive sports. Both remarked that leaving the culture of the big city and being in the rural atmosphere forced them to come to terms with their own decisions; to accept responsibility for those decisions and subsequent actions; and to make new types of friends and connections. They found people at the college and in the community to be friendly, helpful, generally supportive, and interested in their individual success. One of the students had assimilated into the community with assistance and interaction with a host family. The other student made his transition into the culture of the community by working off-campus in a local pizza restaurant. The ability of these students to make connections and to feel a level of comfort in a rural environment might influence their ability to persist.

Seven students were from rural communities and one student was from a town of less than 25,000 population. They also remarked that being in college forced them to come to terms with their own decisions, and to make new friends and connections.

First generation students are more likely to enroll on a part-time basis, 53% versus 38% of students with parents who attended college. Most of these first generation students enrolled in community college (Gordon, 1997). Participants in this research were all enrolled as full-time

students. Full-time students were eligible for full Pell Grants, \$5,550 this past year, and this factor alone encouraged full-time enrollment.

A typical student from poverty must work and go to school, often attending part-time. Nationally, in 2005, 82% of students were employed and 26% were working 20-34 hours per week (NCES, 2010). Three students in this study were participating in the Federal Work Study Program. Work study allows the student to work on campus no more than 5 hours per week. One student worked 20 hours a week in a local diner and cleaned houses; another worked 10 hours a week in her brother's restaurant; and another student, in addition to work study, also worked at a pizza restaurant at least 20 hours a week, and in peak times could work up to 40 hours a week. Four students were not working while attending college. They cited that there was enough left over after tuition, fees, and books to meet most of their basic needs. One student was sharing a house with six others, which kept rent minimal.

Research Question Two

What factors impacted the achievement of Pell Grant recipients in developmental classes at a rural community college? Interview participants spoke about the lack of adequate high school preparation and poor high school counseling, the ability to continue with sports or activity/academic scholarships, tutors and advisors at the college, and the positive campus and community environment, faculty, advisors, and staff being critical to academic achievement.

High School Preparation

High school graduation is essential for continuing education and training beyond high school. Access to education and training, the two factors that can lead to social mobility and greater employment opportunities, is no longer discretionary for those who aspire to full social and economic participation in American life (National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education,

2002). Participants in this study were all high school graduates (100%). Several admitted that high school was not challenging for them; they were passed through because of being successful athletes, and/or they experienced high school coursework not relevant to the world of work. Of these 10 high school graduates, 4 students believed that the high school had adequately prepared them for college study, and six students felt that the high school had let them down.

High School Counseling

The research participants shared in more detail their perceptions of high school counseling. The high school counselor was not at all helpful with six of the students' preparation for college, while four students deemed the counselor helpful. The following are select quotes from the participants about high school counseling:

They took an interest in what you want to go into and then they would give you a list of schools and you would come back, talk to them some more and they would just break it down for you. Like, asking what your major wanted to be. So they did a pretty good job on that. They told us about scholarships.

He always had an open door, I mean, he helped us with anything.

He helped me with getting back on the right track because it takes a lot to stop missing school and stop skipping class and wanting to hang out with friends.

No, but I was part of an upper-bound program, which they were kind of my counselor a little bit. From the school, no, not really. You'd have to go see them and talk to them rather than them requesting you.

No, not at all. I didn't really talk to my counselors unless it was about dropping a class or changing my schedule. They didn't really advise me as well as I think they should have.

My sister was more my counselor than my counselor was.

My dad died while I was in school. I could have gone to college on a Social Security benefit and my education would have been paid for. For some reason that was never communicated to me.

One student was motivated to work toward a counseling degree because, in her high school experience, her own counselor was so poor. Students from the two large urban areas were split between quality and poor high school counseling. Overall, six students had unsatisfactory high school counseling services that did not assist with nor prepare students for the college experience.

Those who came to the rural community college for athletics were primarily encouraged, counseled, and enrolled by coaches. Majors selected by the interview subjects were business, health education, nursing, accounting, and pre-engineering; two students declared coaching, two declared counseling, and one student was officially “undeclared.”

It is problematic that so few of the interview subjects received high school counseling for college. Factors impacting this high school service to students could be: case loads being too large, additional state testing requirements being administered by counselors, overriding discipline issues, or too few counselors on staff. This would be area to warrant further research into the factors that contribute poor high school counseling.

Situational Barriers

Situational barriers were life situations experienced by the student that would affect persistence or achievement. Situational barriers often caused the student to feel frustrated, disadvantaged, and anxious. The most common types of situational barriers centered around family opposition to college attendance, lack of time, no place to study, household or work responsibilities, and lack of transportation or child care (Kasworm, et al., 2002; Merriam, et al., 2006).

Several students expressed initial concern with adjustment to dormitory life and roommate situations when first arriving at the campus. After few weeks into this type of group living arrangement, a different type of stress was experienced by the pull of peer pressure to party versus the pressure of classroom demands for homework and study. Students had hard decisions to make; some were more successful than others. One student moved off campus, believing that the distance would be helpful, but found a sense of isolation from peers, his athletic team, and campus activities. He planned to move back to campus as soon as possible.

Rural versus urban background was not found to be a significant factor in persistence, but in adjustment to the campus, dormitory life, and independent decision making. However, urban students adjusted to dormitory life and made friends more quickly than those students from the rural areas. Initially, all the traditional age students experienced similar adjustment issues. Non-traditional students experienced similar anxieties as their age demographic in returning to college after having been out of school for several years. There were seven students from rural areas, one from a town of less than 25,000, and two from large metro areas.

