

**TEN YEARS LATER: A STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF NON-TRADITIONAL
WOMEN STUDENTS WHO SUCCEEDED IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING
WITH THE HELP OF A MENTOR PROGRAM**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2017

The idea of mentoring in higher education is considered a good thing for students and faculty. What is missing in the research is how does mentoring influence and shape the student experience, does mentoring help retention, and how does it contribute to student development? (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, Pifer, 2017). The mentoring relationship has existed as a framework within which established members of a social structure guide the development of new members. In the United States, post-secondary educational institutions adopted mentoring as one of a group of student services to promote retention and academic success. The subject of this study is a group of nontraditional women students who participated in a mentoring cohort at a community college in Pennsylvania. Members of the same cohort participated in an earlier study (Phase I), which revealed after graduating from the community college with associates' degrees the students felt their mentoring experience was a major contributor to their retention and prepared them to pursue additional academic credentials for professional careers.

The current research revisited the cohort participants ten years after graduation from the community college to document their current perspective on their experiences in the mentor

program. The study provided insight into the positive effects of the mentoring program; and how the students' views about mentoring evolved over time with experience; and how this information can be used to identify opportunities for improving future mentoring programs for nontraditional women students at the community college. The results identify important factors to be addressed in the design of future programs. The participants recommended the cohort format be emphasized to promote peer support, establish academic study groups, and alleviate barriers that hinder degree completion.

The author recommends for consistent quality of a program the criteria be collected as performance metrics, a management team work with a shifting population of mentors and student participants. Implications for the community college include expanding the availability of mentoring and addressing the needs of nontraditional women students with a comprehensive package of student services that complement the program, including life skills, academic preparedness, career advisement, orientation, decision-making skills, time management personal counseling.

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PREFACE

The completion of this dissertation was made possible through the support, guidance, and prayers of many people who encouraged me in my journey. I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ from whom all blessings flow. I acknowledge God with all praise, honor and glory. I know without GOD I am nothing but without me HE is still GOD. He opened the doors for me to accomplish a very important dream.

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To my mom, Mamie, I thank her for being my biggest supporter and prayer partner while encouraging me to complete my degree and always remember to get understanding along with knowledge. I have love, respect and gratitude for my mom for sacrificing her time so I could be the trailblazer in our family by completing my doctorate degree. I will carry what I learned about the power of prayer, unconditional love, and persistence passed from my family members to me.

I thank my editors Paula Shubock and Sarah Capello for their support and assistance. I am very grateful for the encouragement from colleagues and friends. I pay homage for the people placed in my life as mentors and shared in my dream. What I learned from my mentors continue

to impact my life. My calling is to help others to succeed in their educational journey and for this I am forever grateful.

1.0 OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“Mentors play a clear role in student success. Mentoring is one of those concepts in higher education that few disagree is a “good” thing for students and faculty. What is often missing, however, is how mentoring actually influences and shapes the student experience. Does mentoring help with student retention?” (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, and Pifer, 2017) pgs. 3-4.

From 2005 through 2008, a cohort of fourteen women students participated in a mentoring program sponsored by a large community college in western Pennsylvania. These women students, who all graduated from the community college with associates’ degrees, were “nontraditional” in the sense that they were older than typical undergraduates, had extensive family responsibilities, were the first in their families to attend college, and were socioeconomically disadvantaged at the time they began their post-secondary academic work. After graduating, the women continued their academic pursuits, with many earning baccalaureate and graduate degrees, and found employment in professional capacities related to their fields of study. An earlier non published supervised research paper dated December 6, 2015 by me, Gyndolyn Bradford, reported the results of a qualitative study that evaluated these students’ experiences with that mentoring program after they graduated from the community college and as they were completing their undergraduate and advanced degrees and beginning their careers. The research showed that the students believed the mentoring program helped them persist

through to graduation from the community college. The research also indicated that they credited their ability to move beyond their associates' degrees into four-year college programs and professional careers to the knowledge, leadership skills, and confidence they developed through the mentoring program.

The present study was designed to revisit this same cohort of students ten years later who now consider themselves successful because they have obtained a degree(s) and have a career related to their goals. The purpose of the study were to gain insight into the lasting positive effects of the mentoring program; to identify how the students' views about mentoring may have evolved with greater work and academic experience; and to use this information to identify opportunities for improving future mentoring programs for nontraditional women students at the community college.

The information produced as a result of this study expands on the limited research examining the influences on program completion of women in community college, and will add to the current body of knowledge about mentoring women in a community college setting. This study contributes to the literature by evaluating the residual effects of a community college mentoring program a decade beyond graduation and providing guidance to community college administrators as they endeavor to make mentoring programs for non-traditional women students more effective both during the community college experience and beyond. The results will be available to share with nontraditional women students and the community college administrators and faculty who work with them.

What will the future hold for nontraditional women enrolling in the community college? In order for them to be able to find a career and compete in the global economy, they will need to learn the technical skills and earn the degree and or certificate required in a high demand global

market. These women will still have families to support and limited time and funds. What is needed to help the women to be successful in achieving a degree in their fields of study? How can community colleges provide the help and support of women in the advancement of future generation?

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

I have twenty-five years of professional experience in public and higher education, working and living in areas where the environment is supportive of lifelong learning and education. My overarching concern is to learn more about how nontraditional women can succeed in attaining their educational goals.

I attended and graduated from a Pennsylvania college with over 25,000 students; the young men overwhelmingly outnumbered the young women. Fewer than 3% of students were minorities, and a very small number were nontraditional women. At that time, an important goal of mainstream institutions of higher education was to recruit more young women and maintain a more diverse student population.

Despite the efforts of these institutions, many of my peers experienced a frustrating time as an undergraduate student also. Only two of the four women recruited with me registered for a second semester. They said that the university was too strict with rules and they did not fit into life on campus because they had family responsibilities. Students had their own peer groups and they showed no interest in crossing the color line to make friends. Throughout my undergraduate years, I had only one professor of color during my freshman year and he disappeared immediately after class.

When I began this area of research, I wanted to understand the reasons why so many nontraditional women dropped out of college before the end of their first year. In particular, I wanted answers to these questions below because as an undergraduate and graduate student I had never heard the word “mentor” and based on the various definitions, I needed to better understand how mentoring could help support women struggling to complete their degree. These are the questions from the Phase 1 study.

1. How did the community college experiences differ for the women who stayed and eventually graduated?
2. Did these women have additional help, and if so, what kind of help did they receive and who helped them?
3. How had other students managed to stay in school and cope with the stresses of life on campus?
4. What other support systems were needed in order to keep the nontraditional women in college?

As an undergraduate student, I had never heard the word “mentor”. For a significant number of people in the United States, their post-high school story begins at the community college, a specially designed institution where individuals find the education and supports necessary to achieve success in the modern economy.

For women attending colleges there is still the lack of supports from family, in funding and academic help. Historically, getting a college degree is considered the road to success and a better life for all families. A significant number of these families are led by women (Hackett, 2002).

According to Johnson (2001), colleges and universities in America are aware of the lack of social support systems for African American women students attending college. This researcher is aware that there are numerous reasons as to why the problem has not changed today. Some colleges are not trying harder to provide the support networks to all nontraditional women so they can be more successful in getting their degree, getting a good job, providing for their families, being a positive role model for their children, and making a significant contribution to the government.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As community colleges are registering more nontraditional women they need to address the issues that have a significant impact on the low completion rate of these students. New strategies and programs need to be developed in order to alleviate the barriers encountered by women who need to complete their degree and become financially independent. Strategies such as mentoring programs help to provide the support services to help ensure successful completion of the educational goals for these women.

This study addresses what aspects of the mentor program at the community college identified by nontraditional women graduates worked to retain nontraditional women who wanted to be successful in changing their life. These women were able to complete their college degree and move into a careers related to their degree to support their families. It also explores other supports and skills these students learned that kept them in college.

The problem is women are enrolling at the community college but not being retained so they do not complete their degree programs. Remaining in college to complete a degree is critical

if you want the women to be able to move into higher paying and more rewarding employment opportunities. Students need to learn about all the support services available to them such as tutoring, advising and supportive services, and veteran office in order to have access from the start and not fall behind.

The challenges of nontraditional students vary as they participate in the college experience. These women do not understand the importance of the support systems put into place at the college to help students maintain social and academic success (Hackett, 2002). Further explanation by the author (Hackett, 2002) shows that support mechanism are in place to assist the student in achieving their academic goals. If the support systems are not used by students they have little to no value to the student. If the student is not aware of the services due to lack of sufficient marketing to students then they cannot be expected to seek out what they need if they do not know what they need.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Phase I of the study produced by the researcher showed that the students who were interviewed believed the mentoring program they participated in ten years ago helped them to persist through to graduation from the community college. The research also indicated that they credited their ability to move beyond their associates' degrees into four-year college programs and professional careers to the knowledge, leadership skills, and confidence they developed through the mentoring program.

In retention models such as in Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory he discusses the predictors of persistence which are academic integration or performance and social integration or participating

in college activities. There are numerous types of college retention programs. The retention programs are different in the way they are structured, the focus of the program, and how the program is operated (Tinto, 1987). Tinto discussed the principles of effective retention. The three principles of effective retention include; the institutions commitment to the student, which means the welfare of the student comes first, the educational commitment means the programs are committed to the education of every student and learning is not left to chance, and the last principle of effective retention emphasizes how importance of community. All of these principles apply to the retention of nontraditional students such as women and minority groups. Weidman (1985) applied Tinto's theory to women welfare recipients in a community college that included women of all races. The findings recommended that this model go beyond the college setting and consider external issues also. Other issues can be personal or institutional not in the control of the student.

Adaptation to the unfamiliar surroundings of college by establishing a different self-knowledge in order to "fit" into the college environment can take precedent over academic expectations for a new student. Nontraditional women in the community college are first generation students and have little if any previous college experience or role models to mirror. The retention and models and mentorship programs are addressed in the latter part of the literature review to explain how current community college research has tried to address the influx of the nontraditional women who comes with numerous obstacles for completing a program and getting a college degree.

There are personal and institutional barriers that negatively influence the women's persistence to complete her degree also. Some of these may have low self-confidence and previous negative educational experiences. There may also be other factors which may include

lacking time management skills, family and work problems, economics, adding a new role conflict with your current responsibilities.

Cox and Ebbers (2010) found that nontraditional women felt more comfortable registering in the community college environment due to the diversity in demographics. There are several reasons that make the community college more acceptable to women who delayed in attending post-secondary education. Open enrollment, lower tuition and the location of the campus or center in the community (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

The simple fact of being a woman no longer defines a student as non-traditional. In 2016, 57% of community college students were women (AACC, 2016); this gender proportionality has been relatively stable for 15 years. Nonetheless, the services traditionally rendered by community colleges have not until recently recognized the special needs of women in the academic environment. Programs that specifically address the completion rates for graduation of nontraditional women in the community college need information to share through research. One such program where the success of graduates depended upon the participants was the mentor program.

The term mentor has numerous definitions which makes it hard to define (Brown). The literature reviewed shows that the term is not easy to define. The mentor as advisor model is advantageous in helping a student to understand and navigate through academic systems and procedures, but can have several disadvantages. When the mentor emphasizes following instructions rather than providing informed guidance, the student can be discouraged from questioning the ideas and reasons presented by the advisor. Extensive direction, sometime known as “handholding”, can discourage the student from developing his/her own views and making independent decisions. (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

Additional theories which are being addressed in the literature review will address the reasons why and how the nontraditional women define themselves as being successful ten years after they participated in the mentor program at the community college and consider themselves successful.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THIS STUDY

Question 1: How do nontraditional women understand the concept of mentoring in a community college setting?

Question 2: To what extent do these nontraditional women community college students believe mentoring by others has helped in changing their educational lives?

Question 3: What important aspects should be included in the design of a mentoring program for nontraditional college students for it to be effective?

Question 4: What important characteristics should mentors possess in order for them to be effective?

Question 5: What other support systems are needed for these nontraditional women community college students to complete their degree?

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to investigate the same cohort of nontraditional women students ten years later who participated in an informal mentoring in a community college. When asked about

their relationship experience in the mentor program at the college, they all stated the importance of the mentor relationships as a prominent factor in the completion of getting their degree and graduating. Upon further investigation, other important information was found during these interviews. These participants all went on to complete a bachelor's degree and two students completed a doctorate in medicine and law. Two students completed a MSW and all the participants of the study are working in a field related to their degrees.

These women now consider themselves successful because they have obtained a degree(s) and have a career related to their goals. In order to gain insight into the lasting positive effects of the mentoring program; to identify how the students' views about mentoring may have evolved with greater work and academic experience; and to use this information to identify opportunities for improving future mentoring programs for nontraditional women students at the community college.

To meet this purpose ,the original study: (a)asked about the influence of having a mentor, (b) understanding the concepts of mentor and mentoring; (c) the amount of time participation in the program; (d) and influences of the mentor program; (e) and characteristics of needed for a mentor program to be effective.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This qualitative study about the pursuit and completion of a college degrees by nontraditional women in the community college with the help of a mentor is essential for the retention persistence and successful women nationwide. This study can be used as a resource for other colleges that have a need to retain women in college for degree attainment.

The literature suggests that the more educated the population the more economic benefits, less criminal activity, less government services needed to supplement incomes and individuals are more likely to participate with the nation's governance (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). This study will also inform community college leaders, faculty and staff that this population of nontraditional women can succeed when positive mentoring relationships provide the supportive social and academic services needed for students to complete their degree.

Looking beyond the relationship factors of a mentoring program the information can also be used to add to the body of knowledge of effective strategies for retention and success of nontraditional women in a community college setting.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Community college. A very common definition of the community college is “any institution regionally accredited to award the associate degree in arts or science as its highest degree” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5) It also is defined as a two year institutions that offer a variety of vocational, career technical, community education, non-degree course, enrichment classes and associate degree that can be transferred to a four-year college or university.

Community college students. Students enrolled in 2-year institutions of higher education through the nation.

Delayed Enrollment. Students who do not enroll and attend college, immediately, within the same year they completed and or graduated from high school.

First generation student. Students who have not had another family member who graduated from college and received a degree.

Goal setting is deciding what you want to accomplish and developing a plan on how you will get the results.

Informal mentoring. An agreed upon one -to -one relationship that is spontaneous established between a college employee and a student for the primary purpose of achieving the student's academic goals.

Mentor. An individual who has been identified as an influential and important person in the educational journey of a college student.

Mentoring. A mutually agreed upon one -to -one relationship established between a mentor and his or her mentee.

Nontraditional women college students. Over the age of 24 with children or other dependents to support; financially independent with little or no financial support from any other source employed full time; enrolled part-time; first generation college student; member of a minority or underrepresented group; and /or hold a GED rather than a high school diploma (NCES, 2015).

Persistence. An educational institution's ability to maintain a student's enrollment from the time they enroll and are admitted to graduation or transfer to a 4-year college or university.

Retention. Students who continue on from one semester to the next semester even though they may have received failing grades they continue to return until they complete their coursework.

Success. Students who complete their community college education by completing and receiving a specific program diploma, certificate or an associate degree.

Traditional college student. The traditional college undergraduate- defined as one who earns a high school diploma, enrolls full time immediately after finishing high school, depends

on parents for financial support, and either does not work during the school year or works part-time is the exception rather than the rule in the U.S. colleges and universities. (NCES, 2016)

Transfer. When a student completes their general education requirements and/ or have graduated with an associate degree, they transition from a community college to a bachelor degree granting college or university to continue their education.

1.9 STUDY PARTICIPANTS AND LIMITATIONS

Study Participants:

1. All nontraditional women in the study participated in the same community college cohort mentor program for a minimum of one year.
2. All participants were women who met at least one definition of nontraditional.
3. All participants completed an associate degree.
4. All the participants were currently employed.

The study limitations that may have affected the results are as follow:

1. The number of women participants are limited to a small sample of 5.
2. Some study participants were selected from the Phase 1 study.
3. The nontraditional women students were participants in a cohort mentor group.
4. All the nontraditional women students had graduated from college
5. All the nontraditional women graduated from the same community college.

1.10 METHODOLOGY

The study includes the experiences of nontraditional women that completed their education and received an associate degree from a community college by participating in a cohort mentor program. I am very interested in finding out more about the experiences of the participants, how the program help with retention, what other factor may have contributed to the success of the group' and what characteristics are needed in designing an effective mentor program. Qualitative work allows for a view that is fluid and personal. This study is a qualitative research design where I, as the researcher am the key for collecting the data through personal phone interview questions.

Creswell (2009) states" narrative research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This is then retold by the researcher into a narrative chronology" (p.231). The narrative is as old as storytelling which we learn is an old form of sharing information which people have handed down over time.

The narrative research consists of individual case studies. The research questions were answered via analysis of the stories described in each case. There are many variations on a case study and I used multiple case studies because all of the participants are members of the same cohort with varying responses to the same questions.

The research design was submitted to, and approved by, the Institutional review Board at the University of Pittsburgh where the study was conducted. The participants are all graduates from the same mentoring program at the community college. All the participants finished their associate degree and went on to earn at least a bachelor's degree. The students who participated in the previous study (Phase 1) along with other mentor cohort members were invited to take part

in the confidential phone interviews. Emails were sent to the Phase I cohort group members to arrange interviews.

1.11 SUMMARY

A cohort of fourteen nontraditional women students participated in a mentoring program sponsored by a large community college in western Pennsylvania. These women students, who all graduated from the community college with associates' degrees, were "nontraditional" in the sense that they were older than typical undergraduates, had extensive family responsibilities, were the first in their families to attend college, and were socioeconomically disadvantaged at the time they began their post-secondary academic work. After graduating, the women continued their academic pursuits, with many earning baccalaureate and graduate degrees, and found employment in professional capacities related to their fields of study. In Phase I or the previous study the results of the study indicated the participants explained the important impact of the mentor program and how the relationships was a key factor in the success of their graduation. The mentor program was described as so much of key factor for retention that the cohort participants went on to further their education by obtaining additional degrees and better jobs related to their degrees. This research study or Phase II will collect additional information to clarify other factors which may have contributed to the findings such as the women's understanding of the definition of the word mentoring, if mentoring helped in how they were able to handle challenges, and other support factors used by these women to help them with their studies and share this information with other community college retention program developers

2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature is an exploration of research pertaining to nontraditional women in the community college setting and how their participation in a mentoring program had a positive, long term impact upon their academic and professional achievement. The value of this qualitative study relates to a commitment of the community college in providing the support services needed to develop and implement a new program or improve the nontraditional women mentoring program currently operating.