A non-traditional student, who enrolled again after 15 years, readily admitted that her first college experience and living off-campus contributed to being unsuccessful. She also cited that homesickness for her family contributed to her dropping out.

Another student experienced several concussions in his chosen sport, and was unable to compete. This was a difficult adjustment for him. Fortunately, the coaches saw potential in this student-athlete and allowed him to function as an unpaid student-coach. The involvement of the coach on behalf of this student certainly had a positive effect of stabilizing his financial situation, as he was able to keep the athletic scholarship in addition to the Pell Grant. This was undoubtedly

a bonus for the student: kept him engaged in college, gave him experience in coaching, and facilitated movement toward attainment of his academic goal of becoming a coach.

Lack of transportation was a situational barrier mentioned in the literature review that could pose a barrier to student participation (Kasworm, et al., 2002). Students remarked that this rural community college was a distance out of town and that walking to the local discount stores and fast food restaurants was troublesome for them at times. The local bus was not available after 4 p.m. and had to be called in the daytime in order for a student to be picked up. Being situated at the rural community college in a small rural community, students realized the limitations of entertainment off the college campus. The community had a skating rink and the movie theatre was open only on weekends.

For those students who worked, time management became a concern. In response to this stressor, they developed individualized self-organization and prioritization strategies in order to balance schoolwork, sports, off-campus work schedule, work study, and/or student coaching responsibilities. Some students kept track of these complicated schedules with the “post-it note” method whereas others used a planner or wrote schedules in notebooks.

A student athlete felt a degree of negativity from the community and some people at the college because he was with the wrestling team. “Wrestlers have not built up a good reputation for themselves here in this area.” He came from a strong high school wrestling program with a lot more discipline, therefore it was hard for him to stay focused when others did not take his sport as seriously as he did. This student also commented that he was anxious to go home for a visit, as it had been many months since he had seen his family.

The lack of a dedicated study space in her small apartment was a concern for one student. With the assistance of her mother, they planned to work toward developing such a space for her to

be able to study. It would take some re-configuration of the apartment. Both the mother and the student realized the necessity of such a study space.

One student lived in a situation with his girlfriend, her family, and two other men, which made the household headcount total six. The advantage of low rent was a definite plus, but being able to study in the household was a challenge. He spent most of his study time on campus. He had an additional situational barrier. His father was opposed to college study instead of work. The mother and the girlfriend were his counter-balance with full emotional support for his educational efforts.

Two students initially commuted together to campus. At first, it was relatively easy to schedule courses just two or three days a week. But by the second semester, that type of scheduling became impossible. Their opposing schedules did not allow them the opportunity to share transportation. The students had to develop time/travel management skills, always accounting for the possibility of bad weather or other road conditions/factors slowing their commute.

Lack of affordable childcare was an issue reported in the literature as being a situational barrier that could limit achievement in education (Kasworm, et al., 2002). The sample of students for this study did not find childcare to be an issue. Seven students interviewed did not have children. One had a pregnant girlfriend; one single parent had a daughter in high school; and one had grown children who did not live at home.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers to learners at this rural community college were typically administrative, organizational, or educational practices. These students reported some difficulty

with learning to navigate the system, but found the college personnel willing to assist them as needed.

Campus Environment and Services

Students in this study reported being positive about the campus environment and felt supported as an individual. They cited the positive staff and faculty, and the ability of campus employees to assist. Several remarked that they found staff willing to take time to listen to their problems/situations and there was a comfort level established between staff and student. Satisfaction was high with services such as financial aid, advisors, faculty, student nurse, library, study hall structure, peer tutors, cafeteria, activities, maintenance, security officers, and the recreation center.

Although generally pleased with the campus environment and the personal involvement of staff and faculty that a small campus brings to the student, participants did voice some negatives. Those concerns were primarily with office hours not extending into the evening, faculty not being available later in the day, the lack of after-hours printers, and cafeteria food. The non-traditional students in need of tutoring services did not adapt well to the traditional age peer tutors. There was no formal non-traditional student organization. Although the students in this study thought such an organization would be helpful, they expressed doubt that they would have time to participate in such an organization, due to work and family/community obligations.

The interview subjects were generally pleased with the implementation of mandatory study hall for athletic teams. This program was called PASS Program (Program for Academic Success of Student-athletes) and was new for the institution in 2010-11. All athletes were required to attend two days of orientation pre-semester, and then meet in a daily one-hour study hall session facilitated by their coach. This program met with some resistance when initially implemented.

However, students, coaches, and faculty quickly embraced the new program. Students found and reported it useful to be able to work together and complete homework for the next day. Faculty reported that students were coming to class more prepared than in the past and that attendance had improved (M. Depew, personal communication, May 2, 2011; M. Westerhaus, personal communication, May 2, 2011; C. Forest, personal communication, May 2, 2011).

The availability of tutors for students taking developmental courses was important to their success. The traditional students seemed to be satisfied with the peer tutoring model of the community college. However, one of the non-traditional students found it difficult for the student tutor to relate to the adult student, which made receiving help with the developmental mathematics course difficult.

Students had no negative responses about faculty other than lack of availability of faculty members in the mid-afternoon, as faculty had left campus for the day. One non-traditional student commented about the rapid rate at which faculty covered material in the classroom, but understood the time constraints of the instructors within the confines of the semester structure.

Financial Aid, Developmental Coursework, and Career Uncertainty

The majority of students had declared a major. When asked by the researcher what might make continued success difficult, there were three areas that emerged in response. Continuation of financial aid was the primary concern. If financial aid were not available, continuation would be difficult if not impossible. For the athletes, continuation in the sport supported by athletic scholarships was a factor in continuation. Although all subjects had developmental coursework, none were concerned that being developmental would be a barrier to their persistence or achievement. Only one student recognized that he had chosen a major that was math- and science-intensive and that, in the long term, achieving his goal would be difficult. He stated the reason for

current and long-range difficulty being that he was behind in math skills from his high school experience.

There was concern expressed that the economy, such as it is, might impact on the availability of jobs in their chosen careers. The student who wanted to become a counselor commented that she would have to teach two to three years before being able to become a counselor. She was concerned that the teaching jobs might not “be there” when she graduates.

Another student, a pre-engineering major, was concerned with the economy. He stated that he might have to move states to find a job and, fresh out of college, he would be job-seeking with no real experience. He realized that there would be at least another year invested in a low-paying or an unpaid apprenticeship. He said his biggest concern was “staying focused on what’s important and getting through it.”

Additional Themes

As a result of this research, there were unanticipated findings that emerged from the interview process. The first finding: three of the research subjects reported that poor computer skills hampered their transition to college. One of the subjects was a traditional student and two were non-traditional students. The non-traditional students commented that having computer skills would have helped in their businesses, had they acquired computer skills at an earlier time in their lives.

The second theme that emerged was that some students on this rural community college campus were food-short and hungry. One respondent discussed in detail how students would call around to each other asking if anyone had any food. This respondent suggested the installation of vending machines with real food, not just candy and pop, for students who were hungry after cafeteria hours. One of the respondents was pleased to have the cafeteria on campus, and the

reasons given were that extra money did not have to be spent on groceries or time spent to get groceries; the non-traditional students cited the convenience factor of having a meal ticket so that no one had to leave campus at lunch time. Even with the cafeteria, students were reported to having hunger issues.

The rural community college in this research study has a high percentage of students on federal financial aid and loans. Although the federal government determines eligibility and amounts of awards, it is apparent that a high percentage of this rural community college student body is poor. Nationally, 20% of college students had parents who lost a job or had been laid off and were now reliant on federal financial aid for continuation in college (Santich, 2010).

Responding to the current recession and the needs of low-income students in food-short situations, in 2010, the University of Central Florida, Oregon State University campus in Corvallis, Michigan State University, and the Community College of Denver were among those who opened campus food pantries for students (Santich, 2010; Wong, 2009). These food pantries targeted low-income university students, helping them stay in school, work, and pay their obligations (Wong, 2009).

A third theme that surfaced was six students believed they were unprepared for college study by their high school and six reported having received poor high school counseling. All of the students in the study had been in at least one developmental course and seven were the first in their family to attend college. Lack of rigorous high school curriculum and poor advising, in addition to being first generation and low income, raised barriers to persistence, graduation, and achievement of the students' goals. Nationally, fewer than 35% of remedial students earned a degree within 8 years (Bailey & Cho, 2010). At the research rural community college, 60% of new students who qualified for developmental coursework and received a Pell Grant in the Fall of 2010

were retained for the fall of 2011 (Appendix E). Academic counseling and personal counseling at the community college level could have a positive outcome in turning around marginal students. However, each student must avail himself/herself of these readily accessible and free services. Only four of student respondents in this research used advising or counseling services and only three used the free peer tutoring provided by the community college, even though all of them had one or more remedial courses.

Implications of Research

Student Services professionals at a rural community college need to understand that large segments of the student population are high risk students with multiple risk factors. These students live on the margin of persistence and attainment. If any one or more of their support systems falter, this can cause these students to free-fall out of post-secondary educational opportunity.

Some of these student risk factors are:

- **Developmental.** Of all new, full time, degree-seeking students for the fall of 2010, 54% qualified for at least one developmental course (Appendix E). This student needs tutoring and additional institutional services as success in developmental coursework can elongate this student's time to completion.
- **Low-income.** In 2010-2011 this one, small, rural community college expended over \$2.5 million dollars in federal student aid; the largest portion of that aid came in the form of the Pell Grant and student loans. Of the newly enrolled students at this rural community college for the fall of 2010 who qualified for at least one developmental course, 47% also received a Pell Grant (Appendix E). The Pell is necessary for those students from poverty and is often supplemented with additional scholarships or work study positions. This student is operating

very close to the bone, with no cushion; they are economically fragile; living on the margin. Any disruption in financial stability spells disaster for this student.

- **First Generation.** Of the developmental students in the research study, seven were the first in their family to attend college. This student must learn the landscape of the college environment without parental support to guide and assist. Already in a marginal state, being first in the family to attend college is an additional stress factor. This may be the reason students choose a smaller rural campus for ease in navigating the system, and more safety and familiarity to the small environment. However, there was no additional family financial support for nine of students. Although financial support was lacking, emotional support was strong.
- **Cultural pressures.** Often cultural pressures of needing to work or to be married instead of attending college were found to have a strong influence on student persistence. Not all students come from rural backgrounds. Many students, primarily athletes, come to the rural community college from an urban environment for an athletic opportunity. This urban oriented student often has adjustment problems with the small community and the social and entertainment isolation that they find in the rural environment.
- **Preparation.** Of the research study students, six self-reported they experienced poor high school academic preparation and counseling. In addition, three found themselves without the computer skills needed for success with their coursework. Only three of these students reported using the free tutoring services available. The non-traditional students found that the traditional aged tutors found it hard to

relate to the older adult requiring their services. Also students reported that a consistent math tutor would be advantageous to their success.