The literature review is designed to inform college educators and program developers about the important factors needed to mentor and support nontraditional women who attend the community college. These important factors in the program will be used to support the women from matriculation, through retention, to completion of their academic goals, which can include obtaining a certificate or a degree. The literature review addresses the characteristics of nontraditional women as students in the community college; the factors that influence their adaptation to the college environment and perseverance in college; and issues related to the negotiation of conflicts between the home and school environments. The review of the literature also addresses the academic skills required to succeed in college, and examines the important characteristics of the individuals who serve as mentors.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.2.1 The “Nontraditional” Student

The college experience has long been defined by the “traditional” undergraduate. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016) defines a traditional student as one who earns a high school diploma, enrolls in college full time immediately after finishing high school, depends on parents for financial support, and either does not work during the school year or works part time. The traditional student is the exception rather than the rule in U.S. community colleges today. In 1999–2000, just 27 percent of undergraduates met all of these criteria; 73 percent – almost three-quarters - of all undergraduates were in some way “nontraditional.” Exactly what demographic characteristics constitute a nontraditional student has been the source of much discussion in recent research.

NCES (2015) defines “nontraditional college students” as meeting one or more of the following criteria: over the age of 24 with children or other dependents to support; financially independent with little or no financial support from any other source; employed full-time; enrolled part-time; first-generation college student; member of a minority or underrepresented group; and/or hold a GED rather than a high school diploma. These seven characteristics have sometimes been called “risk factors” because they are negatively related to staying in school and earning a degree. (NCES, 2002)

The NCES nontraditional scale represents a simple sum of all nontraditional characteristics (from 0 to 7), with 0 representing traditional students. *Minimally nontraditional*: only one characteristic (14-15% of all students) *moderately nontraditional*: two or three characteristics (25-31% of all students), tended to be older than typical, independent, and attend

part-time. *Highly nontraditional*: Having four or more characteristics in addition to the typical characteristics of moderately nontraditional students, two-thirds either had dependents or worked full-time, and 25% were single parents. (NCES, 2006)

NCES (2002) reports that in the 1999-2000 academic year, only 17 percent of traditional students chose a public 2-year institution (community college). The enrollment pattern of nontraditional students is different. Students who were even minimally nontraditional (just a few of the seven defining characteristics) were much more likely than traditional students to attend a 2-year institution (39 percent), and the more nontraditional they were, the more likely they were to do so. Among highly nontraditional students, 64 percent attended a public 2-year institution. The average age of a community college student is 29, and two thirds of community college students attend part-time while they work or fulfill other responsibilities Two-thirds of all highly nontraditional students consider themselves primarily employees (NCES IES, 2000).

The majority of Black and Hispanic undergraduate students in this country study at community colleges. (AACH, 2005). Diversity continues to increase as students are motivated by enabling legislation, new technologies, and global economic shifts that bring new immigrants and require retraining for displaced citizens. These non-traditional college students embark upon their academic careers with vastly different personal histories, life experiences, academic skills, personal supports, and expectations. (AAAU, 2011)

Overall, nontraditional students are more likely to be women, belong to a racial-ethnic minority group, and to have less educated parents than traditional students. In this article, NCES recommends supports to include flexible class scheduling, child care arrangements, part-time job placement, and similar services. (NCES, 2006)

2.2.2 Women as Nontraditional Community College Students

Since 1985, more than half of all community college students have been women. Since 1970, the enrollment rate for women started to increase and by 1978 women undergraduate's outnumbered men on college campuses. By 2011, 57 percent of all undergraduates were woman, and only 43 percent were male. The enrollment of women is projected to increase by 16 percent between 2011 and 2021, while the enrollment of men is projected to increase by only 7 percent.

About half of the women student population at community colleges is comprised of adult women aged 25 or older. The simple fact of being a woman no longer defines a student as non-traditional. In 2016, 57% of community college students are women (AACC, 2016); this gender proportionality has been relatively stable for 15 years. Nonetheless, the services traditionally rendered by community colleges have not until recently recognized the special needs of women in the academic environment.

These women tend to be nontraditional in ways that directly affect their college experience and success: they were older when they enrolled as freshmen; academic inactivity for many years may require them to undertake supplementary coursework to develop academic skills sufficient for college work; and they may continue to hold multiple roles in the workplace, community, and family while they are in college. (NCES-IES, 2008)

The reasons non-traditional women students give for enrolling in a community college are largely economic. Some of the women are trying to learn the skills needed to get their first job while others are changing careers due to downsizing at the workplace, or loss of a spouse, or bearing the costs of their children going off to college. (Johnson, Schwartz, & Bower, 2000) Some women with workplace experience enroll in college to acquire the knowledge they need

for job mobility and the credentials they must have to assume leadership roles in the workplace. (NCES-IES, 2008)

Adult women typically enter higher education to achieve work and financial goals. Enrollment is often event-driven (job loss, divorce, death of spouse, children leaving home.) Attendance behaviors are highly dependent upon circumstances outside the college, such as caregiving and other family demands, job conflicts, and economic concerns. The primary challenge for adult women is managing multiple and conflicting roles (wife, mother, employee) create real conflicts and may lead to discomfort or guilt feelings (White, 2001).

In summary, we find that as a group, adult women have a set of special needs that must be met for them to persist in the academy and to achieve their academic goals. Although any specific student, at a specific point in time, may individually have a smaller or larger subset of these needs, a range of targeted services must be available and applied as required to fairly support them.

For the purpose of this study the definition for nontraditional student refers to the adult woman who is a new student or returning to school after working or serving in the military. They are defined as anyone 24 years of age or older; single or married; a parent; or out of school for at least five years or more. Also for this study, the age of a nontraditional student or “adult learner” 25 years and over; students between the ages of 18 -24 are considered to be of traditional age. National Center for Educational Statistics (2013) uses 24 years as the boundary age for determining whether a student is more or less traditional.

2.2.3 The Community College Context

The standard definition of a community college is “any institution regionally accredited to award the associate degree in arts or science as its highest degree” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5). For a significant number of people in the United States, their post-high school story begins at the community college, a specially designed institution where individuals find the education and supports necessary to achieve success in the modern economy. During the Depression of the 1930s, a small number of 2-year “junior” colleges began offering job-training programs to ease widespread unemployment. After World War II, the conversion of military industries to consumer goods created new, skilled jobs. This demand, combined with the GI Bill, created the need for more options in higher education. In 1948, the Truman Commission suggested the creation of a network of public, community-based colleges to serve local needs.

The community colleges became a national network in the 1960s with the opening of 457 public community colleges - more than the total in existence before that decade. Baby boomers fueled enrollment growth, and construction was funded by a strong post-war economy and supported by social activism.

The influx of women and minorities into community colleges began with the civil rights movements of the late 1960s and 70s. During that period, students on predominantly white college campuses protested for changes that included an increase in the number of black students, faculty, programs, and administrators, and increased financial aid support (Mosley, 1980). Black women were hired for college faculty and administrative positions in response to the national cry to address the needs of the increasing minority population on predominately white campuses. Between 1976 and 1988, the number of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled

almost doubled (NCES IES, 2006). For the first time in history, women now outnumber men in the community colleges in Pennsylvania.

Today there are 1,108 community colleges in the United States. Of these, 982 are public, 90 are independent, and 36 are tribal. (AACC, 2016) Together, they serve 45% of all U.S. undergraduates and 41% of all first-time freshmen. Community colleges serve 62% of all Native American undergraduates, 57% of all Hispanic undergraduates, 52% of all black undergraduates, and 43% of all Asian/Pacific Islander undergraduates.

Community colleges provide the student a choice of vocational career -technical training or academic equivalent of attending freshman and sophomore years in college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Older students attend community college to attain a specific degree of certification, while traditional students expect to transfer to a four year college. (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Handel, 2013; Miller, Pope & Steinmann, 2005).

The reasons for choosing community college vary based upon the needs of the individual and the norms of the community. Some students take one or more classes to transfer to another school, to find a job, or to advance in their present job. Other students graduate first, and then transfer to another school, find a job, or advance in their present job. Another group of students take classes for personal enrichment. (NCES IES, 2000).

Post-secondary, community college education is typically an economic decision. According to the United States Census Bureau (2011a), women and children make up the largest number of people living below the line of poverty. No matter what the age of the women or the social demographics of women they represent more than men the largest group living below poverty. (Cawthorne, 2008; United States Census Bureau, 2011a). Women earned 81% hourly wage for each dollar earned by men in 2010 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Levi,

2012). According to the United States Census Bureau (2011b), women earn less than men at all levels of educational degrees. Women with a high school diploma earned a wage of 59% of the wage for a man with a high school diploma.

Community colleges now enroll 12.3 million students, of which 7.3 million (60%) are enrolled in credit programs and 5.0 million (40%) are enrolled in non-credit programs. 4.5 million (62%) are part-time students, and only 2.8 million (38%) are full-time students. The average age of a community college student is 28, and the median age is 24. 37% are 21 or below, 49% are from 22 to 39, and 14% are 40 or above NCEC IEC (2015). The ethnicity of the 7.3 million students enrolled in for-credit programs is primarily white. The ethnicity of the 7.3 million students enrolled in for-credit programs is primarily white (49%), Hispanic (22%), and black (14%), with 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% of two or more races, 1% Native American, 1% Non-resident alien, and 4% other or unknown. 36% of students are the first generation in their families to attend college. 17% are single parents, 4% are veterans, 12% have disabilities, and 7% are non-U.S. students.

Women outnumber men in community colleges; as mentioned above; in 2016 women comprise 57% of community college students. This number has not varied significantly over fifteen years, when White (2001) found that women comprised 58% of community college students. She reported that about half of the women are age 25 or older. Thus, about 25% of the community college student body consists of adult women. White also found that three-quarters of adult women are enrolled part-time.

2.2.4 Conflict between Community of Origin and College Environment

A theory fundamental to the study of students who persist in college to receive a degree is Tinto's model of social group transition. (Tinto, 1984). Tinto's theory is based upon the work of Arnold Van Gennep's study in the book *The Rites of Passage*. According to Tinto, (1984) new college students must undergo a transition through three psychosocial stages when they leave high school and enter college. Stage one is the separation from active membership in their communities of origin, including friendships, affiliations with the high school, families, and other social groups. The values, norms, and behaviors of the new college environment can differ significantly from those held by their original communities.

The second stage occurs during the shift from the original environment into the academic environment, as the student adapts to the norms and behaviors acceptable to the college community. (Tinto, p.94). Stage three occurs when the student has psychosocially adapted to the college communities that he or she is required, or has chosen, to join. The major transition has concluded. (Tinto, p.98).

The extent to which changes must occur, and thus the level of stress a student experiences, depends upon how different the original norms and behavioral patterns are from those demanded by the college community (Tinto, p. 94). Past experiences may not have equipped the student with the social and intellectual skills needed to succeed in a college environment. The difficulty of the transition also depends upon whether the student had any prior exposure to the transition to college based upon the experiences of family members or friends.

Nora & Cabrera (1993) conducted a study of the fall 1990 freshmen class at a large public, predominantly white Midwestern institution. Participation was limited to first time freshman who were US citizens. An initial survey and follow-up yielded 831 usable surveys for

sampling or 52 percent of the target population. The composition of the sample was 50.4 percent white and 10.7 percent African American, 21.5 percent Asian American, 17.2 percent Hispanic, and 0.1 percent Native American. Comparisons between the total population in gender and academic ability represented the total population.

The student surveys were taken from items or adapted from instruments developed by Pascarella and Terenzini (2004), Nettles, et al. (2000), Tracey and Sedlacek (1986), Bean and Metzner (1985). The survey measured the following seven dimensions of the student experience:

1. perceptions of prejudice / discrimination,
2. parental encouragement,
3. academic experiences,
4. social integration,
5. academic and intellectual development,
6. goal commitment, and
7. institutional commitment.

The variables associated with persistence were parental encouragement, social integration, academic and intellectual development and grade point average.

In his “Model of Institutional Departure”, Tinto identifies three major sources of student attrition: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated within the intellectual and social life of the institution. To persist, students need to be integrated into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. (Tinto, 1993)

Some colleges have traditional ceremonies and rituals to engage students in life on campus, including the “Greek” system of fraternities and sororities and other social, service, and academic organizations. These opportunities for student interaction are formalized by the college and become fixtures on the college calendar. Students who participate in these activities adapt to the organizations they join and to the friendships and other personal affiliations that follow. While student participation in academic work is mandatory, most extra-curricular memberships are not. Some students who do not establish these memberships may become isolated and dropout (Tinto, p. 98-99).

Nontraditional students at community college are typically commuters with limited time on campus and must negotiate the transition to the academic environment even as they fulfill their simultaneous roles of mother, wife and/or employee in other environments. Nationally, only 26% of community colleges offer on-campus housing (NCES, 2016) so even if a non-traditional women student chose to stay on campus to enforce the separation of her worlds, this would not usually be an option. Students in-residence at college experience an actual physical transition from one world into another, but commuter students can find separation more difficult because they live in two (or more) worlds simultaneously; they spend less time at the college and may not yet understand the college environment, and they remain bound to their original environment. At home, family and friends may continue to operate as if nothing has changed and may not be capable of effective support. At work, employer demands seldom change when an employee chooses to enter college and become a student.

In 1985, Bean and Metzner proposed a model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. In 1987, Metzner and Bean tested their model and found that, for nontraditional students, dropout was a function of GPA and credit hours enrolled, as well as the usefulness of

education for future employment, satisfaction with being a student, opportunity to transfer, and age. In addition, absence from class, age, high school performance, and ethnicity had indirect effects on dropout through GPA. Their results indicated that nontraditional students dropped out of school for academic reasons or lack of commitment, but were unrelated to social factors at school.

Based upon the experience of this author, nontraditional women students do require a level of social integration that supports achievement of their goals within the context of the college. Because their association with school is only one part of a multi-dimensional environment, their social integration at school is necessarily time-limited and the social function may well be served by a mentor who helps them select and create links to appropriate people, organizations, and resources, for either the short- or long-term.

The field of cross-cultural psychology offers research that helps illuminate the plight of minority students enrolled in predominantly white colleges. The psychology of acculturation predicts that the work required for them to adapt is more complex (Berry, 1990). Jewelle Gibbs studied the adaptation patterns of Black students on white campuses. She found that black students experience identity conflicts and stress related to adapting to a new culture using four modes of adaptation to the cultural norm. Students who moved away from the cultural norm were withdrawn, and separation was the descriptive used for Black students who moved away from the culture all together. Many of the Black students did not find a sense of belonging by making a connection with others in a group. This is in direct conflict with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of the need to belong. These students did not have participation and success in higher education because they could not find the informal and formal networks of support needed for college retention. (Gibbs, 1974 p.734-736).

It is impossible for traditional student cultures to meet the needs of all the minority social cultures which students bring to predominantly white colleges. Since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's, minority students have insisted on programs to meet their specific needs. Student cultures are a very important role of the retention process. The peer group helps to educate and support the new minority student on campus. Student affairs administrators need to include minority representatives in addressing research on student satisfaction, retention, and expectations from the institution. Focus groups, interviews, and surveys can be used to understand the influences and the importance of student cultures and relationships needed for student retention in higher education.

Students need to feel that they participate through an active role in the campus community. There are acceptable social norms for all students to follow, but minority students who come from a community which is with different norms are often left outside the college community of acceptance. The way in which students commit themselves to a higher institution through acceptance, registration, and financial obligation is a form of contractual agreement (Freeman, p. 130). A lack of commitment to the contract and a sense of detachment from the community they encounter are other reasons why students who enter into the academic contract agreement drop out before they complete their first year. Each student brings his/her own ethical, moral, social, set of norms previously established in their home environment. When students are not able to agree with the standards of norms required by the college community it can lead to failure. The failure may be due to limited faculty and staff support, lack of self-knowledge, lack of academic skill preparation, lack of minority role models, and a sense of not fitting into the new community or isolation.

2.2.5 Academic Preparedness

When students are academically unprepared for college-level work, the likelihood of successful completion is doubtful. Boylan and Saxon (2006) cite Cross (1976) in noting that fewer than 10% of those requiring remediation are likely to survive in college without it. Although many four-year colleges assume that freshman are academically prepared, community colleges have taken the lead role in pre-college level, “remedial” courses due to the “open admissions” policy that admits students who may never have been academically prepared or who may be returning to school after an extended absence. As public institutions subsidized with tax dollars, community colleges are governed by local, state, and federal legislation and accountable to government regulators. They are required to document the retention rates and activities that serve all student populations. The attrition rates data for all underrepresented groups on campus must also be collected and reported to the state department.

Jenkins (2011) found that many new students enroll in community college without clear goals for college and careers and are sometimes sidetracked by remedial courses, never enrolling in a program of study that leads to a credential. Analysis shows that students who declared a major in the first year performed substantially better than those who became concentrators in the second year or later, and completed their programs sooner. Older students tended to be more successful when applying for limited entry programs. Jenkins recommended that although community colleges rely on students ‘declared majors to indicate enrollment in a program, actual course-taking patterns are a better indicator of student concentrations. When difficult “gatekeeper” courses may prevent students from entering a program, the author recommends supports to help students pass these classes. College faculty, staff and administrators from across silos should work together to review processes and services at each stage of the student’s

experience with the college, and redesign or realign college practices to accelerate entry into and completion of programs of study leading to credentials of value.

Mandatory courses for academic skill development are generally available to incoming community college freshman whose needs for academic skills enhancement have been assessed through placement-testing, ACT or SAT scores, and writing samples. The skills assessed are typically math, reading comprehension, and academic writing. These remedial courses, which are required but do not earn credit toward an academic degree, are often filled with nontraditional students; although they are necessary, they extend the time a student must persist until earning a degree. In addition, nontraditional students are not always prepared to seek out supplementary resources that are available to them, such as study skill courses, tutorial assistance, academic advisory help, and other support systems established to increase the probability of satisfactory academic achievement.

Strayhorn (2011) explored the use of Summer Bridge programs as a strategy for helping underrepresented (nontraditional) students prepare for college. Quantitative analyses suggested that summer bridge program participation positively affects specific academic skills (use of technology, interpreting syllabi) and academic self-efficacy. Further, a student's positive beliefs about his or her own academic skills and aptitude positively predicted first-semester grades, explaining approximately 30% of the variance in first-semester GPA.

Boylan and Saxon, in their 2006 meta-analysis of effective practices in college-level remediation, found two general research trends: exploration of method and techniques for effective instructional activities in remedial courses, and the exploration of program components and organizational structures that characterized successful programs. Early work by John Roueche and colleagues and later work are addressed. Key research findings make the following

recommendations for remedial learning, which may be reasonably extended to mentoring programs for nontraditional students who must undertake remedial work.

Clear-cut Goals and Objectives. Establishing clear-cut goals and objectives for remedial courses is important, and leads to a clear course structure

Master learning. Utilizing small units of instruction and frequent testing, is beneficial to students in remedial courses because it provides regular reinforcement of concepts through testing.