- **Transition.** Seventy percent of the subjects reported having at least some difficulty in transitioning to college; problems included adjusting to dormitory life, developing self-organization skills and making good decisions. One male student reported homesickness and the interview subjects struggled with some feelings of isolation even in a group living environment. Initial socialization and adaptation to college and to dormitory living was a larger issue for rural students than for urban students. Being rural and having weak social skills inhibited the ability to quickly make friends and to adapt to group living.
- **Working.** Six of the students were working at least five hours a week and some were working up to 40 hours a week while attending college. Working, a financial necessity for stability of their finances, also limited time to study and to participate in campus activities.
- **Non-traditional.** Three of the students in this research study were also non-traditional. This group brought with it additional challenges to persistence and achievement. Barriers included maintaining reliable transportation, commuting to campus from a distance, the pressures of working at least part-time while in attendance, and often being place-bound. Although childcare was not a barrier for this particular research group, the literature points to the fact that non-traditional students generally had the additional challenge of affordable and reliable child care (Kasworm, et al., 2002).

By mission, the community colleges positioned themselves as an integral part of the community and service area. Traditionally accessible, affordable, and student-centered, community colleges provided access to postsecondary education and technical training. In addition to the associate degrees and general transfer courses, the community college also provided developmental courses for those needing remediation in reading, writing, and/or mathematics. For the community, the community college also offered adult and youth enrichment, as well as cultural activities.

In areas where few job opportunities exist, the rural community college was a powerful force for workforce development and educational advancement for the area population. For rural communities, hit hard by the farming crisis of the late 1970s and the recessions in recent years, the community college has been a means for access to quality and affordable educational opportunities. It has met the educational needs of the low income student as well as the returning adult student seeking a degree, re-training or upgraded job skills at a reasonable cost (Cohen & Brawer, 1991). The rural community college that was the subject of this research, the cost per credit hour was \$85 for tuition and fees. The total cost of attendance for the academic year was \$4,972, which included tuition, fees, dormitory housing, a 19-meal plan, and books (S. Barrett, personal interview, September 26, 2011); in contrast, \$19,030 at Kansas State University (Kansas State University, 2011).

The issues of being poorly prepared by the high school experience and being a developmental student in college are not separate issues but tied to each other with grave implications for persistence and achievement of any one particular student. Add to this situation eligibility for a full Pell Grant, as well as being a first generation student with little financial

support or family expertise, the picture becomes one of multiple risk factors that interlock and place this fragile student at particular high risk for failure.

Recommendations for Improved Practice

- **Enhancement of Student Life activities.** Student life activities need to be enhanced to counterbalance the lack of activities in the rural community. New times for activities should be considered to fit the late night schedules of the students and not for the convenience of staff. A few activities for the non-traditional student should be included in the menu of student activities. With a little creative planning, there could be a special “orientation to the campus,” allowing family members to meet advisors and faculty members. Possibilities include: family night at a basketball or baseball game; a night at a college music program or theatre performance; family picnic or other ways to familiarize the family, especially the children, with the campus and with what their parent, spouse, or relative is experiencing. Families could gain an understanding of what it means to be a college student, thereby increasing their ability to emotionally support and encourage the family member who is attending school.
- **New support services.** New support services need to be developed for these students. Those in advising services need to understand that advising and counseling for this cadre of students must be more intrusive and more holistic. It can no longer be an option to wait for these students to seek out advising and counseling services. Their high school experience with advising and counseling has not been a positive one; therefore early alert systems need to be implemented and enhanced efforts to reach out and support these at-risk students. This research clearly points to the additional risk factor of the developmental student who qualified for and received a Pell Grant. In order to assist with persistence and attainment,

this high risk student could be identified early and placed with advising services immediately, with close follow-up throughout attendance.

- Cultural diversity. Although this was a small rural community college, cultural diversity made up 12% of the student body. The availability of culturally diverse faculty and advisors in such a rural community is not easily achieved. However, the administration should provide mandatory, focused training for staff and faculty concerning advising/counseling strategies for this segment of the student body and additional sensitivity training for those faculty and advisor who work with students who are low-income/poverty (Payne, 2005). Training could be accomplished online, through cost-effective webinars and instructional video materials. Faculty development can be difficult and expensive for the rural community college. Faculty can face some of the same learning barriers as their students: lack of time, child care issues, personal and community obligations, teaching, grading, and committee assignments to name a few. It is incumbent on the administration of the rural community college to offer faculty development at times and in modes of delivery that are the least intrusive and as faculty-friendly as possible. Technology will help.
- Non-traditional student services. Non-traditional students made up 25% of this research sample. Specialized advising services needed to be available for the non-traditional student population. This research suggested a student organization for non-traditional students would be valuable tool to help this demographic with faster integration into the classroom and into the fabric of college life. Non-traditional students have unique characteristics and are often place-bound for a multitude of reasons: lack of financial resources to leave or to travel to a larger attendance center, jobs kept them located in the rural community, family

and community responsibilities, personal support systems were located in the rural community, and the affordability of the community college (Cohen & Brawer, 1991; Kasworm, et al., 2002). It is for these reasons that additional, targeted, or specialized services should be made available to the non-traditional student population.