Highly Structured Learning Experiences. The provision of highly-structured learning experiences appears to be effective because students lack experience with organizing information; a highly-structured learning experience helps students compensate for this and teaches them how to create learning structures.

Visual and/or Hands-On Learning Approaches. Because lecturing has proven unsuccessful for these students in the past, a variety of teaching methods is recommended; community college students are much more likely to be either iconic (visual) or hands-on learners than other students.

Theory-based Coursework: Remedial courses should be systematic and clearly based upon learning theory.

Centralized program. Remedial education should be strongly coordinated and provide for abundant communication among those who teach.

Program evaluation. The use of formative evaluation for program improvement is associated with program success.

Program Definition. Programs seeking certification must specify their operational philosophy and describe program goals and objectives based upon the philosophy.

Assessment and Placement. Early identification is associated with successful remediation; however, mandatory placement has a significant negative retention of students in remedial programs (possibly because these weaker students may not enter a voluntary program.)

Counseling Component. Counseling is associated with success, and should be integrated into the overall structure of the remedial program, based upon the goals of the program, and undertaken early in the semester by counselors specifically trained to work with developmental students using sound principles of student development theory.

Tutoring. The effectiveness of tutoring is influenced by the quality and training of tutors.

Computer-Based Instruction. CBI is most successful when used as a supplement to regular classroom activities in remedial courses; students are more likely to complete more learning in less time, earn slightly higher grades on post-tests, and improve student attitudes toward learning.

Classroom/laboratory Integration. Instructors and laboratory personnel work together to ensure course objectives are directly supported by lab activities.

Institution-wide Commitment. Commitment is reflected through administrative support, allocation of resources, and acceptance of remediation as a mainstream academic activity.

Consistency of Academic Standards. Remediation standards must fit with entry standards for curriculum courses.

Learning Communities and Paired Courses. Learning communities have combined courses and groups of students organized as cohorts. Tinto (1997) found that underprepared students organized around principles of learning communities had better attitudes and course completion rates.

Supplemental Instruction. Participants in small group sessions in support of a remedial course consistently outperform those who do not. Video-based supplemental instruction is particularly effective for remedial students.

Courses and Workshops on Strategic Thinking. Students taught how to acquire and process information became more effective learners, obtained higher grades, and were retained over longer periods.

Professional Training. Staff training leads to increased effectiveness of program components such as instruction, counseling, and tutoring as well as overall program effectiveness.

Student Orientation. College orientation courses for remedial, and particularly for first-generation college students, are useful tools for helping students learn what is expected of them and assisting them in adjustment to the college environment.

Critical Thinking. Participation in courses, programs, and activities designed to enhance critical thinking has improved reading and writing performance, improved attitudes, and contributed to higher grades and retention.

2.2.6 Self-Knowledge and Self-Efficacy

Adaptation to the unfamiliar surroundings of college is often difficult, and the question, “how do I fit”, and even “do I fit”, into the college environment can take priority over academic expectations for the new college student. Although college is usually a time of self-discovery, confusion and conflict can be debilitating when a basis for a reasonable response to an unfamiliar situation is unavailable.

Neisser (1988) states that self-knowledge is “based on several different forms of information, so distinct that each one essentially establishes a different ‘self. The ecological self is the self as directly perceived with respect to the immediate physical environment; the interpersonal self, also directly perceived, is established by species-specific signals of emotional rapport and communication; the extended self is based on memory and anticipation; the private self appears when we discover that our conscious experiences are exclusively our own; the conceptual self or ‘self-concept’ draws its meaning from a network of socially-based assumptions and theories about human nature in general and ourselves in particular. Although these selves are rarely experienced as distinct (because they are held together by specific forms of stimulus information), they differ in their developmental histories, in the accuracy with which we can know them, in the pathologies to which they are subject, and generally in what they contribute to human experience.” Self-knowledge is based upon learning from life experiences and testing oneself in a variety of situations. When a situation is new or extremely different from those we have confronted in the past, we do not know how to react to the circumstances beyond basic principles and values we may have adopted earlier. Freshmen find themselves on campus and away from home for the first time, struggling to discover who they are and how they fit into the new community. A lack of self-knowledge entering the freshman year that does not lead to growth and adaptation can lead to college failure and dropout.

For the student who commutes to college, the struggle between the college environment and home environment can be as frustrating as the dormitory living arrangement. Both situations present problems of adjustment to the environment. Issues such as developing new relationships, self-discipline for study, understanding the expectations for performance in academic classes,

and making decisions that will affect their future are all associated with how well prepared the student is for college.

Self-confidence tends to fluctuate with experience, but begins with a student's prior experiences in school and is colored by expectations. Students have "experiences of earned success" when they receive tangible evidence that their potential has been acknowledged, and "experiences of destabilization" when they realize that their efforts are not acceptable. Earned success experiences are reinforcing, while destabilizing experiences are associated with diminished confidence even as they may generate needed change. (Bickerstaff, et al., 2012).

Financial concerns are endemic to nontraditional women college students, but financial literacy tends to be low. Eitel, et al. (2009) found that these students perceived that they had a great need for this knowledge. Although age, ethnicity, and student classification were predictors of higher financial literacy, the students did not seem to know where to start in confronting their lack of knowledge and did not seek out information.

A common group, which is easy to fit in with, is one that mirrors the environment from which the student is most familiar (home). The collective of individuals may have the same racial identity or ethnic group and beliefs. There are social norms that are acceptable for collective groups such as fraternities and societies on campus. Each student has to learn and understand these norms in order to fit into the community.

2.2.7 Previous College Experience and Role Models

There are as many variables associated with why students drop out of college as there are students who attend and graduate from college. Those students who have had family members and friends assisting and encouraging them with college preparation activities, getting

information on financial aid and admissions, and helping them organize the process are more successful at transitioning to college. Students who receive help with the application process and with preparation for standardized college admission tests have a greater chance of enrolling in post-secondary education (Horn, p. 25-27).

For the student who has experienced campus visits, social interactions with college group members, and high school prep courses such as upward bound or transitional summer college prep courses, the adjustment to college life is somewhat easier. Family members and friends who attended college can explain the experiences of social interaction among diverse populations on campus and the resources available to all students and help in the development of higher expectations of the newly enrolled student.

When the first generation college student has little or no previous exposure to college life, academic expectations, and little self-discipline, he or she is more likely to have a hard time adjusting to the college environment.

Exposure to role adult models who succeeded in college and are employed tends to positively influence first generation minority college-bound students. They have a sense of support within their own community and people they can talk with about issues relating specifically to college adjustment, expectations, and program selection.

These positive role models can be from the community, such as school instructors, coaches, church members, and college faculty. So, the important role that minority faculty members represent is two-fold: they not only teach minority students, but they also provide leadership, direction, and guidance for the minority student who needs positive reinforcement to succeed.

In a student-institution-fit application model the two components that determine whether a student will succeed are academic and social integration. In order for the model to work, students must possess similar characteristics. If the environment is radically different from the one they came from, then separate retention programs only exacerbate the isolation of the student. The personal devaluing of one's self-worth can occur.

Faculty, staff and administrators responsible for providing a nurturing academic environment for college students generally have little interaction with minority students, unless it's within the context of a model in which the adult has the power of control. When faculty in a teaching position are in a setting with minority students, it does not mean interaction is taking place between them. Faculty and staff need a better understanding of the sociocultural behaviors and sense of community values of minority students in order to assist them with obtaining academic success through support relationships (Martin, p. 9-10). The commitment for diversity and fairness in academic and social integration has to develop and be instituted throughout the college community. The more opportunities that people have to interact with others, the greater the sense of equality and less stress is felt. Individuals will start to identify and discuss various ways to cooperate with each other. More verbal communication leads to more opportunity to engage in norms of fairness in behavior and grading (Frey & Bohnet, p. 292-293).

Underrepresented first generation college bound students are given more opportunities to succeed if they take advantage of retention programs that incorporate tutorial assistance. The faculty, staff and administrators directly responsible for retention programs must be sensitive to the moral issues of equality and how students are treated by others on campus. There must be fairness in grading, and the cultural differences in values and beliefs of the students must not be judged based upon one's own limited knowledge and experience. Ethical issues in advising and

counseling of students must be based on the training experience of working with diverse racial ethnic groups.

The Model of Student Departure developed by Bean and Metzner (1985) predicts that nontraditional students (older, part-time, and commuter) are more affected by the external environment than by the social integration variables affecting traditional student attrition.

Karp and Bork (2012) argue that community college success relies upon the student effectively playing the “role” of student, which depends not only upon academic preparation but upon a range of important skills, attitudes, and behaviors that are unspoken (tacit). The paper articulates the role of student and provides strategies students can use to meet expectations. The core role of the college student consists of four specific areas of knowledge and behavior: Academic Habits are approaches to school activities that support academic success; Cultural Know-How exhibits understanding and adherence to unwritten institutional norms; Balancing Multiple Roles and Time Constraints; and Help-Seeking Behavior that is both self-directed and timely. Compared to other roles, the community college student role is fluid: it is highly variable in that there are many ways to meet expectations, the structure is self-determined, and feedback is irregular, with frequency often dependent upon student request.

Self-awareness (critical self-examination and planning for improvement) is necessary to enact these four components. To prepare students, practitioners need to recognize that successful role enactment entails two things: understanding the normative expectations of the role, and having the cognitive repertoires that allow for normatively appropriate behaviors. Scaffolding is particularly important for developing college readiness, especially for those who are from cultures other than the middle class.

In his “*Model of Institutional Departure*”, Tinto (1993) identifies three major sources of student attrition: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated within the intellectual and social life of the institution. To persist, students need to be integrated into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems.

Recommendations for college support programs tailored to needs of adult women: child care center (critical for mothers), support network (noted as particularly important), specialized orientation, career exploration assistance, and instruction in stress management and relaxation techniques. Also important is publicizing the existence of specialized support programs.

2.2.8 Retention and Persistence Factors

Students who stay in school and persist through graduation typically have the assistance and encouragement of family and friends as they accomplish activities related to preparing for college academic work, acquiring financial resources, and gaining admission to college. Those who have assistance with the application process and have been prepared for standardized tests have a greater chance of enrolling in post-secondary education (Horn, 1998, May). For the student who has experienced campus visits, social interactions with college group members, and high school prep courses such as upward bound or transitional summer college prep courses, the adjustment to college life has proven to be somewhat easier. Colleges, including community colleges, are traditionally designed to accommodate the schedules, life patterns, developmental needs, and student services of the 17-22-year old undergraduate. Family members and friends who attended college can prepare students for the rules, regulations, processes, and behaviors

expected of college students, including interacting with diverse populations on campus and accessing the resources available to all students on campus. Importantly, they can help the student develop and manage their expectations.

Research by Gibson and Slate (2010) found adult students were able to engage with the faculty in a way that led them to be persistence staying in class in the community college. None of the women in their study spoke about being close to any faculty or college staff. Deil-Amen (2011) found nontraditional age students did not take part in co-curricular activities. Her study showed that older students only participated in social activities if the activity had a direct impact on the academic success.

While the door for student admissions is open to the community college, the rate of completion remains low at approximately one-third, depending on the research. For nontraditional women students with the extra burden of developmental coursework and demanding non-academic roles in addition to schoolwork, the risk of ‘dropping out’ or ‘stopping out’ is higher than for those without those demands. Many nontraditional students do not persist in completing academic work after enrolling because of a lack of appropriate supports within the institution, the community, and their own families. Although they rarely have the full set of necessary supports within their existing personal networks, they need these supports to improve the likelihood of achieving their educational goals and must acquire them from external sources. (Berry, 2005)

Financial concerns are endemic to nontraditional women college students, but financial literacy tends to be low. (Eitel & Martin, 2009) Although age, ethnicity, and student classification were predictors of higher financial literacy, the students did not seem to know where to start in confronting their lack of knowledge and did not seek out information.

Community colleges typically offer student services to support the accomplishment of generally required academic processes. Some of these supports include the enrollment process, including placement testing and student orientation; developmental classes to improve academic skills; and transitional classes to teach study skills, time management and goal setting. There are often child development centers for the 3-5-year old children of the students. The student usually has access to individual and small group tutoring, learning style assessment, financial aid assistance, workshops on overcoming test anxiety and early intervention for academic difficulties. There is often a fitness center for exercise. A career center will offer opportunities for job shadowing experiences and job placement. Unfortunately, many nontraditional women students do not know when and how to access these services, or cannot find the additional time or child care necessary to take advantage of them.

2.2.9 Model Programs to Promote Retention and Persistence

Colleges typically offer defined programs designed to increase student retention through graduation. Most of the programs currently being developed and used on college campuses target academically and economically disadvantaged students. These students share the difficulties of adjusting to college due to ineffective academic skills, lack of role models, and/or limited knowledge about goal achievement. In addition to mentoring, two major program models adopted for this purpose include academic retention/intervention programs and special advising programs. All models have advantages and disadvantages.

Academic retention/intervention programs are designed to assist the academically disadvantaged student with support services such as basic developmental courses to increase math, English, reading, and writing levels. These skills are needed for competency at the college

level and to understand and master academic programs. Students complete placement tests prior to registration, which show the level of mastery they have acquired from secondary education. The results of the placement test scores are used to place new students into developmental courses, set up tutorial assistance, and track the student during the semester to ensure all the academic support is available to the student.

Intervention programs are the other half of the academic retention service where notification of possible course failure by students is given to a college coach specialist, who contacts the students, makes appointments to meet individually with the students add to discuss the options and tutorial assistance services available through the college. This process takes place at mid-semester to ensure that freshmen have access to and utilize the resources within the time frame to pass the course(s).

Special advising programs are designed to provide services and activities above and beyond the regular support services offered to all newly enrolled students. Examples may be summer orientation programs to assist the student with adjustment to campus life, individual counseling services for individual students, and small support groups, and social and political opportunities on campus that have limited participation by certain groups. Also, testing services and cultural events that cater to one or more racial/ethnic group is promoted by special advisors representing the makeup of the group (Lee). Mandatory freshman orientation courses are designed to assist new students with the transition to campus organizations and external/internal community activities. Some of these freshmen courses are specifically designed for minority only attendance as with a minority leadership development course. There are advantages to offering courses and programs through special advising for minority students. The minority students have the opportunity to meet other peers in a common social or academic setting to

establish relationships for support. The greater the match between the students, the less anxiety and stress that occurs. Because black students may enter with a sociocultural background that differs from the dominant white culture on the campus, minority students can be perceived as “misfits” who need to adapt to fit in. Changing the structure and organization of the college environment to acceptance of the diversity in other cultures would be to the advantage of the entire college community.

The disadvantage of the special advising program is the separation of students for social, academic, and political events. Keeping the students apart in the college setting defeats the mission of most institutions that espouse diversity and acceptance of all people for the common goal of their educational attainment.

2.2.10 The Mentorship Program Model: Theoretical Approach

Mentorship is a goal-driven relationship between individual people. Any specific mentoring relationship is based upon a model that outlines the goals of the relationship, the roles of the participants, and rules for interaction. There is a clear distinction between the roles of the mentor and the mentee(s); the mentor controls the utilization of resources and holds the greater power (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000). The term “mentor” entered the literature as the character in Homer's *Odyssey* who served as guide and teacher to Ulysses' son Telemachus during the father's extended absence related to the Trojan War (Parada, 1993).

The term mentor has numerous definitions. The review of the literature states the word is not easy to define (Brown, 1999). The traditional mentoring model is the mentoring "dyad," which is defined by Moore and Salimbene (1981) as an "intense lasting and professionally centered relationship between two individuals." The two participants are usually designated the

mentor and either the mentee or protégé. In the *traditional model*, often used by men, the mentor is the source of benefits and has greater power and responsibility than the other (mentee/protégé), who is the receiver of benefits. This model overlaps the *grooming model*, in which the mentor is usually a superior within a hierarchical organization who has more experience than the mentee and is in a position of power and control over him/her. This model can also be defined as the *apprenticeship model* when the relationship is of extended duration; a *quasi-apprenticeship* exists when the training period is relatively brief. (Haring, 1999; Welch, 1996)

Despite the advantages of mentoring in achieving individual and organizational goals, there are several disadvantages that must be addressed if the program is to be successful. Gupton & Slick noted that abuse, dependency, and exploitation can develop in apprenticeship and quasi-apprenticeship relationships (1996). For example, in an academic environment, a student researcher has an opportunity to participate in the research of an advisor to learn how to conduct research, but may advance the research of the advisor yet receive no credit for any original contributions to published results. Another disadvantage exists when the mentor seeks to shape the protégé to his/her self-image to an extent that the protégé's ability to make unique contributions is inhibited.

The *mentor as advisor* model is typically used in the academic environment; the student has a one-to-one relationship with a faculty member who may or may not be active in the student's academic discipline or, at the graduate level, in the student's area of research interest. This model defines the *academic mentor* or the *formal academic advisement* relationships. (Welch, 1996). In the mentor role, the faculty advisor is expected to have sufficient knowledge to advise the student in a wide range of subjects related to academic work in general but is not

expected to be active in the student's field of interest. In this model there may be limited interaction because the focus is on guiding the student through the academic program of study and not research. When a student has completed the basic program of study, he/she may need to terminate the relationship and adopt new advisor more knowledgeable in the student's field of interest.

The mentor as advisor model is advantageous in helping a student to understand and navigate through academic systems and procedures, but can have several disadvantages. When the mentor emphasizes following instructions rather than providing informed guidance, the student can be discouraged from questioning the ideas and reasons presented by the advisor. Extensive direction, sometime known as "handholding", can discourage the student from developing his/her own views and making independent decisions. (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

The *mentor as teacher model*, also known as the *academic mentoring relationship model* (Welch, 1996), exists when a teacher designs an individualized curriculum for a student. This mentoring relationship usually develops over a period of several years. Because of the extensive interaction required by the relationship, it is typically more holistic and more emotional. The investment of time by both participants can lead to psychological bonding. In this model, "the mentor helps the mentee to 'learn the ropes,' to become socialized into the profession" (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000). The primary disadvantage of this model is the emotional severing of the special relationship after the student has completed the program of study.

The *mentor as a guide model* is the relationship between two professionals in which one person helps the other through socialization process needed to enter their profession (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000). This model overlaps with the *career mentoring relationship model* in which the advisor has the direct role of preparing the student or colleague for active employment

within the institutional setting (Welch, 1996). This model exists in post-secondary education when a senior faculty member guides a junior faculty member through the tenure process.

In education when a master teacher guides the first year novice in classroom control. The mentor-as-guide relationship can be referred to as *woman-to-woman mentoring* when the emphasis is on collaboration and mutually beneficial exchange between two women participants (Duff, 1999). A disadvantage to this relationship emerges when one person permanently assumes the role of leader and other the role of follower, but the appropriate reversal of lead-follow roles can be a positive form of mutual learning.

Networking provides for the sharing of information and other resources beneficial to professionals with mutual concerns and common interests (Hall & Sandler, 1983; Duff, 1999; Welch, 1996; Haring, 1983; Johnson, 1991). The personal and professional relationships established through networks can provide information on resources, career advancement, job opportunities, publication and endorsement for support. Networking has been shown to be highly beneficial for black women working on predominantly white campuses with limited systems of support for their unique interests and concerns. Campus networks made up of senior women and newcomers have been shown as useful resources for information and support both on-campus and beyond. The professional network contacts made outside of the campus community can be local, regional or national. The *networking model* is described as a process for empowering individuals to develop their own unique professional style. Women are encouraged to develop relationships across various age and ethnic groups. These models can be long or short-term collaborative relationships depending on the mutual needs of the participants. The relationships are a multiple *blend of models* such as career, guiding, advisory, grooming and networking with

other professionals (Haring, 1999; Kraus, 1996; Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Sandler, 1986).

In the *multiple mentor model*, an individual participates in more than one mentoring relationship or network. The individual maintains a variety of professional relationships and networks which may consist of the traditional/grooming model, sponsors for promotion, career guides to explain the system and provide general information, as well as "peer pals," to offer advice and share strategies (Hall & Sandler, 1983; Welch, 1996; Duff, 1999; Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Haring, 1999).

Trust has been found to be an essential component of the mentoring process. Students are able to persist and succeed with the influence of an informal mentor only after trust has been established. Students will return to a mentor only when they have come to believe that their persistence in the face of obstacles is being rewarded with tangible success. (Farruggia, Bullen & Pierson, 2013)

Because the mentorship model involves one to one contact there are limitations to the number of students who can participate in a typical, limited-enrollment program. Also, the advantages of the mentorship model depend upon the amount of time the mentor is available for each student. On a campus with limited number of available faculty and upper-class students, the number of mentors is extremely limited, so students have to find other support providers within or outside of the college community setting. On campuses where there are few minority staff and faculty members, the demand for their time is greater than on a more diversified campus. The need for minority mentors is greater on a predominantly white campus where there are a few people of color. Senior level students can be trained to provide some of the same needed supports for incoming minority students. Workshop classes and training sessions for

mentorship programs are offered on campuses as course credit or as part of a community service portfolio.

2.3 PRIOR COHORT RESEARCH AND PHASE I STUDY

2.3.1 Characteristics of Subject Cohort

The original community college mentoring program occurred at one campus of a multi-campus regional institution; although each of the four major campuses sponsored a mentoring program, they were designed and implemented separately. The program was informal in that the relationship evolved to meet the students' goals as they emerged. The same mentor served the same student with both personal guidance and academic advising throughout the community college experience, directing the students to other resources and following-up to assure that those other services met the students' needs. The mentoring contact continued, although with less intensity and informally, until the last of the fourteen students in the mentor program received their associate's degrees. Some of the relationships continued informally beyond the next degree.

Most of the women who participated in the program were the first generation to attend college. They were active mothers who held jobs and participated in the education and school activities of their children, while completing their college work and other responsibilities. All of the women received need-based financial aid. None of the students lived in student dormitories or in other student-centered housing.

2.3.2 Phase I Study: “Mentoring Non-Traditional Women Students Who Succeeded in a Community College Setting”

The Phase I study upon which the current research is based showed that the benefits of mentoring accrue to the mentored student, but there are other beneficiaries as well: the students’ families, their contemporaries, the community, and the college. After participating in Phase I these women continued their pursuit of their educational goals while working. They helped other women they met at work and college by helping others address the same barriers they encountered as students and employees. The women shared the skills they learned from the mentor cohort program with other women they met.

1. Student achievement of academic goals. By achieving their own academic goals, students were able to satisfy the hopes and expectations of their families and friends. It is clear that mentoring was critical in helping the subject students stay in school, complete their community college programs, and continue their formal education.
2. Improvement of socioeconomic status. By completing their academic programs, the students gained the knowledge, skills and credentials needed to generate income sufficient to meet their family obligations.
3. Students serve as role models. The subject students modeled successful behaviors that they recommend for other students, their family members (including their children), their friends, and community members.
4. Achievement of community college objectives for retention and graduation. The success of a community college is measured by results: number of students enrolled, percentage of students retained, and percentage of students graduating. By improving retention and graduation rates, mentoring contributes directly to the achievement of college objectives.

5. Mentor satisfaction. Mentors are educators whose job satisfaction is substantially derived from helping others learn and achieve. The mentors were advised of the study results and are eager to continue, improve, and expand the program. They asked the participants for help with developing the characteristics of an effective program.
6. Mentor development. For nontraditional women aspiring to leadership positions, mentoring relationships are extremely critical. Students who have benefitted from a mentor program become mentors (“Pay it forward.”), providing opportunities for the further development of professional leadership skills, advocacy for other nontraditional women, direct intervention, political insight, professional contacts and an established support system (Gardiner, Enomoto & Gorgan, 2000; Hall & Sandler, 1983; Gregory, 1999; Welch, 1996; Johnson, 1991).

Barriers to mentoring success may be real obstacles that prevent mentoring from occurring, or can exist as beliefs or perceptions held by the potential mentors or mentees. The author became aware of these barriers while acting as a mentor, and their importance was emphasized during this study.

1. Limited availability of time and other resources available to potential mentee. As discussed above, nontraditional women hold multiple conflicting roles in addition to that of student, including spouse, mother, caregiver, and employee. A potential mentee may view the mentoring relationship as an additional burden rather than a support.
2. “Not for Me.” Nontraditional women can feel that mentoring relationships are available only for traditional students or to nontraditional students with different characteristics; they may be unqualified or undeserving of the attention. If mentoring outreach and activities are not designed to meet the special needs of nontraditional women they may

not be able or interested in participating due to cost, travel, time, and other limiting factors.

3. Perceived Value of a Mentoring Relationship If a potential mentee does not understand the value a mentor can provide, the relationship will not be pursued (Eitel and Martin, 2009) This study showed that nontraditional students are not fully aware of the value of mentoring until they understand and experience it. Students who have never had a mentor may find it difficult to find and maintain one until the service is offered and explained to them.
4. Rejection of Mentoring. A mentoring program will not work if it is not accepted by the participants. There is a danger that mentoring will be seen as a requirement and not a method of encouraging individual potential. Sufficient information about the benefits of mentoring and coaching, an explanation of what mentoring and coaching can and cannot achieve, and clarity about who may participate can mitigate distrust and generate enthusiasm.
5. Gender Boundaries. The mentor-mentee relationship has the potential to be burdened with concerns related to gender differences between mentor and mentee. The results of this study show that women are comfortable with a woman mentor, and find it important that their mentorship is holistic which includes family and faith; this was shown to be particularly important when issues related to women's special needs and problems had to be resolved.
6. Limited availability of nontraditional woman mentors. A high-quality mentoring relationship is characterized by mutuality, trust and empathy from the start and continues through to the end of the relationship. These qualities can be generated only by

competent mentors, particularly those with cultural competence, or the ability to communicate effectively in a manner that is comfortable and familiar to the student (Farruggia, Bullen & Pierson, 2013). The limited number of women available for mentoring means that one-on-one mentoring is limited by time available. Even if mentoring is defined as an important part of the woman's role, performance of other functions means that mentoring time is scarce.

7. Requirement for Qualified Staff to Develop and Operate Mentoring Programs. The development and operation of a formal or informal mentoring program, or even the context within a less-formal program may be encouraged, requires administrative time and attention. Because the design of a culturally competent program or context requires extensive thought and collaborative work, the program will require dedicated staff time during startup; the staff may also need to conduct research and undergo training during this period. During operation, the program or context must be supervised so that it is conducted in line with the initial design; monitored for compliance with relevant regulations; modified as required for quality assurance; and assessed to determine whether goals are being met. The professional development (PD) function typically exists with the Human Resources department and, in many academic institutions, the staff may be strong but the team is small. Colleges tend to outsource PD and have limited time and budget to develop and maintain a long-term internal program that serves a subset of the population.
8. Cost of Mentoring Programs. Although mentoring research has shown that mentoring has value, analyses that quantify the benefits of mentoring relative to the costs of conducting the programs are not readily available. The subject community college mentoring

program measured the benefits versus the costs only in qualitative terms; the rate of graduation was the only metric employed. In addition to the time cost of mentor, mentee, and administrative staff, other costs may accrue. The relative value of paid time spent in mentoring versus other professional development activities has not been formally established.

9. Poorly Qualified Mentors. Mentors must be qualified to provide accurate, useful, and appropriate services in a timely manner. If mentoring is provided haphazardly and/or incorrect direction is provided, it can be injurious and should not continue. Also, when mentoring propagates a dysfunctional set of views and behaviors, external mentoring or training may be preferred.

The original research conducted by the author confirmed that an effective mentor program can enable nontraditional women to succeed. Other research studies have arrived at similar conclusions. (Eitel & Martin, 2009) (Choy & MPR, 2001) (Bean & Mentzner, 1985)

The current research revisits the cohort of nontraditional women students who participated in the subject community college mentoring program. The author invoked the students' wisdom of hindsight, capturing their observations and recommendations to assist in the development of future mentoring programs.

The Phase I research employed a qualitative approach involving personal interviews with highly nontraditional women who participated in the original mentor program for at least two consecutive semesters, graduated from the community college, and still lived in Pennsylvania.

In Phase I, the women were initially contacted via email and asked participate in the study, which would consist of one telephone interview of up to 45 minutes in duration. They were asked to reply with either a yes (with a list of dates/times of available) or a no (to verify

receipt but deny participation). The Phase I questionnaire was tested for the likelihood to promote insight and generate useful information and for efficiency (the ability to conduct the interview within 45 minutes) by conducting mock interviews with subjects who would not be associated with the study. The research questions were both open-ended and closed-ended, and were clustered in four groups. The initial groups of questions were designed to elicit facts, and the later groups were designed to help the subjects explore different aspects of their experience. Four sections of questions were developed for the interviews in order to capture enough information from the participants to address the questions with sufficient answers.

2.3.2.1 Interview Questions

1. Education

- a. What other degrees did you earn after graduating from the community college?
- b. Have you achieved any additional educational goals?
- c. Why did you attend the community college and other schools you have mentioned?

2. Work

- a. What organization do you work for now?
- b. What is your current job title?
- c. As part of your job, do you manage or supervise any people?

3. Challenges

- a. What were your greatest challenges when you were a student at the community college?
- b. What methods did you use to overcome these challenges?
- c. What challenges have you found most difficult to overcome and why?

4. Mentoring

- a. What were the advantages of a mentor when you were a student at the community college?
- b. What positive experiences do you have about the mentoring program at the college?
- c. How could the mentoring experience been improved to help you as a student and as a professional?
- d. If you were going to design a mentoring program for community college students, what important aspects would you include in this program?
- e. What criteria would you use to evaluate the success of a mentoring program for community college students?
- f. Have you mentored anyone in school, work, or any other way since graduating?

The interviews were conducted via telephone.

2.4 SUMMARY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Phase I qualitative study on which this research was based was concerned with the results of the mentoring program and how it affected the nontraditional women students while at community college. The current study, Phase II, explores the experiences of these women after they graduated from the community college but while they continued their college educations and began to work in positions related to their major. Phase II has been designed to evaluate the lasting positive influences of the mentoring program and other aspects of their community college experiences and supports on their continued educational and professional development.

The current research supports the proposition that when women are well-educated they will require less governmental assistance, become financially independent, and contribute economically to society. Prior to this study, longitudinal research has been limited because nontraditional women were seen as the least likely population to complete a college degree. Also, mentor relationships are generally temporary and do not expand beyond the student's graduation or obtaining employment.

Research has shown that mentoring is important for low income, first generation, and academically unprepared which describes the nontraditional women in college students have a better chance of achieving their educational goals, including completing their degrees, when they participate (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). A good mentoring program offers these women the guidance and support they need from positive role models who share their own experiences in helpful ways. The women also benefit from learning about the community resources available to them outside of the college environment. Mentoring programs can be evaluated in terms of their success in helping students by collecting the data on the participants and the number of degree and certificate completers along with transfer students.

As the demographics of the students attending and completing college continue to change, institutions must adapt to the change. Services for women with children, women who have been out of school for more decades, and women going into the workforce for the first time, need to be addressed because for the first time in history, women outnumber the men attending the community college. Findings of this study will support the need for additional help for women such as on campus women centers, child care services and classes that start after the school bus has taken the children to school or daycare.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The current research revisits the cohort of nontraditional women students who participated in the subject community college mentoring program. The author invoked the students' wisdom of hindsight, capturing their observations and recommendations to assist in the development of future mentoring programs.

The research employed a qualitative approach involving personal interviews with highly nontraditional women who participated in the original mentor program for at least two consecutive semesters, graduated from the community college, and still lived in Pennsylvania.

In Phase I of the study, the women were initially contacted via email and asked participate in the study, which would consist of one telephone interview of up to 45 minutes in duration. They were asked to reply with either a yes (with a list of dates/times of available) or a no (to verify receipt but deny participation).

Before initiating Phase II or the current dissertation research study, the questionnaire was tested for the likelihood to promote insight and generate useful information and efficiency and the ability to conduct the interview within 45 minutes) by conducting mock interviews with subjects who would not be associated with the study. The research questions were both open-ended and closed-ended, and were clustered in four groups. The initial groups were designed to

elicit facts, and the later groups were designed to help the subjects explore different aspects of their experience. Four sections of questions were developed for the interviews in order to capture enough information from the participants to address the questions with sufficient answers. The interview questions are listed below. The following sections explain the design of the research. The research design was submitted and approved by, the Institutional Review Board, at The University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

3.2 SELECTION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative approach was selected because the inquiry process that explores a social or human problem can be used to ask questions and examine or describe the meaning and impact of the complex college experiences for these women. This method was appropriate for gathering information about the experiences these women lived through while being a student at a community college. The results of this study are intended to qualitatively assist community college administrators in the development of strategies that can be used to reduce some of the academic and social barriers that negatively affect the academic success of women and provide the support services needed for successful program completion.

Qualitative research looks for the answers to questions by examining different social settings and the people who reside in these settings. Qualitative researchers are interested in how humans arrange themselves in their settings and how the people who reside in these settings make sense of their surroundings with various symbols, ritual social structures, social roles and other social behaviors (Berg, 2004).

The research design for a study begins with the selection of the topic and a paradigm which is a framework of various beliefs, values, methods in which the research takes place. (Creswell, 1994). According to Creswell (1994) a qualitative study is defined as a process for inquiring the understanding of either a social or human problem based on a picture to be developed through getting the details from informants, and it is conducted in a natural setting.

Qualitative work also allows for a view of the world that changes or is fluid, contextual, and personal (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The research relies on the person collecting the data to immerse themselves in the issue that is being studied (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative research also provides a voice to those who were once considered the “other” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and provides for a vibrant context of experiences and emotions. The personal nature of the context of the research questions lead this researcher to explore in depth the experiences of nontraditional women in a community college mentor program using the case study design.

3.3 CASE FORMAT

Each case represents a nontraditional woman over 24 years of age who participated in a mentor program at the community college for one at least one year and graduated with an associate degree. Stake (2006, p.23) recommends asking three questions when you are choosing cases: “is the case relevant, does the case provide mixture of context (p.49), and are the opportunities to learn about the complexity of issues being provided in the variety of cases to address the questions being asked?” This structure is highly relevant for collecting information about the unique stories of the individuals who participated in the program.

3.4 CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The key to getting good and useful data from interviews is to ask good questions, according to Merriam & Tisdell (2016). Patton (p. 118, 2015) suggest that there are six types of questions an interviewer can ask: (1) *experience and behavior questions*, (2) *opinion and values questions*, (3) *feelings questions*, (4) *knowledge questions*, (5) *sensory questions*, (6) *and background or demographic questions*. Asking demographic questions such as age and income depends on how relevant this information is to the research study; this information was collected for the present study.

To gain a better understanding of how and why their mentoring experiences had a positive impact upon the students' ability to complete academic degree sat the community college, information was obtained through interviews with past participants of informal nontraditional women's mentoring program. College educators and administrators have implemented numerous programs to improve the retention of non-traditional women through completion of the college program, and this study was to focus upon the nexus offered through mentoring.

To develop the questionnaires, based on the literature review and information needed to gain additional insight the researcher asked the participants questions regarding their experiences during the time spent at the community college as a student. Each of the women graduates has been contacted via email to request participation in the study. After conducting the previous study with three of the fourteen mentor program cohort participants, I realized that five was the optimum number to have enough variation in responses to the questions and the information needed to analyze the cases.

The research questions and the participants interviewed provided additional information for developing supportive college student communities needed for nontraditional women to succeed and graduate. The questions will address the understanding, the impact of mentors, and the important aspects in designing a successful mentor program. Also, the participants will be asked to address the characteristics and other supports for a successful mentor program for nontraditional women in a community college setting.

The guiding categories that framed the questionnaire were important aspects of the participant's life: education, work, challenges, mentors and other supports. Within these categories, questions were designed to collect experiences, opinions, feelings, knowledge and background. The five general categories of questions to be addressed were as follow:

1. UNDERSTANDING How do nontraditional women understand the concept of mentoring in a community college setting?
2. IMPACT To what extent do you believe mentoring by others has helped in changing the educational lives of community college students?
3. ASPECTS What important aspects should be included in the design of a mentor program for it to be effective?
4. MENTORS What important characteristics should mentors possess in order for them to be effective?
5. OTHER SUPPORTS: What other support systems are needed for women to complete their degree?

3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

All the data collected during the study was kept confidential. Only the researcher asked the questions during private phone interviews; the responses were typed in the University of Pittsburgh storage system known as “Box”. Only the researcher had access to the stored data.

The following section describes the design of the research. The research design was submitted to, and approved by, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Pittsburgh prior to the investigation of this study. Data collection began with a research study in September 2014. By conducting the previous study in 2014, I was able to gather information pertinent to the information needed to frame the questions for this dissertation.

For the previous, Phase I study an email was sent to contact students where they were asked to participate in the study. Some of the program graduates kept in touch with each other and followed up with an email address sent to, and retained by, the researcher. In the previous study I wanted to know if participating in a mentor at the community college was helpful and how the participants’ experiences with the program could be used for future planning.

Fourteen (14) participants in the original informal mentor program were contacted via email. The original study was to reach three nontraditional women who participated in the mentor program and they were interviewed in order to understand experiences of the participants and further developed the questions to gather data and clarify the responses. They were the first three women who responded to the original Phase I study email requesting their participation. The research questions were both open and closed ended. A one hour-1.5 hour interview was conducted by phone in order to collect the information. The final data collected from the previous study interview results implicated how very important it was for these women to

develop a relationship with a mentor to address the support they needed to progress through the community college system and complete their first degrees.