- **Tutoring Services.** Staff professionals and faculty coordinating tutoring services need to be proactive in assuring that developmental students, low-income, and non-traditional students understand the value of and the availability of tutoring sessions. Encouragement needs to be provided for these students to take advantage of services offered. The research discovered a reported inability for the traditional peer tutor to relate well to the developmental needs of the non-traditional student. The community college could enhance tutoring services by either employing or seeking adult volunteers for the non-traditional students who reported such difficulty. Retired teachers' associations could be tapped as a resource for tutoring the non-traditional developmental student.

It was also a student concern that the same (person) tutor was not available for use.

Different student tutors on a rotating schedule made mathematics tutoring more difficult than working with consistently the same (person) tutor.

- **Ties to the high schools.** Six students reported they were not academically prepared for college study and another six had little to no quality high school counseling. Community colleges have been actively linked with high schools for many years via concurrent credit courses, whereby students could gain a jump-start on their general education college credits. Community colleges have actively hosted "college days" on campus to better acquaint incoming and prospective students with the feel of the college and knowledge concerning programs and available services. The subject community college hosts annual

financial aid nights for parents in all of the area high schools. This is where the involvement has stopped and fallen short.

Taking the students' testimony to heart, the community colleges should be more actively linked with high schools in an advising capacity. College representatives should meet more regularly with students to ensure the students understand what it means to be academically prepared. Community college advisors should become a partner with the high school counselor in a more directive approach with students' understanding of what to expect when they arrive at college and how to prepare themselves while in high school.

- **Orientation.** Initial orientation workshops and interactive functions to assist the rural student adapt more quickly to the college environment and group living could be enhanced. Resident assistants should consider hall activities and small group activities to facilitate adaptation to the dormitory environment.

Reflections

Conducting the student focus group assisted the researcher with grouping questions, developing new themes, and checking for depth and richness of responses. The focus group was the first time that student anxiety about decision-making and self-organization emerged. This area was included in the student interviews.

A pilot study was held for further refinement of the interview questions and process. As a result, some interview questions were placed in different order and re-worded and additional probes were included.

The interview protocol was developed, finalized, and reviewed. Consultation was held with two colleagues surrounding the interview protocol and subsequent adjustments were made.

The interview protocol was reviewed and adjusted by the researcher and the doctoral committee at the time of the proposal presentation.

Once the interview was being conducted, although guided, it would often take on a life and direction of its own. As the interview subjects became comfortable with the process, they had information and pieces of their lives to share that were not part of the interview protocol, but were nonetheless valuable to the study. Had the researcher been strictly adherent to the interview protocol, this richness and depth of the subjects' experience would not have been captured.

Transcripts of the interviews have been delivered to the interview subjects for their review. This in itself has been a rewarding experience. The students are still engaged in the process, with questions about "what did you learn" and "did you know" (about things in their lives that have occurred in the time after the interviews). Two students have found that by reading their transcripts, they have learned about themselves. William commented, "Seeing your own comments and experiences actually written out gives you a whole different perspective."

This choice of a research topic was personally informative as well as challenging. A certified court transcriptionist put the recorded interviews to paper. This proved to be highly valuable, as it eliminated researcher bias in the interview transcription process. It would have been difficult if not impossible for the researcher to conduct interviews and then transcribe them without some error or addition to the conversations. Field notes and journal entries were helpful. Having the exact testimony of the interview subjects added richness and detail to the process. Interviews were then coded by the researcher and a co-rater. This co-rating process assured that maximum saturation had been achieved and nothing had been overlooked.

Recommendations for Further Research

The first area for further research would be to follow these students through the remainder of their community college experience. The researcher would want to track their persistence and their achievement at least over the next year. The researcher is particularly concerned about Anna, the student who is an undeclared major and who is carrying a student loan; Benny, the pre-engineering major who is starting out in developmental math and working 20-40 hours a week; Jackie, who has no affiliation with a sport or campus activity group; and LouLei, who has a language barrier and cultural pressures.

Another area for further research would be to conduct this research at another rural community college to understand if the barriers to persistence and achievement are universal to the rural community college and to the students who choose to attend. It was anticipated that the majority of the interview participants to have originated from rural communities. Seven were from small rural towns, one from a town of less than 25,000 and two were from large urban areas. Further follow-up would be needed with these students relative to their persistence and achievement to determine if coming from rural or urban backgrounds had any overall effect.

There is little research available that looks critically at the Pell Grant in relation to the developmental student. Although it is known that success is marginal for the developmental student, does being from a poverty background also have a negative and compounding effect on this student's ability to persist and to achieve.

Further research is needed to examine the high dropout rate among Pell Grant recipients. These students live so close to the bone, that if any one incident or support systems fail, this can be the catalyst for a Pell Grant student to drop out of community college. Research is needed to determine what combination of factors play into the Pell Grant student dropout situation.

Another area for further research is an examination of what factors contribute to making high school counseling so ineffective and poor, as reported by six of the research participants. Issues could be with lack of training, overload with disciplinary problems, state testing requirements, overload with students with learning and physical disabilities at the high school site? Not enough counselors for the workload? Are the credentialing structures and are requirements too strenuous to attract quality people into the counseling field? Should there be a shorter track to enable students to become counselors or a more seamless process? Further research is certainly indicated for this area.

The researcher is also intrigued with the students who revealed that rural community college students are in hunger. More research should be conducted on campus hunger: how widespread is it? How does hunger affect achievement and persistence of college students and student-athletes? What remedies or strategies should be put in place to address hunger on the campus?

Contribution to the Field of Adult Education

Large community colleges, such as Sinclair Community College, the Community College of Denver, and Maricopa Community College, have been the recipient of many national longitudinal research projects through the Lumina Foundation and others. Although this research is valuable for data concerning large cohorts of students, and being able to generalize these studies to the broad population of community college students, there is little specifically known about the rural community college student.

When a rural community college student population is examined in relation to students qualifying for Pell Grants and qualifying for developmental coursework, there is little data or literature available that links the two factors. This research was conducted with the hope that this

student population will be identified as an additional high risk group, and consequently services and programs could be developed to assist them with persistence and attainment of their educational goals.

This research supports adult education literature. The research found a number of the male subjects concerned with the utility or the technical aspect of their community college attendance (Merriam, et al., 2006; Kasworm, et al., 2002). They desired the skills necessary to be successful. All had chosen a major area of study and viewed their education as a means to an end: a job that could support themselves and a family. William spoke of helping others with his chosen career of being a counselor; M.J. spoke of his education as being a means of never having to live in poverty again, and being an independent businessman; while Jack desired a fast-paced and exciting career while helping others with his goal to be a police officer. The female students spoke more of concern with independence and helping others was secondary to their ultimate goals. Linda, a single parent, wanted to get out of the hard, dirty, physical labor of manufacturing jobs to a “clean” office position in accounting and be a good example for her daughter; LooLei wanted a degree in order to be independent, not live at home with her parents, in order to forestall the pressures of her culture to marry; and Juanita wanted to major in business in order to own and operate her own beauty salon. The female students were interested in using their education as a means of establishing themselves as independent women. Their individual action of obtaining an education will allow these young women to achieve their goal to become independent ... true examples of praxis. In adult education literature, praxis is written about in relation to personal power and freedom (Freire, 1993); independence is written about in relation to women finding their voice (Hayes & Flannery, 2000) and discussed in relation to life transitions that send students into education (Kasworm, et al., 2002).

Most of the anticipated experiences, the barriers, the challenges, the cultural forces, first generation status, and academic preparation for college study follow adult education literature: praxis, independence, power, voice, the motivation of life transition, situational and dispositional barriers to success. There were new insights that emerged from the study: students being food-short; concern about the economy and job availability at the time of graduation; struggles with, and the lack of computer skills that impeded success in the classroom. Other primary concerns of students were continuation of financial aid and/or scholarships, independent decision-making, and personal organizational abilities.

Eduard Lindeman, the father of adult education, wrote, “Freedom is dependent upon a degree of intelligence and is realizable in terms of education” (Lindeman, 1961, p. 50). The research, by examining factors that impacted achievement and persistence of students in developmental courses receiving Pell Grants at the rural community college, discovered that these students experiencing poverty fully understand that education is a step up and a step out of their situation toward a better future.

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Appendix A - Demographic Information Instrument

Please circle or provide a short answer to the question as it applies to you and your situation:

How many hours a week do you work? _____

What is your age range? 18-21 _____ 22 or older _____

What is your gender? Female Male

Do you have a Pell Grant? Yes No

Do you have a scholarship from this college or other source? Yes No

Are you a first-generation college student? Yes No

(you are first generation if one or both of your parents did not attend college)

What is your culture? African American Asian American Indian Hispanic Caucasian
Other

What is your major or interest area of study? _____

Are you (have you) taking more than one developmental course? Yes No

Are you (have you) been enrolled in the Strategies for Success Class? Yes No

Your name _____

Please print

May I contact you in the near future for an interview about your college experiences? Yes No

If yes, when is a convenient time for you to be interviewed

Please provide your cell or telephone number

Please provide your active e-mail address

please print

This information is confidential and will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher.

If you are selected for an interview, you will receive a \$25 gift certificate.

Appendix B - IRB Approval



University Research
Compliance Office
203 Fairchild Hall
Lower Mezzanine
Manhattan, KS 66506-1103
785-532-3224
Fax: 785-532-3278
www.k-state.edu/research/comply

TO: Sarah Jane Fishback
Educational Leadership
354 Bluemont

Proposal Number: 5798

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair 
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: April 7, 2011

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "How students from poverty backgrounds perceive barriers to persistence and academic success at the rural community college."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for one year from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: April 7, 2011

EXPIRATION DATE: April 7, 2012

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated "**continuing review**" of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is not granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
 There is greater than minimal risk to the 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 at least annually, 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.

Appendix C - Permission to Conduct Research



348 NESR 61 Pratt, KS 67124 www.prattcc.edu 620-672-5641

January 27, 2011

Kansas State University
Institutional Review Board
Manhattan, KS 66502

Please note that Ms. Pamela Dietz, has the permission of Pratt Community College to conduct research at the Pratt Community College campus for her doctoral research study, "How rural students from poverty backgrounds perceive barriers to academic success at the rural community college".