For the dissertation study I emailed the same cohort of nontraditional women who were participants in the mentor program an effort to collect additional information relevant to the study of the influence of the role of the mentor in the life of nontraditional women in a community college degree attainment.

Maxwell (2005) describes research design as the interaction between the various elements of research questions, goals, methods and the conceptual framework. Each component is revisited in order to be sure new information is included in answering the research questions. This study methodology will be crossing cases with issues and themes. Stake (2006) has written a comprehensive guideline to conducting multiple case study research. Each case chosen represents the research questions to be addressed.

3.6 STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The population for the study was determined using sending an email to all the women who participated in the cohort of nontraditional women community college mentor program, who graduated with an Associate degree, who participated in the mentor program for at least one full year, attended workshops and other activities and met with their mentor bi monthly. Three of the five women interviewed participated in Phase 1 and Phase II of the study.

To develop the questionnaires, I based interview questions on the literature and questions to gather information needed to gain additional insight. I asked the participants questions regarding their experiences during the time spent at the community college as a nontraditional

student. Each of the women graduates was contacted via email to request participation in the study. After conducting the previous study with five of the fourteen mentor program participants, I realized that five was the optimum number to have enough variation in responses to the questions and the information needed to analyze the cases.

Due to the limited number of women who participated in the mentor cohort program it was determine that five student's would participate in the study. Interviews were scheduled according to when the women would be available. The researcher called each participant via phone and asked a series of questions and asked the women to reflect and expand on the narrative responses for clarification and additional data.

3.7 INTERVIEW FORMAT

Formal letters of intent were sent to the participants. Richards (2009) explains that "Interviewing is both the most ordinary and the most extraordinary of ways you can explore someone else's experience. It is as ordinary as conversation, and as intrusive as a spy camera." Each student was be sent an email and asked if they would respond to the email with a phone number and best time to call if they wanted to participate in the study.

The study was conducted using open ended phone interviews. All the participants were told their responses from their interviews would be included in the researchers 's dissertation; In order to insure anonymity no names from the participants would be used nor will the community college be identified in the findings.

Instead of referring to each individual case as A, B, C, D and E, factious names would be used throughout the findings. The purpose and the significant of the study would be a

contribution to the literature as well as the aspects needed in the development of additional support services programs needed for degree attainment for nontraditional women in a community college setting. The study was conducted from January 2017- February 2017. The interviews were one to one and a half hours in length.

The interviews over the phone began with a few minutes to catch up on the status of the nontraditional women's lives. As I spoke with each woman, everyone was excited to talk and share their personal experiences in detail and how their lives have changed over the years. As they responded to each question I was able to guide them through the questions designed for the study. I was able to use the key questions to uncover a few common themes across the five cases. Stake (2006) does caution that all themes will not be relevant in all the cases. All the participants were interviewed based on the interview questions to be addressed below in the next section.

This study interview responses were recorded into the University of Pittsburgh storage system called "the box", to which only the researcher has the access password. The five sections for interview questions to be addressed; education, work, challenges, other supports and mentoring will provide additional data needed to clarify and to expand on the previous study in 2015. The data collected during the confidential interviews would be stored for a maximum of 7 years in the University storage system.

3.8 INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions were asked during the interview:

1. Education

- a. What other degrees did you earn after graduating from the community college?

- b. Have you achieved any additional educational goals?
 - c. Why did you attend the community college and other schools you have mentioned?
2. Work
- a. What organization do you work for now?
 - b. What is your current job title?
 - c. As part of your job, do you manage or supervise any people?
3. Challenges
- a. What were your greatest challenges when you were a student at the community college?
 - b. What methods did you used to overcome these challenges?
 - c. What challenges have you found most difficult to overcome and why?
4. Mentoring
- a. What were the advantages of a mentor when you were a student at the community college?
 - b. What positive experiences do you have about the mentoring program at the college?
 - c. How could the mentoring experience been improved to help you as a student and as a professional?
 - d. If you were going to design a mentoring program for community college students, what important aspects would you include in this program?
 - e. What criteria would you use to evaluate the success of a mentoring program for community college students?

- f. Have you mentored anyone in school, work, or any other way since graduating?
- 5. Other support systems
 - a. What other types of support systems are needed for women to complete their degrees?

Table 1. Matrix: Research Questions and Questionnaire

		DEMOGRAPHICS	1 UNDERSTANDING	2 IMPACT	3 ASPECTS	4 MENTORS	5 OTHER SUPPORTS
1.1	What other degrees did you earn after graduating from the community college?	X		X			
1.2	Have you achieved any additional educational goals?			X			
1.3	Why did you attend the community college and other schools you have mentioned?						X
2.1	What organization do you work for now?	X		X			
2.2	What is your current job title?	X		X			
2.3	As part of your job, who do you manage or supervise?		X			X	
3.1	What were your greatest challenges when you were a student at the community college?			X			
3.2	What methods did you used to overcome these challenges?			X			X
3.3	What challenges have you found most difficult to overcome and why?		X	X			
4.1	Define the advantages of mentoring when you were a student?		X		X		
4.2	What positive experiences do you have about the mentoring program at the community college?		X			X	X
4.3	How could the mentoring experience been improved to help you as a student and as a professional?		X				X
4.4	If you were going to design a mentoring program for community college students, what important aspects would you include in this program?		X				X
4.5	What criteria would you use to evaluate the success of a mentoring program for community college students?		X			X	X
4.6	How have you mentored anyone in school, work, or any other way since graduating?		X			X	X
5.1	What other types of support systems are needed for women to complete their degrees?						X

There was no need to do follow-up interviews since the original research interviews provided extensive data. I also felt that five interviews were sufficient for addressing the one program with fourteen cohort participants. There was some redundancy in the responses of the participants in the study. Three of the participants in Phase II of the study were also participants in Phase I of the original research.

A common strategy for ensuring validity or credibility of the data analyze is by using member checks. This is also refer to as respondent validation where you solicit feedback on the findings you uncover from people you interviewed. This is a way of finding if you are miss-interpreting what the study participants are trying to say. You can also identify your own personal biases and misunderstanding (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 126-127). You have to take some of your initial findings back to some of the participants ask them if your interpretations are true. The words in your interpretations maybe different but the study participants should be able recognize their experience in your findings. If the participant is not able to find their response the researcher may have to change their analysis of the data collected.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of making sense from all the data collected Merriam & Tisdell (p.202. 2016). According to Flick (2014) he describes the process of analyzing qualitative data as a way of ‘the classification and interpretation of linguistic material to make statements about implicit dimensions and structures of meaning in the material and what is represented in it’ (p.5). Data analyses is one for the few aspects of doing qualitative research in which the preferred way

is to review the purpose of the study, review the data, capture any possible themes, that from the first set of data.

Each time data is collected the researcher knowing what the study is about and the problem to be addressed, should write up the information immediately along with any notes or possible emerging themes. After the second interview is completed, it should also be written and compared to the first set of data and so on. Otherwise the data collected can be overwhelming to interoperate. The researcher knows what the problem is but since you do not know what you will discover from each interviews it needs to focused and concentrating on one case at a time it forces the researcher to make decisions that narrow the study and not pursue everything (Bogdan and Biklen (2011).

I transcribed the interviews. I asked the answered be repeated and listen to each response carefully along with the tone of the voice, and volume to better understand the topic being discussed. I repeated the responses back as I typed them to ensue I was not added or embellishing their answers. The women talked about their feelings and experiences of being lost and very alone when they entered the community college for the first time.

In the next chapter, each nontraditional women's story is presented as an individual case filled with their person experiences written as a unique study and to be analyzed and shown if there are any common themes. There will be multiple views of the same situation that should create a whole picture of the mentor program experience. By repeating the response back to the participants, I hope to alleviate the danger of going off target and maintaining consistency in adopting any themes.

3.10 SUMMARY

The results of the original research actually strengthen the study because it attempted to provide clarity, it helped to link the questions more closely to the research, and made it easier to carefully use the correct words for the questions. I was able to distribute the questions to the study participants so they were able to read the question along with me and formulate a verbal response. This is how some of the participants better understand what is being asked for them to answer. It also provided more direction and details during the interviews.

The women in the cohort felt connected to the other participants and wanted me to share their responses with other cohort members. They were excited they were getting an opportunity to share their thoughts with community college administrators and others who make numerous decisions about providing student support services for nontraditional women without ever soliciting information from a graduate of the programs.

There were challenges while I was conducting the interviews, mainly due to one of the study participants being a very fast talker. I felt, I used that experience to ask the questions over again and to read the information typed back to the participant for accuracy. The participant also thanked me for letting her know to slow down based on my repeated questioning. The participants expressed the excitement to talk with me and thanked me again for allowing them to verbally express their ideas and putting it in writing. They wanted to know if they could meet with the other mentor cohort participants from the program and discuss developing a mentor program for women in education, business, and social work areas. A program that can be adapted for any nontraditional women in school, working, and or thinking about a better future for their families. I asked they keep me posted on future developments and I really had to concentrate on the interview questions at hand. Because of the original research study I felt the need to keep the

participants focused on answering the questions and be aware of the constraints of time used for the interviews.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Narrative technique generally places each story in a chronological order (Creswell, 2009); however, I arranged each case to identify some common background information for cross case analyses. In this chapter, each case starts with a description of the participant's education attainment and demographics and reason for attending the community college. Each case study participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to remind the reader that nontraditional women are real people sharing the personal life experiences through lived stories.

The research questions were organized into five sections to provide a structure that made it easier to ask the participants appropriate questions related to the data needed for the study. As discussed earlier, the following general research questions guided this study:

1. **UNDERSTANDING** How do nontraditional women understand the concept of mentoring in a community college setting?
2. **IMPACT** To what extent do you believe mentoring by others has helped in changing the educational lives of community college students?
3. **ASPECTS** What important aspects should be included in the design of a mentor program for it to be effective?
4. **MENTORS** What important characteristics should mentors possess in order for them to be effective?
5. **OTHER SUPPORTS** What other support systems are needed for women to complete their degree?

The participants were eager to share how far they have advanced over the past ten years. The women were positive about the interview, wanting to share information on the positive impact their education had on their children, family members who lived with them, such as mothers and cousins, and how their education had changed the way they view the world and define success. The women also wanted me to understand how they have grown and to appreciate their personal and educational accomplishments.

4.2 CASE DEMOGRAPHICS

4.2.1 Demographic Summary of Study Participants

Table 2 summarizes the demographics of the five nontraditional women who agreed to participate in the interview process for the Phase II of the research study. The table also contains academic and career information, the total number of years each participant was enrolled in college while getting their degrees, current training or other college programs which they are pursuing, their job title, and the number of people they have mentored since graduating with an associate degree.

Table 3 provides the current demographic information consisting of their current age, ethnicity, the number of children, and current relationship status of each women. In order to put a name to the participants, and to show they are real people and not just a letter I made up a name to distinguish them as individual stories and not A-E. The five names I selected for the women to be interview are as follows; A. Cher, B. Gina, C. Lisa, Penny, and E. Tyra. These names are not in any way connected to any of the actual interview participants.

Table 2. Current Demographics of the Participants Interviewed (Phase II)

Interview participants (names are fictional)	Current degrees held by members of the cohort	Number of years attending college to date	Other degrees & training currently pursuing	Current job/title	People you mentored at work/school after your associate degree
A. Cher	BS, Special Ed Teacher	7 years	Supervisor Training Certificate	Special Ed. Teacher	6
B. Gina	BS, MSW	8 years	Drug & Alcohol certificate	Mental health adults	2
C. Lisa	BA-Bus, Cert- CNA	8 year	Registered Nurse	College Career coach	3
D. Penny	BS, MA, DPM	11 years	Grant writing for a Medical clinic	Podiatrist for dancers	2
E. Tyra	BA, MBA, JD	10 years	BARBRI Bar Review Course	Lawyer for social justice program	5

Table 3. Current Self Descriptive Demographic by the Woman Interviewed (Phase II)

Name	Current Age	Self-Described Ethnicity	Number of Children	Relationship
Cher	42	African-American	2	Divorced
Gina	38	African American & Puerto Rican	2	Single
Lisa	36	Black/White American Mixed	4	Married
Penny	46	Caucasian	3	Widowed
Tyra	41	African and White Mixed	3	Divorced

Two of the five women completed a bachelor degree, one women completed a Master's degree, and two women completed doctoral degrees. One women completed a Jurisprudent Doctorate (JD) and the other completed Medical Doctorate (MD). The five women were enrolled in college between 7 and 11 years for an average of nine years. All five women are currently participating in some type of work related training and or professional development program to expand their knowledge and continuing their education. Two women are in certificate training programs while the other women are pursuing training for an RN program, learning how to write for grants, and one is studying to take the bar exam.

The age of the women is between 36 and 46 years of age. Three of the women are mixed race, one is Caucasian and the other is African American. The women all had between 2 and 4 children. Two of the women are divorced, one is married, one is widowed and the other is single.

4.3 CASE INTERVIEWS

4.3.1 Cher

Cher was a 42 year-old special education teacher in a public elementary school at the time of the interview. She was born and raised in a small town in central Pennsylvania. High school and studying were not easy for Cher. She had a hard time sitting still and listening to the teacher. She dropped out of high school when she found out that she and her boyfriend were pregnant with her first child. Cher's boyfriend left town to find a job. Unfortunately, he never returned,

and the child support money he was sending stopped coming in the mail a few months after he was gone.

Cher struggled to take care of her baby and was forced to work low-wage jobs, because she did not have a GED or a high school diploma. She worked two low-paying, dead-end jobs until she found out she was pregnant with her second child. She married that boyfriend, and everything was going great for Cher until her husband started coming home at night after work after stopping for a few beers.

The breaking point for Cher was when her husband lost his job and starting drinking and taking his anger out on the children. When she was afraid her husband might hurt one of the children, she left her husband and moved in with her sister, brother in-law, and their two children.

Cher's older sister was married with two children, and the house was the right size for that family but when she and her two children moved in it made the house seem even smaller. Her sister did finish high school and got her diploma, so she always held a job. After Cher moved into the small house with her sister and her family she decided not to return to her husband, because it meant the arguing and fighting about not having a job and not enough money would start again. That was not the life she wanted for her two young children. After an overnight stay in the hospital with stomach problems and another fight, Cher finally left her husband and got a divorce from him the following year.

Cher has one brother who is also married with one child. He tried to be supportive but he liked her ex-husband and did not know the extent of the fighting that she had gone through with her ex-husband. She did spend time with her sister in law because she was the type of person who would not tell your business to the family, so she could be trusted.

Cher got frustrated after working a number of low paying, part time, and dead end jobs. Because she didn't have a GED or high school diploma that limited the job opportunities which meant a lack of money for essentials needed for her children. All these issues had a major influence on her decision to attend the community college. With the support of her family (they watched her children), Cher went to college, studied, and, with the help of tutors and family, and she passed her GED test. Passing the test the first time and getting a GED gave Cher the encouragement to go further.

Cher's schedule was a huge challenge because she was working two jobs, raising two children, and trying to find time to study. She said, "I did not have anything to lose but everything to gain. I felt like I was finally doing something right for myself and my children for the first time." Cher came to the community college to take the adult GED classes, maybe find a better job, and to start to feel more confident in making the right decisions for her family. By attending classes, meeting other likeminded women, discussing issues with other adult students it gave her the opportunity to "be an adult again". She said attending college, well, it changed her life forever. She did not know she was so out of touch with what was happening in the world around her. She had stopped watching the news or reading books or checking the internet for communication with other people.

Some of the ways in which Cher's life changed was she met new friends, gained enough confidence to give presentations in class and in the mentor program in front of her peers, worked on a campaign to support additional services for all Pennsylvania children. Most of all she helped her sister to get enrolled into a certificate training program at the community college. As she started to describe her experience of walking across the stage at graduation to receive her degree, or scroll, from the community college, she stopped talking and her eyes started to tear-

up. She said she got a lump in her throat. The feeling of “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” was overwhelming inside of her and although she wanted to scream and shout for joy, she had to fight back the tears as she walked down the ramp and off the platform. She does not remember shaking hands with the college president and taking her scroll in her left hand.

Cher’s greatest challenge was how to support her family, because going to school took a large amount of time away from her children and less money for things they needed. This, in turn, caused a lot of unwanted stress. Living with her sister in such a small space further exacerbated Cher’s stress. She could not afford to get her own place with the expenses of books, transportation, medical bills, etc., and she was also concerned that something would be lacking for her children while she was in class each evening.

Cher finally asked for help. She felt she could no longer impose on her sister and this put a strain their relationship, and she could not juggle all the roles on her own. She heard a presentation in her college transition class the first week of school that made an important impact on her experience at the community college.

During the presentation to my class I heard about a mentoring program for nontraditional women at the college.” The women giving the presentation said special services called the mentor program were available for women who could be in any or all of these categories; first time in college, first in their family to attend college, head of household, and trying to work and raise a family at the same time. That was me I thought. I went to the office listed on the flyer and that was the beginning of a new relationship for me. I learned that mentoring was a process where there is someone who wants to help you learn new information,

help you with the transition to college life, and explain what the expectations of a college student are, and how to reach whatever goals you set for yourself at college. I visited the office twice a week before class. I met other women who invited me to become a part of different study groups. They spent time discussing how to handle issues such as, child care, getting house work done, and what to do when your child is sick. We attended workshops on how to study, how to give a presentation, and time management. We could find someone in the office to listen to our concerns. We were all part of the mentor program. "I had a place where I actually fit in with the group. We all learned how to speak to faculty about a problem. Going to the office after the class presentation to find out about the mentor program, well, it was the most important thing I did while I was in college.

The mentor program allowed Cher a chance to share her concerns and get help when her family did not understand what she was going through or how to help her. Cher learned to take advantage of the other support systems available to her through the college and the mentor program. Some of the other supports women need and I used included; tutoring, academic advising, career planning, and counseling services and it was all for free. Another obstacle for Cher was mathematics.