Ms. Dietz will contact students who qualify for the full Pell Grant and other supporting scholarships, who may also be first generation and may also be in need of at least one developmental course. Mrs. Dietz has permission to interview, conduct surveys and focus groups. Ms. Dietz' on-site research activities will be finished by August 1, 2011.

Ms. Dietz has agreed to provide to my office a copy of the Kansas State University IRB approval document.

Regards,


Dr. William Wojciechowski, President

The right college for the right reasons!

Appendix D - Students Qualified for Developmental Coursework at PCC

Cohort 1: New to PCC Cohort Characteristics:
 New to PCC: New to College (post HS) or New Transfer-in
 Full time
 Degree/Certificate Seeking or Transfer Bound

Cohort 2: New to PCC & Qualified for Developmental Cohort Characteristics:
 Cohort 1 Characteristics *plus* Qualified for 1 or more Developmental Courses
 (Cohort 2 students who tested into one or more of the following:
 either Fundamentals of Writing or Basic Writing, either Fundamentals of Reading or Basic Reading,
 and/or Basic Applied Math, Tech Math I, Beginning Algebra, Business Math, or Tech Math II)

Cohort 3: New to PCC & Below the Ability to Benefit:
 Cohort 2 Characteristics *plus* Tested Below Ability to Benefit in MTH, ENG and/or READ

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
<i>Headcount</i>	How many students are New to PCC? (Cohort 1)	How many New to PCC Students Qualified for Developmental? (Cohort 2)	How many New to PCC, Qualified for Develop. Students Tested Below the Ability to Benefit? (Cohort 3)	What % of the New to PCC Students Qualified for Developmental? (Col.3/Col.2)	What % of the New to PCC Students Tested Below the Ability to Benefit? (Col.4/Col.2)
Fall 2005	279	164	46	59%	16%
Fall 2006	320	192	48	60%	15%
Fall 2007	348	182	45	52%	13%
Fall 2008	364	189	66	52%	18%
Fall 2009	365	198	47	54%	13%
MOST RECENT 3-YEAR AVERAGE	359	190	53	53%	15%

Source: Data Coordinator, Pratt Community College

Appendix E - Interview Questions Protocol

<p>Introduction:</p> <p>This interview protocol is based on two research questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do participants receiving a Pell Grant perceive factors that impact persistence and academic success at the rural community college? • How do these perceived factors effect persistence and achievement of the participant? 	
<p>A. Interview Question #1 about background.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How many are in your immediate family 2. Where are you in family order... the youngest, oldest...? 3. What are the occupations of your parents? 4. Did either of your parents attend college? 5. Do your brothers or sisters attend college or technical school? Did they finish? 6. What person in your family has had the most influence on you to this point? 	<p>Question A-5 will indicate First Generation status.</p>
<p>B. Interview Question #2 about perceptions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you think about this college before you arrived? 2. Did you have any perceptions about this college? 3. Were your perceptions correct? 4. Where you pleased or were you disappointed and why? 5. What has excited you the most about the college? 6. What has disappointed you the most? 	
<p>C. Interview Question #3 about living arrangements.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where are you living? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. On campus? b. Off campus? 	<p>If answer to C-1 is <i>on campus</i> then probe with additional questions from 3a:</p> <p>In which dormitory do you live? What is your perception or feeling about that? Do you have a roommate? Did you know your roommate before you came to this college and how is that working out for you? How are you paying for your living either in the dormitory?</p> <p>If answer to C-1 is <i>off campus</i> then probe with additional questions from 3b:</p> <p>If you live off campus, do you live alone? If not, how many others are living together? If living with others, are they college students</p>

	<p>or family members? Do you live close to the college? How do you get to the college for your classes? How do you arrange for transportation to classes? Is transportation ever a problem for you? If you live off campus, do children live with you? If yes, how many? Are they your children? If they are your children, how do you arrange for their care while you are in classes? Do family members care for them, or must you arrange for childcare? How do you pay for that child care? Is finding childcare ever a problem for you?</p>
<p>D. Interview Question #4 about participation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Now that you are a student here, have you had a chance to participate in campus activities? 2. Talk about what you do in your leisure time? 	<p>If answer to Question D-1 is yes, then probe with other questions: In what have you participated? What kind of sports do you like? Are you a member of a team? Are you a spectator or fan? Does being a college student help or hinder your ability to participate? Do finances play a role in your ability to participate?</p> <p>If answer to Question D-1 is no, the probe with other questions: What do you do for recreation or relaxation? Do you participate in community or church events? Do you volunteer? Does being a college student help or hinder your participation or volunteerism? Do finances play a part in your ability to participate?</p>
<p>E. Interview Question #5 about preparation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please comment about your high school experience and being prepared for college now. 2. Who played the largest role in encouraging you to attend college? 	<p>If answer to Question E-1 is a teacher or counselor, then probe with these questions: Did the teacher or counselor encourage you to attend college? Did they help you to choose high school classes that would prepare you for college? Do you feel that you are prepared for college work?</p>