I knew I needed a lot of help with math. I felt defeated before I entered the class from anxiety and stress. I always tried to avoid math and I did not know that I had to spend time just practicing math problems in order to get better. I knew I could not graduate without passing all my math classes. I learned in the mentoring program that I was not the only person who felt like this. I became best

friend with the math tutor along with some of the other women in the mentor program. We all supported each other through the three math classes needed to complete a degree. After seven years in college, I was working towards my dream job and helping young children. When I have completed my master's degree, I will take a break from school and spend time with my grandchild and "then, I will think about getting another degree as a public school administrator, maybe an elementary school principal in education." I know some of the women in the cohort are trying to get me to return to college to get my master's degree and I know they will help me. I already have a support system to return to college. I had the support of my family, children and college friends when I was in school for my associate degree. I also became close friends with the math tutor since I spent so much time in the tutoring center with him. I still keep in touch with three of the women that were in the mentor program with me. "One of the women is a lawyer and I know she went through a lot to finish her degree. So if she can do it, I know I can at least get a master's degree." I know someday I may want to get out of the classroom and I want to have options besides working in the classroom as a teacher. Besides, I have to keep going so my kids will go to college and learn how to work through everything and not let life issues stop you from working your way up to the top of the education system. "I remember you told the mentor group more than once to continue with our education so we can get to the top."

4.3.2 Gina

Gina was 38 years old at the time of the interview. She was born and raised in Western Pennsylvania. She lived in a small town where most families worked for one of the two manufacturing companies, or at the four restaurants or the local diner, at the school, or the meat packing plant. She has one older sister who is married with one child. Her sister has a high school diploma, and now works at the local public school preparing meals for children, teachers and staff, serving, and cleaning the cafeteria.

Gina was never really close to her mother whom she believed had mental health problems. Most days she was not home while they were growing up. When her mother did come home she smelled like cigarettes and alcohol and would sleep on the couch for hours. Her sister, who at the time worked part-time at the local grocery store, took care of Gina for as long as she can remember. Her sister shopped at the thrift stores looking for bargains on school clothes, bought the food, cooked for them and braided her hair, so the school would think everything was fine at home. They were both afraid of social services stopping by, because a neighbor turned them in once before for not having an adult in the house all the time. Gina and her sister worried that a Social Services check on them could lead to the two of them being separated and placed in foster care. Gina's sister encouraged her to go to attend the community college, finish, and graduate and get a good paying job.

Gina got pregnant right before she graduated from high school, and her boyfriend broke up with her when he found out she was going to have his baby. He refused to pay child support and left for college in Maryland on a football scholarship. She has not seen or heard from him since. She was left to support her child and herself on the income of two part-time jobs that provided no medical benefits. A few years later Gina had a second baby to support after another

boyfriend left her with a newborn. Gina found a part time job at a restaurant as a hostess and server. She met new people every day at work. Sometimes she overheard the conversations they had and that is how she learned about the community college. Gina was working through a lot of personal issues of her own so she thought maybe she could do well by helping other women to move forward with their lives as a social worker. She did not want to see children taken away from families. She thought by helping other people it would be a way to work out her own issues of insecurity and abandonment by her mother. She said, "I met two women in the restaurant, where I worked who were students at to the local community college, and they told me all about how they found an office where people can go to get help for anything and answers to all kind of questions." Gina finally applied to the community college when she found out she did not have to pay any money to apply for admissions and she could apply for a scholarship for free.

As a new community college student, Gina attended school every semester including summers, and took three or more classes at a time while working as a hostess and server. She stayed up late at night and took advantage of the time when her children were in school to stay on the college campus and use the tutoring center. Gina found the office where they provided mentoring for women and started asking questions about how they could help. Gina was invited to go to attend a mentor meeting just for women. She did not know what the word "mentor" actually meant at the time so she went to the meeting in the office, with other women from her class.

Some of the ways in which Gina life changed after going to the meeting was she met women who became friends, she found a place where somebody would listen to her concerns and not criticize her ideas for her future but provided encouragement. During the meetings she

learned she was considered nontraditional because of her background of being a low income single women, working and over the age of 24 years.

“I have been shy for most of my life, the mentoring office was a comfortable place where I could practice a presentation to the mentor group and then give it in my class.” In the mentor program we did projects like we all worked on a group campaign to support a new legislative bill to be passed that would help women and children and this was at the state level. The bill would provide additional medical services needed for all Pennsylvania children. This added to building up my self-esteem by working on a common goal together and how it impacts other families in the state. Most important for me being a part of the mentoring program was finally being able to help my sister to get enrolled into a certificate training program at the community college. “I was able to share with my sister all kinds of information, introduce her to other women and friends from the mentoring program.”

Gina, a single mom now with two children in elementary school, has been a college student for eight years. She has earned an Associate Degree as a social work technician from the community college. After graduation, she transferred to a local university for a Bachelor’s degree in social work and completed a Master’s degree in the same field the following year. While in the mentor program Gina took classes Tuesday through Friday along with a few online classes. She has hope to return to college one day in pursuit of a doctor degree in social work so she can help other nontraditional women obtain their degree and have a better life for themselves and their children.

Gina had always been afraid to speak out in public but she eventually volunteered to speak in the mentor meetings and bring in guest speakers from the women shelter, the food bank, and free legal counselor to help women in the meetings. She completed two internships working with young women and children who needed help with housing, food and financed and child support. With each experience Gina gained more confidence in working out her own issues. She could talk to her sister about how they grew up and the relationship with her sister grew closer. She gained confidence in her decision to be a social worker and help women and children stay together. After finishing an externship, she was hired as a part-time intake specialist at a second chance house for recovering alcoholics and drug recovery. She felt as though she had found her place moving into a career where she could help people. She studied and did research about free services for women and children so she could share the information with peers, her friends and family. Her other support systems included her sister and friends she made in the mentoring program and the tutors who worked at the center. “If it was not for the women in the mentor program helping me I probably would not have stayed in college and finished, let alone continued on to get another degree. They were a God send and I made life time friends with the women in the program.”

4.3.3 Lisa

Lisa was 36 years old at the time of the interview. She was born into a blue-collar family in upstate New York, and her family relocated to Western Pennsylvania when she was about eight years old. She has one older brother. Now she is married with four children all under 14 years old. She is also the step-mom to her husband’s two teenage children who live with them. Lisa wanted to find a career where she could help people in need. She applied to the community

college, because she needed a flexible class schedule while trying to raise six children and hold down a part-time job.

In Phase One of the study, Lisa remarked that when she was a new student at the community college she struggled with trying to pay her bills, getting her three children to daycare and school, and she did not have enough time or energy to study in a house with no privacy. Lisa made friends while participating in the mentor program. She has kept in touch with most of the members of the cohort over the past ten years. She understands the importance of sharing her problems with other women who are going through the same situation, and they supported each other. She had other supports which came from her boyfriend, now her husband, and the friends she made at college. Her success has come from persistence and patience. Her husband of five years who was raised in a house with three sisters loves to cook and he helps out with raising their six children. Her husband would rather stay home and raise the children.

Lisa has been taking college classes for eight years and has received an Associate's degree from the community college in business. She has learned a lot and knows the career she wants to pursue. After taking care of her grandmother while attending college and assisting various other older people from her church, she discovered her passion in life. She enjoys listening to the life stories about where and how people grew up, the struggles they encountered, and how they made it through the hard times and the struggles. She was also surprised at how humbling and grateful the elders at her church were for having someone so young listen and learn with interest to share their lifelong experiences and stories with. She has returned to college and is now taking biology and other science classes to qualify for limited admissions into the registered nurse program at the community college.

“Someday, I will own my business where I and all the people who work for me will take care of seniors and other people who may be sick or have been injured who want to live at home but need a home health aide or a nurse to provide medical, personal, and companion care.” I hope to have compassionate people with experience in caregiving and they can provide the a variety of support in such areas as meal preparation, grocery shopping, rides to the doctor’s office, going to the bank, cleaning their living space, doing laundry, playing cards, making sure they are taking the correct dosage of medicines on time, giving shots, and just being a companion for conversation. “You know, I never gave this thought until I spent time talking about this to my mom, some of the friends I met in the mentor program and you.” I just wanted to change my life and do better with the lives of my children. I am glad I have my mom to help me and provide so much support I needed to move forward.

4.3.4 Penny

Penny was 46 years of age at the time of the interview. She was born in eastern Pennsylvania and her family relocated to western Pennsylvania when she was two years old. Her mother stayed at home to raise her and three older brothers. Her father had a certificate in welding from a trade school, and he worked in the steel industry. When the steel mill closed, her father opened a small shop to repair household appliances. Two of her three brothers went to trade school and learned how to do body work on cars and to repair car engines. Her middle brother went to work for a dealership while the other found a job in an auto body repair shop.

After Penny’s oldest brother was injured in the war, in the Middle East, on his last tour of duty, he came home to recuperate. When he figured what he wanted to, he selected the school for

diesel engine and truck repair. After two years in school, he was able to purchase a spacious empty auto body shop next door to her father's appliance repair shop. Some of his high school friends helped him to fix up and purchase the equipment need to open the auto shop with his two other brothers. All three are still working in the same family owned auto shop as of the date of this interview.

Penny was the only girl in the family, and she loved to dance. Because she was a young woman it was not spoken but understood by her family that she would get married soon after high school, and her love for dancing would keep her busy until a husband and children would come along. She went to the local dance school and practiced long hours throughout junior and senior high school. Penny got married and pregnant soon after her high school graduation. She continued dancing as she raised her baby and as a stay at home mother. She worked part-time at the dance studio to pay for using the studio to practice dancing until she had her second baby and decided to stay at home and be a mom full time.

Penny wanted to attend college, but her family pushed her into marriage and having a family. In her family, the norm was to get married and start a family right away. She was following the family tradition where her cousins compared the number of children they had to how much strength and fertility they possessed. She loved her family and her life when the accident that changed not only her life but the lives of her family forever took place. It was on a rainy evening about eight years ago. Penny and her husband were driving to her sister's house to pick up the children. They had just left the dealership where they went to pick up their new used truck. The roads were slippery from all the rain, they hit a big pot hole when the truck slid and went off the road and down a hill side. They both had fastened in seatbelts as the pick-up rolled over a few times before hitting a tree half way down the hill.

The accident left my husband paralyzed from the neck down. “I was hardly able to walk. “Thank God, I said my girls were not with us in the truck.” After months in the Intensive Care Unit and over a year in various rehabilitation centers, my husband came home in a wheel chair and on a ventilator machine. He was finally home where he seemed to be getting stronger but he died a six weeks later from internal complications and an infection. “I had one foot which was so severely injured I was not able to dance for three years. I still cannot dance for a long time or gracefully the way I did before, I mean. I had a lot to overcome just with learning how to walk so my return to the dance studio every other day to strengthen her mind, legs, and body helped me to rehabilitate my feet and my life.

As the only parent left to raise my three daughters.” I was motivated to go to the community college and the inspiration came from my mom and my daughters, who also wanted me to dance and get on with a new life. I was afraid to know that I had to be the bread winner of the family. “It was comforting to know that the support of her mom and brothers, including my oldest brother, injured in the war was coming over to help me with raising my children.”

After more than a decade of college classes and residency experiences in quite a few hospitals, Penny finally reached part of her dream of becoming a podiatrist. With the other support she needed from her parents, her brothers, and friends from the college mentor program she was able to complete and receive an Associate’s Degree in Fine Arts specializing in theater and acting from the community college. She returned to the community college to complete science classes needed to transfer to the University for a Bachelor’s degree in biology and science for the pre-medical program. She continued her education full-time and completed her

residency in a Philadelphia hospital where she met her current husband to be who was an emergency room doctor.

Penny was awarded a Medical Doctorate degree with a specialty in podiatry where she is helping the fine arts community by trying to keep their feet as healthy as possible. She is currently finishing a class on how to write grants in order to fund a community health clinic for people who work in the field of fine arts but have no medical insurance or access to specialized health services. Success to Penny is helping people one at a time to walk upright by healing the feet and the body.

4.3.5 Tyra

Tyra was 41 years of age at the time of the interview. She was born in a small town in eastern Ohio and was raised by her mother and a stepfather. Her mom married her stepfather when Tyra was eight years old. Her mom eventually birthed a girl and a boy with the stepfather. Tyra was not close with her two siblings or close to her stepfather. Aside from the age gap between her and siblings, Tyra reported that they were given most everything they wanted. Tyra was brought up living in a small apartment, because her mother did not have much money and had a hard time finding a good-paying job. Her mother had a high school diploma, but folks talked about her mother because Tyra was a mixed race child in a town where everyone was White. The town was so small that the local restaurant had a backroom for town meetings and other events.

“Sometimes I felt like I did not fit in or belong to this family I lived with. Growing up I use to hear from some other kids in school that I was adopted into her family.” As the oldest child, I had to pick up my step her brother and sister after school and walk them

home. At home I was given the responsibility of checking their homework and cooking dinner before our mom got home from work.

Right after high school Tyra ran off and got married, so she could get out of the house and that town. She got a full-time job as a bank teller while her new husband went to the community college and worked part-time. She was glad to be miles away from her family. Finally, she was on her own and starting to feel like a part of a community where more of the townspeople were Black and looked like her and appeared to be friendly.

After a few years of marriage and a degree from the community college, her husband said he no longer needed her, so she had to leave. The next day, Tyra came home from work and found her belongings in boxes and plastic bags on the front steps outside the apartment building door and when she tried to use her key to get in, the lock on the door had been changed and her key did not work.

Tyra slept in her car for two nights with no place to else to go. While having coffee at the diner on the third morning with no place to go but the YWCA for a shower, she ran into a friend she had not seen since high school. She was happy to see a friendly face and she told him what happened to her. He invited Tyra to stay at his place for a few weeks while she was trying to decide what to do next. At least she could take a shower every day and sleep in his roommate's bed while his roommate was out of town for a few weeks. Tyra gave a two weeks' notice to her job and decided to relocate to Pittsburgh and start a new journey in her life.

“When I relocated to western Pennsylvania, I found a job at a store, and worked there for about a week before I found out I was pregnant. I had rented a small studio apartment and I continued to work until the day my son was born. I worked my entire 9 hour shift that day and went from work directly to the hospital.” I had saved all the

money I could, including babysitting money from taking care of my neighbor's kids on the weekends. As the money slowly dwindled away, I decided I needed to do something to change my life because no one else could make that change but me. I always wanted to be a lawyer but I never thought I could get there so I figured I would start with getting my associate degree and at least find a better paying job to start. "I heard one of my neighbors talking about having to register for classes for the next semester so I asked her about the application process to get into the community college." She said it was very easy to enroll and one woman who works at the college even referred her to the career center where she found a job to help pay for food, a monthly bus pass, subsidized housing expenses and other things she needed for herself and her child.

After that conversation I learned how to ask other people for help. I learned from friends at school and I read about the variety of resources available for free in the community. I even volunteered at the local food bank which provided me with new resource information and with free food and diapers twice a month. That left me with only personal items to buy each month.

Tyra came to the college at the end of the summer hoping to find a friendly person to help her enroll in a few classes. She wanted to complete the financial aid information but no one explained the matriculation process to her or that the process was free for everyone so Tyra walked away not knowing what else she had to do to register for college classes. On her way out, Tyra took a copy of every flyer, brochure and booklet available for taking. She went home and when she heard about the mentor program in class and showed up at the office door asking questions about the program. She told me the first time we met that she wanted to be a lawyer for social justice and underserved families. She helped the women in the mentor program complete

forms needed for accessing the community food bank and CHIP for medical needs for their children. She also explained to them how to sign up for other social services offer by the government agencies.

While at the community college Tyra completed two associate degrees by taking five classes each semester as a divorced mom with a very young child. Right after she graduated from the community college, she continued her education by obtaining a bachelor's degree and a Masters of Business Administration degree from a college just outside of a city in western Pennsylvania. She took a job at a large social service agency. Tyra, who now has three children, returned to college to complete her lifelong dream of graduating with a doctorate degree

4.4 ANALYSIS OF EACH CASE

4.4.1 Questionnaire Section 1.0 EDUCATION

4.4.1.1 Question 1.1 What other degrees did you earn after graduating from the community college?

Response: 1.1

- A. Cher completed a Bachelor's degree in Human Resource management and Special education.
- B. Gina completed a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and she has completed a Master's degree in Social Work or (MSW).
- C. Lisa has completed a Bachelor degree in Business and working towards an associate degree in Nursing.

- D. Penny was awarded a Medical Doctorate degree working within a specialty of Podiatry helping the fine arts dancing community with trying to keep their feet healthy.
- E. Tyra continued her education obtaining a bachelor's degree in business and a MBA degree from a college just outside of Pittsburgh, PA. She returned to college where she completed last year, 2016, her dream of graduating with a Jurisprudence Doctor degree. She took a job at a social justice law agency.

Findings: 1.1

Five of the participants had gone beyond an associate level of their education by continuing their college education after receiving an associate degree from the community college. Two women have received bachelor's degrees, one has a master's degree and two have completed doctor's degrees.

4.4.1.2 Question 1.2 Have you achieved any additional educational goals?

Response: 1.2

- A. Cher is now attending classes for a Supervisor Training Certificate.
- B. Gina is currently two classes away from completing a Certificate program in Drug and Alcohol Counseling.
- C. Lisa has completed a Certificate as a Certified Nurse Aide. She is taking Biology classes to get accepted into the RN program.
- D. Penny is currently finishing a class on how to write grants in order to get funding to start a community health clinic for people in the world of fine arts such as dancers.
- E. Tyra is studying to take the Bar exam.

Findings: 1.2

All five women interviewed are involved in some kind of professional development by pursuing additional education. The comment that was common among all the participants was “education is a life long journey.” Cher is taking classes for a certificate, Gina is in class for a training program in Chemical abuse, Lisa finished her nurse aide program and now enrolled in a biology class, and Penny is learning how to write for a government grant , and Tyra is studying for her bar exam.

4.4.1.3 Question 1.3 Why did you attend the community college and other schools you have mentioned?

Response: 1.3

- A. Cher said dead end jobs and not completing a high school diploma limited the job choices and opportunities for her future. She finished her GED and applied to the community college. She completed the financial aid form and got enough scholarship money to cover tuition, fees, and pay for my books. That is why I attended the community college because I can afford it.
- B. Gina had two young children and no one to help her with financial support. There were classes held at the center close to her apartment. That was motivation that moved her to attend the community college and make a better future for herself and family.
- C. Lisa needed to think of the future of her children, she needed to work part time and have a flexible schedule to take classes. With four children of her own to raise and a husband who wanted to be a stay at home dad, the community college was the only choice Lisa had to improve the possible outcome for her family.

- D. Penny was widow with 3 young children that she was left to support alone. The community college offered her a chance to attend college and become a role model for her daughters and help other women to become a doctor.
- E. Tyra decided to apply to the community college to get a degree and get a better job to support herself and her son. She knew the tuition was reasonable and they had classes day and evening. Her ex-husband went to a community college and did not have to pay any school loans when he finished.

Findings: 1.3

The reason that adult women students go to the community college is for work related and family responsibilities. Johnson, Schwartz and Bower (2000) found that adult women “loss of a job, divorce, death of a spouse, and career limitations due to lack of education” (p.291). About three- fourth of adult women attend college classes part time (Phillippe, 2000). These nontraditional women have family obligations, they have to work as head of house hold and there are child care concerns. The five women interviewed for the study had expressed these same concerns. They needed a flexible schedule so they could attend part time, they had to work to support the family, and they were all single parents during the Phase 1 or original study. They needed a college they could afford.