	<p>Did they help you focus on a career? Did they help you plan to pay for college? Did they help you apply for scholarships? Who helped you choose this particular college? Why did you choose this particular college?</p> <p>If answer to Question E-1 is someone other than a teacher or counselor, then probe with these questions: Who other than a teacher or counselor encouraged you to attend college? Did they encourage you to take high school classes that would prepare you for college work? Did they help you focus on a career? Did they help you plan to pay for college? Did they help you apply for scholarships? Who helped you choose this particular college? Why did you choose this particular college?</p>
<p>F. Interview Question #6 about persistence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are your goals or plans for a career after college? 2. What do you think will be the biggest factor in you successfully achieving your goal? 3. Are finances a factor? 4. Is starting out in a developmental class a factor? 5. Is family support a factor? 6. Is support from teachers or coaches a factor? 7. Is support from friends a factor? 8. What might make success difficult? 	<p>If answer to Question F-4 is yes, then probe with these questions: How is being in a developmental class a factor? How do you perceive being a developmental class playing a role in your success? Do you think the class is/not helping you? In what way is/not the class helping you?</p> <p>If answer to Question F-5 is yes, then probe with this question: In what way does your family support you?</p> <p>If answer to Question F-6 is yes, then probe with this question: In what ways do teachers/coaches support you?</p> <p>If answer to Question F-7 is yes then probe with this question: In what ways do your friends support you?</p>
<p>G. Interview Question #7 about finances.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe how you are paying for college. 2. Do you have adequate finances for transportation, food, and childcare? 	<p>If answer to G-1 is Pell Grant then probe with the following questions: Does the Pell Grant cover all your expenses? Are there expenses the Pell Grant does not cover?</p> <p>If answer to G-1 is scholarship then probe</p>

	<p>with the following questions: How did you find out about scholarships at this college?</p> <p>If answer to #1 is <i>student loan</i> then probe with the following questions: Is this loan just for your community college degree? Do you feel like you can repay the loan in a reasonable amount of time? Will you be also seeking a 4-year degree? Will you also need a loan at that time?</p> <p>If answer to G-2 is <i>no</i>, then probe with the following questions: What do you do when you do not have transportation to get to college or work? What do you do when you do not have finances for childcare? What do you do when you do not have enough food?</p>
<p>H. Interview Question #8 about family</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does your family want you to attend college? How do you know this? 2. Do you stay in contact with your family on a regular basis? 3. Does your family encourage you? 	<p>If the answer to question H-2 is no, then probe:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you are having a rough time do you let your family know? 2. Do you share your grades with your family? <p>If the answer to question H-3 is no, then probe:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you have a question or need someone to talk to, where do you go or to whom do you talk? 2. Does your family understand of how much time it takes to study and be in class? 3. Is your family aware of how much time it takes to study and to be in class? 4. Is your family supportive of this time commitment?
<p>I. Interview Question #9 Other Barriers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you could list five things that get in the way of your success, what would those five things be? 2. Can you talk about those in a little more detail? 	

<p>3. Other than those you just listed, is there anything else in your life that makes it difficult for you to be successful?</p> <p>4. Is there anything else you would like to discuss –good or bad- about your experiences?</p>	
--	--

Appendix F - Informed Consent Form

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT TEMPLATE

PROJECT TITLE: How students from poverty backgrounds perceive barriers to persistence and academic success at the rural community college

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: April 7, 2011 **EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:** April 7, 2012

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Sarah Jane Fishback

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: 785-532-5554

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: 785-532-3224

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: n/a

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: To learn what barriers to success are encountered at a rural community college by low-income students

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Initial survey and semi-structured audio taped interviews of 1 1/2-2 hours. Participants will receive a \$25 Wal-Mart Gift Certificate

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT: n/a

LENGTH OF STUDY: 6 months

RISKS ANTICIPATED: None

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: The information provided could help faculty, staff, and administrators design services or programs to better serve low-income students

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: The participants will be given a number and all material with the name of a participant will be held at the home safe of the researcher/recorder.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURRS: n/a

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: n/a

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled. I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant)

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Witness to Signature: (project staff) _____ **Date:** _____

Last revised on May 20, 2004

Appendix G – New to PCC/Qualified for Developmental/and Receiving Pell Grants



New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Fall 2010

% QUALIFIED; % PELL:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
<i>Headcount</i>	How many students are New to PCC, Full time & Degree Seeking or Transfer Bound?	How many New to PCC Students (column 2) Qualified for Developmental?	What % of the New to PCC Students Qualified for Developmental? (Col.3/Col.2)	How many New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students (column 3) also received Pell Fall 2010?	What % of the New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students also received Pell Fall 2010? (Col.5/Col.3)
Fall 2010	381	206	54%	96	47%

% RETAINED SPRING

Column 7	Column 8	Column 9	Column 10	Column 11
<i>Headcount</i>	How many New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students (column 3) were retained Spring 2011?	What % of the New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students (column 3) were retained Spring 2011? (Col. 8/Col. 3)	How many New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students that also received Pell Fall 2010 (column 5) were retained Spring 2011?	What % of the New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students that also received Pell Fall 2010 were retained Spring 2011? (Col. 10/Col. 5)
Fall 2010	160	78%	78	81%

% RETAINED FALL

Column 12	Column 13	Column 14	Column 15	Column 16
<i>Headcount</i>	How many New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students retained Spring 2011 (column 8) were retained Fall 2011?	What % of the New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students (column 3) were retained Spring 2011? (Col. 13/Col. 8)	How many New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students that also received Pell Fall 2010 and were retained Spring 2011 (column 10) were retained Fall 2011?	What % of the New to PCC, Qualified for Developmental Students that also received Pell Fall 2010 and were retained Spring 2011 were retained Fall 2011? (Col. 15/Col. 10)
Fall 2010	103	64%	47	60%

Source: Data Coordinator, Pratt Community College