4.4.2 Questionnaire Section 2.0 WORK

4.4.2.1 Question 2.1 What organization do you work for now?

Response: 2.1

- A. Cher works at a public elementary school as a teacher.
- B. Gina works in a hospital in the psychiatric ward as milieu therapist. She supervises six aides who work in her ward when her boss is attending a meeting or training.
- C. Lisa is a Career Coach at a community college who does not supervise anyone at this time.
- D. Penny is a medical doctor specializing in helping the feet for dancers.
- E. Tyra works for a social justice program in Ohio. She is currently supervising 5 union representatives.

Findings: 2.1

All the women said they were passionate about helping other people to thrive. As they continued in their professional journey these women were learning and sharing with other nontraditional women at work and school. Each of the five women has worked in a variety of part time jobs.

Sharing with other women was one of the goals they learned and repeated while participating in the mentor program.

4.4.2.2 Question 2.2 What is your current job title?

Response 2.2

- A. Cher is a Special Education teacher.
- B. Gina is a mental health worker
- C. Lisa is a Career Coach at a college
- D. Penny is a Podiatrist for dancers
- E. Tyra is a lawyer.

Findings 2.2

Success is commonly defined as the completion of a college degree or certificate. (Boggs, McPhail, 2016) In the community college success is also defined as finding a job in a related field of study, transferring to another school and/or going into the military. Two of these women defined “success” as not just what you do but also having credentials for credibility, or a degree such as MD after your name. Since two had a doctor degree after their name their definition of success had nothing to do with the amount of money they earned but helping others. One woman was learning to write a grant to fund a clinic for people who needed medical care and had little if any money because of medical bill and college loans to repay. The JD after her name meant Tyra could continue to help people through social justice programs which does not lead to a large pay check but more free case work. The social worker will not be returning to college this year nor the teacher due to the size of college loans. What they learned and shared while in the mentor program was more valuable than what they earned with all their degrees. They made lifelong friends, patience, perseverance, and professionalism.

4.4.2.3 Question 2.3 As part of your job who do you manage or supervise?

Response 2.3:

- A. Cher does not supervise any adults, just children.
- B. Gina supervises 6 aides when her boss is attending a meeting or training
- C. Lisa does not supervise any staff but she does assist college students at this time.
- D. Penny has 3 nurses who assist her with patient care.
- E. Tyra is currently supervising 5 people.

Findings: 2.3

Three of the participants are supervising multiple people while two are not supervising anyone at this time. The skills learned in the mentor program were being used to manage others. Three of the women Cher, Lisa, and Tyra were working in a career field they stated they wanted to pursue while they were a member of the cohort mentor program in the community college. While Gina is not a supervisor all the time she is sharing her knowledge and her skills in leadership with others which is a form of mentoring.

4.4.3 Questionnaire Section 3.0 CHALLENGES

4.4.3.1 Question 3.1 What were your greatest challenges when you were a student at the community college?

Response: 3.1

- A. Cher's challenges were trying to schedule time for studying, raising her children, and supporting her family financially.

- B. Gina had challenges with not being able to spend enough time with her children. She was raised by her sister and she did not want her children to end up feeling as though they were alone. Scheduling time for homework was very difficult. Not knowing where to go for help when she started at the community college was very hard because she was shy and afraid to speak up for herself.
- C. Lisa had numerous challenges especially financial and emotional. She needed a support system to help with her kids. Lisa lost a job because she had to take off work early again because 3 of her kids had the flu. I needed to get day care funds to help pay for my kids after school problem. Until the voucher came in, I had to use my friends to watch my children while I was in class. I had to find time to meet with a tutor and edit my papers.
- D. Penny had to take physics and loads of biology classes with labs. She spent hours with the tutoring and sometimes her kids would be hungry and tired when my school day ended. The guilt was causing so much stress, I thought about dropping out every semester. I tried to go after child support but I did not know where the baby daddy moved to so that did not work. It was costing me money because of time away from work. Dance was no longer an option because I could not find the time to practice anymore and I was too tired most of the time to dance anyway.
- E. Tyra's biggest challenge was trying to move forward with her life alone and slowing down long enough to enjoy her children. She did not have time to schedule family activities. She was always running in or out while other people, neighbors and teenagers watched her kids. The stress was making her sick and weak. She even had to call on her neighbors to help her with grocery shopping and cleaning her apartment while she recuperated and learn skills from the mentor group on how to manage her stress.

Findings: 3.1

The greatest challenges as a community college student was lack of time to study and take class, not enough money and finding the academic support to pass the classes. Dealing with children when they get sick, and cleaning the house, and grocery shopping was even hard when you have little time and even less energy. You need to get a support group and surround yourself with likeminded students.

4.4.3.2 Question 3.2 What methods did you use to overcome these challenges?

Response: 3.2

- A. Cher learned from the women in the mentor program how to share responsibilities such as child care with each other. Let the cleaning go until school breaks and show your kids, if they are of age how to fold clothes and cook using the microwave.
- B. Gina came to most of the mentor workshops and always had a long list of questions which the women in the cohort helped her and others with answers based on how they handle the same problem.
- C. Lisa thought working more hours to make more money would help with the financial problem. She also tried going to a counselor on campus would help her with some of her emotional issues. The problem was she needed to spend more time taking care of her children and providing them with better meals and not the fast food they were getting most evenings. She starting cooking more homemade meals on the weekends and freezing the meals to go into the microwave during the week. When the voucher for afterschool care came in she already had reserved seats for her kids. She no longer had to worry about or pay for someone to watch her kids every day after school.

- D. Penny was able to find a study partner who was in the premed science classes so she started receiving and sharing tutoring help in the cafeteria and in the mentoring office. Eventually the member of the cohort set up a schedule for tutors to rotate through the mentoring office in the room where they ran workshops for the women. The women did not have to sign in or wait to be tutored.
- E. Tyra listen to a workshop on managing time and money when you have a little of both. She tried writing down her daily activities and she found out there were things she could save until the weekend of school break. She started writing a weekly schedule for work, school and her kids' activities. She also made new friends and shared information on how to and from where you can get more social services.

Findings 3.2

The methods used to handle the challenges were derived from skills learned from attending workshops where the presenters had already gone through the college process. Being able to share ideas with each other and sharing responsibilities and childcare to help out in an emergency.

4.4.3.3 Question 3.3 What challenges have you found most difficult to overcome and why?

Response: 3.3

- A. Cher said she could never schedule enough time to spend with her kids. The guilt she felt was always lingering over her from taking time for class and studying.
- B. Gina was also stressed for not spending more time with her children. She can talk in front of a classroom of kids but she is still nervous with speaking in front of a group of her pairs.

- C. Lisa wanted to stay at home and cook homemade meals and help her kids with homework, but that was not going to happen. Lisa is still a student in college and working at a college but she is learning how to ignore the clothes in the washer, and change the beds less often in order to spend time with her kids or studying.
- D. Penny was always studying she knew she had to get A's and not B's for medical school. She practice math calculations and formulas each day. She recited body parts and how they work all the time. She studied in every quiet place she could find.
- E. Tyra used the schedule everything once she learned how to schedule. The problem was she would forget she is dealing with other people too and they do not fit into her schedule all the time. She still had stress but learned how to give up some activities that could be scheduled for another day and time.

Findings 3.3

The most difficult challenges to overcome were not enough time for children family, more time needed for studying and tutoring, needed more money to pay bills, buy and cook fresh food and eliminating stress.

4.4.4 Questionnaire Section 4.0 MENTORING

4.4.4.1 Question 4.1 What were the advantages of having a mentor when you were a student at the community college?

Response: 4.1

- A. Cher said a mentor is the go to person you can trust. When she had to take off for a few days and miss class because her child was sick, she went to her mentor who told her

exactly what to do by contacting faculty, following up with another student in her class to get the notes from the two classes she missed, and giving them a date as to when she would turn in her late assignments and make up a quiz.

- B. Gina said the mentor was the one person who would not judge her life but try to answer her questions or give the name and phone number of someone to contact for more help.
- C. Lisa needed the encouragement she got from visiting with her mentor. She said her mentor was always positive about dealing with problems of life. She was also able to access resources available through the institution such as subsidized childcare.
- D. Penny was challenged to go the next step by her mentor and to never give up without first exhausting all your resources. Then you ask about other outside agencies and follow-up on those also. You would be surprise at all the services that are free for low income and single moms and students trying to get through college. There was even free daycare opened to mothers who had little money and able to volunteer for two hours a week per child at the daycare center.
- E. Tyra was able to learn from her mentor how to become a leader and speak with confidence about a topic.

Findings: 4.1

There are numerous advantages to having a mentor. They can be a great source of support. Mentors know how to navigate the educational system and connect to the resources to help with moving, childcare, church, food and scholarships. They provide positive and constructive feedback and challenge you to think beyond today and step outside your zone of comfort when you are ready. . A mentor provides someone for you to talk out your ideas. Mentors are helpers who provide encouragement without judgment.

4.4.4.2 Question 4.2 What positive experiences do you have about the mentoring program at the college?

Response: 4.2

- A. Cher, knows the people who participated in the mentor program are committed to helping students both educationally and professionally.
- B. Gina said the program worked for her because she received just what she needed from the program. She made new friends and shared information with other students.
- C. Lisa was able to meet and make new friends in the mentoring office.
- D. Penny develop a support system of people she could call if there was an emergency.
- E. Tyra learned how to reach out and share with others the resources she found available to these women students.

Findings 4.2

Mentoring brings together women from all backgrounds and place them into a situation where they can learn, share and support each other if they have someone to organize them and to bring them all together. As a result we learned from each other and shared information and difficult experiences we had to deal with. The goal for the cohort was the same to complete and obtain the associate degree. We all learned to open up in small group and share our feelings.

4.4.4.3 Question 4.3 How could the mentoring experience been improved to help you as a student and as a professional?

Response: 4.3

- A. Cher wants the program to invite women who are already working professionally in the field to talk and share advice on what they can do to help them prepare for their future careers.
- B. Gina wanted to have more workshops on areas dealing with raising children, saving for the future, and finding reliable child care.
- C. Lisa needed information on how to save in all areas of your life, food, clothing and shelter. Lisa did not learn this at home.
- D. Penny needed to meet other women doctors to have as a mentor in my career field.
- E. Tyra wanted more opportunities to speak in front of audience to further develop leadership skills.

Findings 4.3

Adding more opportunities to develop leadership skills would help with our professional development. Having guest speakers who are working in the career field of our interest so we could ask them questions about how they worked through barriers would have been very helpful. Having mentors from the faculty would help increase our need to feel more comfortable in speaking up in class.

4.4.4.4 Question 4.4 If you were going to design a mentoring program for the nontraditional women attending the community college what important aspects would you include in this program?

Response: 4.4

- A. Cher - The program should be race and gender specific. African American women deal with a lot of 'stuff' while in school. Not to say that other races don't have issues, but there are more African American single moms who are struggling, than.... There are not many African American instructors and administrators working in college. We have to dispel the myth that we are angry and looking for a free handout.
- B. Gina - Communication should be clear. The mentor should not judge women based on their personal values. They should be committed to helping women throughout the degree completion process.
- C. Lisa - Mentors should encourage and inspire others to achieve. They should possess a wealth of knowledge about the resources nontraditional women need.
- D. Penny - A good mentor should make referrals on where he student can go to get additional information on a career or subject. They should be articulate.
- E. Tyra - Be open minded to new and different ideas and continue to learn. They should communicate very well.

Findings: 4.4

In the design of a mentor program at a community college, the college community should be invited to participate as a mentor. The mentor as an advisor model is generally used in a college setting where the student has a one on one relationship with a faculty member who may

or may not be active in the student's discipline. The faculty is expected to have sufficient knowledge in order to advise the student (Welch, 1996). The mentor needs to have a sense of humor and have some fun to show the student how to relax. The mentor needs to be able to communicate clearly. As they encourage and inspire others. They need to have outstanding leadership qualities and be a resourceful person.

4.4.4.5 Question 4.5 What criteria would you use to evaluate the success of a mentoring program for nontraditional community college students?

Responses: 4.5

- A. Cher stated the number of graduates each year can be measured and the number of students who have continued on to earn additional degrees. You could do a survey to find out what they learned from participating in the program.
- B. Gina felt strongly about completing the weekly report listing any and all issues that needed to be addressed and how they were resolved. Also, get feedback from the women on the success of the resolution.
- C. Lisa collected information on the amount of student each time shows up at the mentor office for help.
- D. Penny collected student information on what they wanted to improve or change in their life and how they would go about completing the task.
- E. Tyra calculated the number of referrals the mentor made and follow-up on the number of graduates who continued on to further their education.

Findings: 4.5

The criteria for evaluating the success of a mentor program for nontraditional women in a community college should be based upon the following; the number of graduates or the completion rates and those who have gone on to obtain additional degrees. Also the completers who have mentored other people, in work or school.

4.4.4.6 Question 4.6 How have you mentored anyone since in school, work, or any other way since graduating from college?

Responses: 4.6

- A. Cher Yes, I have mentored 6 people, 2 at work and 4 while attending different colleges. I learned how important it is to assist other women trying to attend college. I was able to share with them how I worked through some of the obstacles we have to face as women with multiple roles and issues.
- B. Gina Yes, I have mentored 2 people while at work. The experience at work of helping two new colleagues get acclimated to the reminded me of the challenges I had to face as a single mom trying to juggle the many hats I had to wear while attending school. These women had to find childcare, learn how to do the job, work with supervisors who did not care about what was happening at home, or about taking care of a sick child.
- C. Lisa Yes, I have mentored 3 people. One was a family member getting ready to go to college and the other 2 were from college and work. Helping my family member (a cousin) was easy because she was able to see what I had achieved and she listened to most of what I had to say. She asked questions all the time and even sent text questions while attending class. I was able to share with the other women and I know one did

complete her associate degree but I am still helping the other women when she ask me for help.

D. Penny Yes, I have mentored two people at school. It can be draining to help some folks.

The one women thought I would do her homework for her and even though I made a lot of referrals to the right people who could help her, she didn't always follow up. She kept trying get me to be her personal assistant and make calls for her.

E. Tyra Yes, I have mentored five of them at work. Mentoring people at work was exciting

because you could see how they were happy when they starting understanding their role in the company. When I tried to help students at college It took up a lot of my studying time and they wanted me to do everything for them. I just kept thinking, I hope I was not that needed when I was a new student at the community college.

Findings: 4.6

The interview participants have all mentored someone else since graduating. One person was a mentorship coordinator for a mentor partnership. Another cohort member was a mentor at her church for youth and women who wanted to go to college or return to college. These women did not view themselves as mentors by definition of this paper. They just thought they would pay it forward without needing any kind of a title used for this study. The women had numerous ideas in common such as persistence, confidence, like minded friends, new to college life, self-sufficiency, social communication, leadership, and communication.

4.4.4.7 Question 5.1 What other support systems are needed for women to complete their degrees?

Responses: 5.1

- A. Cher received support from her older sister and her brother's family. She was able to live with her sisters' family for a while because she needed a safe place to stay. She also held a strong belief in God. She believes child care should be a part of every program that addresses helping to support nontraditional women.
- B. Gina said her support was her older and only sister who raised her for as long as she could remember. She also had a few neighbors in her apartment building who brought over food and gifts sometime during the holidays. When she went to college some of them would watch her children if her sister had to work. Gina also got help from two faculty members while in the college program.
- C. Lisa said she received help from her friends of her mother and elders in her church. Her mother who is completed the nursing program also helps with watching the children and, cleaning, laundry, and cooking meals.
- D. Penny has her help from her family and friend. She has spent hours being tutored by teachers in her science and math classes also. Some of her friends from the mentor program assisted her with learning parts of the human anatomy.
- E. Tyra found help from her neighbors and friends she made in the mentor program. She spent time with the counseling department staff and the financial aid staff learning as much as she could, to share with other women. Tyra also found help at the nonprofit child care center which was free to low income fulltime women who kept their baby and

decided to attend post-secondary education. They had a resource person who helped Tyra in navigating the college system.

Findings: 5.1

All five of the women received help from at least one close family member. Some of the systems needed by women to stay in college and complete their degree was founded to be childcare services, help with managing time, and utilizing the services of relatives, friends, neighbors, church members, and faculty members. Family was the number one support system used by the women.

4.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Common responses from the interview participants are summarized here by general theme:

4.5.1 Families and Friends

1. Each woman relied on family and friends for support and encouragement, hands-on help with daily routines, and sometimes financial support through gifts and loans.
2. Childcare was a very important issue for each woman. They wanted their children to be taken care of by a family member or a trusted friend.
3. They developed supportive friendships with like-minded nontraditional women in the mentoring program.

4.5.2 Mentoring

1. For each woman, the mentoring relationship provided a context for identifying the support services that were available and then determining which support services were needed.
2. The women were persistent; each woman persevered to work through problems and issues unique to her personal situation with the guidance of the mentor.
3. The women gained more confidence the longer they continued in college.
4. The women discussed among themselves how much they wanted to take the next step for another degree.
5. The women emphasized the importance of support from the other program participants and recommended that the cohort format be adopted for subsequent programs.
6. The women continue to support each other via cell phone, sending emails and text messages to meet for lunch.

4.5.3 Time management

1. Time management was a major obstacle for each woman, and they learned together how to balance their multiple commitments. The women shared strategies for managing their daily routines.
2. The women agreed that work, school, home maintenance, and family caregiving expectations created conflict. Managing those expectations and responding appropriately were important skills they all learned.

3. Their own set of expectations about the role and lifestyle of a college student changed. Orientation, workshops, and exposure to current students helped the women to adjust to the college environment.
4. The women learned about the importance of attending class and utilizing the college's system of support services.
5. All the women received some form of financial aid for school.
6. None of the women had any previous exposure to college life before they met on campus. They acquired a sense of 'pay it forward' to help other nontraditional women the way they were helped.
7. Learning about the institutional resources together helped them individually, particularly in learning how to access computer labs and the tutoring center.

4.5.4 Finding a Job

1. The women acquired the information they needed to find jobs while in school and after graduation.
2. They supported each other academically by helping each other with homework, including math and writing papers.

4.5.5 Educational Goals

1. The women were not experienced in long-term planning, and all had to learn how to develop a plan for their futures.

2. Through workshops and discussions, they learned how to develop plans to reach their goals.
3. Each woman wanted her education to provide the means to become financially self-sufficient and able to take care of her family.

4.5.6 Characteristics of an Effective Mentor Program

1. All the women agreed that faculty and staff should contribute to the planning of a mentor program. Without their input, the program would not contain sufficient insight to be effective.
2. Students met with faculty in class and had more contact with them than anyone else on campus. This contact often included providing advice. To better help struggling students, faculty need to be trained to direct students to the range of resources available on the college campus.
3. Because faculty members have a deep understanding of their disciplines and the career paths within those disciplines, an effective mentoring program must include them. Faculty members require training and the mandate to mentor students.
4. They each believed that in developing a mentoring program, nontraditional women should provide input to help specify the characteristics and content of the program. For example, the program should address: understanding how the college system can work for you; taking advantage of the resources available to students; utilizing the protocols for addressing student-related issues, such as how to file a complaint about a grade. They believed that mentors should be trained, and that faculty, staff and administrators should be on the list of mentors if possible.

In each of the five cases the woman who enrolled in the community college after having a family was able to have a “do over” in her life. They each had experienced different life events which changed the course for their future. They were given a chance at starting over again with different goals in mind. Life was now about focusing on how to change the future to a positive outcome for themselves and the next generation, their children.

The women supported each other to get along though out the mentor program. The fathers of their children did not play an active role in their family lives. In some cases, immediate family members provided some of the support system needed for the women in the mentor program. Most of the women agreed they did not have friends or acquaintances before they started in the program. They met women while in the program. The women had to adjust to class schedules, course work loads and learning the new skills needed at the beginning of each semester. The amount of time they spent studying was overwhelming.

They had each felt at times how they wanted to drop out of the program because of the stress they felt was too much, the job demands for work, and lack of enough quality time with their children would suffer. After discussing among themselves in the mentor office how to address the issues of time management, they soon learned they could do homework on campus and be more successful because it was quiet and there was academic help such as tutoring in mathematics and sciences, the reading and writing lab, and help in using the computers for class assignments.

Tyra presented a workshop for the women where they learned how to dissect large problems into smaller pieces and work on them one section at a time. She taught her peers how to do the same. An example was when finals were two weeks away and she met with the cohort to schedule study sessions and childcare after the day care closed. Tyra set up a matrix and asked

everyone in the mentor program, who was able, to fill in the blanks on sharing child care services with each other even overnight if they were available to babysit so the students could study for longer periods of time without interruption and not have to ask family members for multiple nights of overnight care.

The bond these women shared as participants in the mentoring program continues to have a positive impact on them even now. If you are going to evaluate the success of the program the response of the participants presented good ideas on what data you need to collect to show the outcome of the program. You should collect information on the number of women who started in college, participated in the mentor program, and completed their degree or other goals. Also, collect information on the number of women who continued their education and the number who have mentored others after completing college.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

“Mentors play a clear role in student success. Mentoring is one of those concepts in higher education that few disagree is a “good” thing for students and faculty. What is often missing, however, is how mentoring actually influences and shapes the student experience. Does mentoring help with student retention?” (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, and Pifer, 2017) pgs. 3-4.

This chapter presents a discussion of the study, the conclusions that were drawn, and final recommendations for future study from the data collected during the interview process. The discussion introduces common themes identified in the study, explores the issues involved in the study, and presents implications of the results. The discussion also highlights the aspects of a mentoring program that the subjects identified as important; these characteristics should be considered in designing an effective mentor program for nontraditional women students attending community college.

The research shows that community colleges, compared to other post-secondary institutions, serve the greatest number of nontraditional and underprepared students. For this reason they have the greatest need to provide appropriate services that increase retention rates for these populations. Community college completion rates have remained stable at only 32 percent (Brock, 2010); community colleges need to do better, improving and expanding programs that increase student success. As Tinto made clear (1993), to improve college completion rates the institution needs to understand and then focus on the underlying causes for non-completion, including what happened to the students before they entered college as well as after they are

integrated into the classroom. Throughout the literature, many support systems have been designed to enhance student success; many incorporate a mentoring component, including orientation programs, honors and the first year experience, and peer mentoring. (Crisp, 2017).

5.1 COMMON THEMES

The research study was guided by five questions: How do nontraditional women understand the concept of mentoring in a community college? To what extent do the women believe mentoring by others has helped in changing the educational lives of the community college students? What important aspects should be included in the design of a mentor program for the program to be effective? What important characteristics should mentors possess for them to be effective? What other support systems are needed for women to complete their community college degree?

In response to a questionnaire targeted to provide this information, the women discussed their experiences with mentoring in trying to pursue a college degree. As described in Chapter Four, six common themes emerged: support of family and friends; mentoring; time management; finding a job, educational goals, and important aspects of an effective mentor program.

5.1.1 Family and friends

Family and friends were the most important sources of support for these nontraditional women. Based on the interview responses, the help they received from their families, along with the friendships they developed through the mentoring program, offered the social supports needed to provide safe child care and maintain a stable home environment for the women and their

families. The women needed to know that the person watching their children would take excellent care of the children or they would not be able to focus in school. In addition, having at least one supportive family member provided the encouragement needed for continuing their studies.

When asked about other supports in question 5.1, all five women mentioned family and friends first, but only three mentioned faculty, counseling, and academic tutoring as another support system. College representatives need to explain the other programs which can provide a variety supports for women students such as academic tutoring, counseling services, new student orientation, mentoring and financial aid to all students including the nontraditional women participating in the program. All community college staff must be trained in the various support departments and services available to students.

When they first entered college, these nontraditional women were not comfortable with the environment. They felt intimidated and out of place with the younger students in class and their own children at home. Adapting to the unfamiliar surroundings of college is often very difficult, and the question, “how do I fit”, and “do I fit”, into the college environment can take over academic expectations for a new student. They experienced the conflicts associated with integration discussed by Tinto (1993) and explored self-knowledge as described by Neisser (1988).

Neisser (1988) explains that self-knowledge is based on different forms of information. Each form is so distinct it establishes a different self as perceived with respect to the immediate physical environment; the interpersonal self is based on signals of rapport and communication; the extended self is based on memory; the private self appears when we discover our conscious experiences are our own; and the conceptual self draws its meaning from a network of socially-

bases assumptions about human nature. So when a situation is new or extremely different from what we confronted in the past we do not know how to react to the circumstances using the mechanisms we adopted earlier. A lack of self-knowledge that does not lead to growth in the first year of college can lead to college failure and dropout. The complexity of the women's multiple roles as parent, mother, and breadwinner and college student add to the types of self-knowledge that must be maintained, and can be overwhelming. As they learned about and began to experience the support they received through the mentor program, they decided to stay in college.

5.1.2 Mentoring

All the women acknowledged the importance of the college's offering a mentor program for nontraditional women. They all stated that the program should exist to ensure that college social and academic programs would be fully accessible to them. All believe that the mentor program should be expanded to include other women who need help to complete their degrees.

Student responses support the findings of the ASHE Higher Education Report on Mentoring Undergraduate Students (Crist, et.al.) with regard to the both the short-term and long-term benefits of mentoring: academic performance increased (citing Brittian, Sy and Stokes, 2009, Dahlvig, 2010), the students persisted and attained degrees (citing Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Gross, Iverson, Willette & Manduca, 2015), and satisfactory career and personal development (citing Kinkel, 2011).

Because the term mentor has numerous definitions in the literature, the word has not been easy to define with precision. To avoid tarnishing the subjects' responses, the author did not define the term for the subjects prior to administering the study questionnaire; each woman had

to provide her own definition of “mentor” in her own words. The author then provided the definition adopted for the study after each woman completed her interviews. In general, the subjects’ definitions were similar to the definition used for the study.

For this study, the definition of mentor is an individual who has been identified as an influential and important person in the educational journey of a college student. This traditional one-to-one mentoring model, referred to as the “dyad”, is defined by Moore and Salimbene (1981) as an “intense lasting and professionally centered relationship between two individuals.” The two participants are usually designated the mentor and the mentee. The mentor is the source of benefits and has greater power and responsibility than the mentee, who is the receiver of benefits.

The more opportunities that the women had to interact with each other within the program, the more they were inspired to cooperate, share, and help each other. More verbal communication leads to more opportunity to engage in norms of fairness in behavior and grading (Frey & Bohnet, 1995). Although the primary mentoring relationship existed between the college mentor and the individual mentee, the students also engaged in supporting each other individually and within the group. The interview results revealed that the women in the mentor program formed a special bond to support each other. They set up support systems within the group to encourage and help each other during their academic journeys. “We kept in touch with each other. Someone in our group could always find another woman from the group to share ideas.” In a sense, they became mentors for each other.

5.1.3 Time Management

Another common theme for these women was the challenge of juggling multiple roles and figuring out how to get everything completed each day. Balancing the demands of parenting, spending quality time with the family, and working for a living, and handling household responsibilities, all while attending classes and finding time to study, was a major hurdle mentioned by everyone. Scheduling time for school each day was a major task, and managing their time to fill multiple roles was a juggling act for the five women. Providing workshops on time management helped, but their schedules had to be flexible because “you do not know what could happen to change your schedule, such as a sick child”.

There was a desperate need for learning how to get everything done in 24 hours. As the women discussed, their carefully developed plans would change when a sick child was added to the equation, and the impact would mean readjusting their schedule for days. “Try to explain a sick child to your teacher and finding the time to make up homework assignments when you fall behind in class. Only a family member or dear friend can help you in this situation by staying and taking care of your child. Work, school, classes, and homework – it all gets put on hold for a sick child.”

Every woman wanted help in figuring out how to develop a flexible schedule and stay on track using that schedule. Tyra did provide a workshop for the women to use as a guide for managing their time. Also, one of the counselors had the women participate in a time management exercise. The women said both workshops were helpful but agreed that schedules are a guide to develop and use, but as parents they had to remain flexible – and so do the children and others who provide support.

5.1.4 Finding a Job

Providing financial support for the family was very important common theme addressed by the women. They had to balance multiple roles at home, work, and school along with financial obligations. Each of the women worked as they progressed through school. They had to obtain income for the handling survival-level expenses, including food, clothing and shelter for their families. Three of the women worked three jobs while attending college.

Finding a job to address their financial concerns is overwhelming to nontraditional women college students, but financial literacy tends to be very low. Eitel, et al. (2009) found students had a great need for financial information. Some students did not seem to know where to start in confronting their lack of knowledge so they did not look for information. They just did what they learned to do previously which was “look for a job”. The *mentor as a guide* model (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000) helps with the socialization process needed to enter employment. The model overlaps with the *career mentoring* relationship model (Welch, 1996) in which the advisor has the role of preparing the student for active employment.

As a mentor, I wanted to see the women learn how new skills gained from the job search workshops would help them find employment and lead them to a professional career. I learned through observation that when these women had someone walk them through the job search process they made better choices in selecting their next position and employer. They developed skills in interpreting their transferable work experiences, updating their resumes, investigating the target employer, applying for the position using the internet, and preparing for an interview by practicing. I watched as these women who participated in the mentor program workshops became better at finding jobs, helping other women navigate through college, and building their

self-confidence. They were getting better positions which provided more money and greater responsibilities.

Gina was able to turn her externship into a better paying job. Cher and Tyra worked at restaurants, banks and retail shops. Lisa worked a variety of jobs because her bosses kept trying to increase her hours to full time, which she knew would conflict with home and school. Penny was on disability for a short time and then she was able to work in the dance studio teaching very young children who only needed to learn the basic steps.

Having access to the campus Career Center made it easier to find jobs but it was not always easy to work the jobs. They observed that the demands of the job can change, for example of the boss wanted additional time commitments to cover the absence of another colleague. Their employers made them feel as if their jobs were in jeopardy if they did not stay and work additional time. Most of the women wanted to work full time but with multiple roles it was not possible due to family obligations and lack of time needed for attending class and studying.

Once these nontraditional women knew what they wanted to do and what career they wanted to pursue, how to get there was next for the student. Each woman was scheduled to go with the mentor to meet with the academic advisor and the career counselor to set goals and develop an educational plan to reach their goals.

5.1.5 Educational Goals

Jenkins (2011) found that many new students enroll in the community college without clear goals for college and careers. Many are sidetracked by remedial courses and never enroll in a program of study that leads to a credential. Jenkins observed that older students tend to be more

successful when they apply for limited entry programs. In setting their educational goals, these women were mentored to decide what they wanted to accomplish and then to develop a plan for how to achieve the results they wanted.

The new students spent several weeks discussing how the academic work was getting harder and their lives more difficult to manage. When students are academically unprepared for college-level work, the likelihood of successful completion is doubtful according to Boylan and Saxon (2006). These women wanted to complete their first educational goal which started with completing their associate degree. The determination of these women to support each other through graduate inspired them to band together and take advantage of academic services available to all students on the campus, by using the writing lab for proof reading papers, attending study skill workshops and tutoring services for help in mathematics.

Cher decided to become a special education teacher and now she wants to continue to the next role of becoming an administrator. Gina was not sure if she could handle college but she was encouraged by her sister who took care of her. Gina wanted to help people who process information differently than most? She has a master's degree and works with mentally challenged adults. She has set a goal of working with the adults who have drug and alcohol issues like her mother.

Lisa set her goal as working in the business world. She became the care giver for her grandmother and other senior church members in their homes after she graduated with a degree in business. Lisa set her goal on owning and operating her own companion, home health aide, personal care, and skilled nursing business. She has set her educational goals not only by starting the business by studying for the certificates and degrees needed for each position. She needs to get into the nursing program for her last degree.

Penny wanted to earn a medical degree and had not set educational goals when she enrolled in the community college. She said, “Developing a plan was a way for me to figure out how long it would take me to reach my goal of becoming a podiatrist for the fine arts community.” Tyra walked into the mentoring office and after she introduced herself she said “I want to be a lawyer for social justice”. From that day forward she has been working, going to college and being very active in the political arena working for non-profits such as the community food bank and unions. The emphasis of the participants was on how to expand the mentoring program for nontraditional women in the community college to accommodate help more women to complete their programs.

5.1.6 Important Factors in the Design of an Effective Mentor Program.

The design of an effective mentor program should include the following characteristics, according to the women I interviewed: Students will return to a mentor only when they believe that their persistence in facing obstacles is being rewarded with tangible success. (Farruggia, Bullen & Pierson, 2013) Because the mentorship model involves one to one contact there are limitations to the number of students who can participate in a typical, limited enrollment program. The advantages of the mentorship model depend upon the amount of time the mentor is available for each student.

Women need to understand the value of a mentoring relationship, or the student will not pursue a mentoring program even if one is available (Eitel and Martin, 2009). Of the various components that go into the design of an effective mentor program, methods for establishing trust have been found to be essential components. The program needs to be supported by the institution with trained, committed staff and assigned leadership; training and workshops can be

provided for faculty, minority staff and mid-level administrators where available for mentorship programs. The training can be offered to increase the number of student participants; there needs to be a dedicated source of funding to ensure continuity; the program must define its mission, goals, and objectives within the context of the college missions and goals; and mandatory orientation should address the services available for all students. The program should be marketed and its services made known to incoming and returning students using all modes of communication including social media and paper flyers.

In realizing the budget constraints of institutions, the planning stage for the development of the mentor program needs to be a team effort. The team should include community college graduates who participated in the mentor program and continued their education for additional degrees. An evaluation process to measure the success of the participants, who can provide feedback on the merits of their experience in the program, can be used to justify continuing the program. Additional information was needed to address how these nontraditional women understood mentoring in a community college, the impact of the program, the important aspects of an effective program and other supports to measure the success of the participants. The results of these research questions asked during the interviews are presented in the next section.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.2.1 Research Question 1: Understanding

5.2.1.1 How do nontraditional women understand the concept of mentoring in a community college setting?

According to Crisp & Cruz, 2001; Jacobi, 1991, the definition of mentoring varies across studies and programs, there are four areas where the studies are consistent: Mentoring relationships focuses on the growth of students; the experiences include a broad range of supports, such as career and emotional; the mentoring relationships are personal; mentors have more experiences and influences in the educational environment.

When I asked the question regarding understanding the concept of mentoring, all five nontraditional women explained the concept of mentoring in a community college as having a helper or a guide. It is a way of learning how you can navigate through college. They believe the mentor must be honest and have the student's best interest in mind to lead her in the right direction based upon her needs and goals. The women also believe that mentoring is a process to go through in order to learn about how what is expected of you in college. Mentoring should address what academic and personal resources are available to help you stay in college, develop new life skills, and help students to achieve.

Mentoring is the process that leads to the student's own personal growth because someone took the time to help with pursuing her education, selecting a career path, and choosing a job. Mentoring can be like a form of teaching where the mentor develops a one on one relationship with a student that helps with learning a specific subject, and therefore a better

understanding. Having a mentor is like getting a personal concierge who follows you throughout your college experience and keep you on task until you graduate.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: Impact

5.2.2.1 To what extent do you believe mentoring by others has helped in changing the educational lives of community college students?

According to the interview responses in findings 2.1 and 3.2, the staff in the mentor office had a positive impact on many of the mentor members. Because a staff member had to be in the office throughout the day keeping the office doors open, the two flexed their work schedules to back up each other for both day through early evening office accessibility. If a student needed to use one of the three computers, to check email or to get an opinion on the topic they choose for the class research paper the doors were open as an invitation to enter and share or relax. One of the comments that was common among the participants Gina, Penny and Tyra was “education is a life long journey.” These three women were the ones who had completed the master and doctoral degrees. Cher is taking classes for a certificate, Gina is in class for a training program in Drug and Alcohol abuse, Lisa finished her nurse aide program and now enrolled in a biology class, and Penny is learning how to write for a government grant while Tyra is studying for her bar exam.

The women express the importance of developing a mentoring relationship with someone who you can trust, has compassion, is knowledgeable about community college resources, encouraging and has a positive attitude. The mentor needs to be friendly and approachable in order to discuss and provide support for the student’s educational goals. There needs to be an awareness of the college programs and certificates at the campus, mentors should recommend tutoring help and know where the student can go for other academic skill development. The

mentor has to be aware of the amount of influence they possess over the outcome of the educational lives of women in the college setting. Dispensing incorrect information to a student can lead to students dropping or stopping out of college. Mentors can help students by listening to the concerns and communicating to the mentee effectively. They can teach the student how to navigate through the college academic system which does have a positive impact on the retention of the nontraditional women. Encouragement by their peers was a very important reason given by the interview participants for staying in college and completing their educational degree.

5.2.3 Research Question 3: Aspects

5.2.3.1 What important aspects should be included in the design of a mentor program for it to be effective?

The mentor program provided a way for women to share information and ideas on how they were able to overcome the challenges that came with the stress of managing multiple roles of a nontraditional woman student, including taking care of a family, working to support the family, attending parent teacher meetings at school, cleaning the house, doing laundry, and shopping while juggling classes at the community college and finding the time to study. One of the greatest challenges as a college student was the lack of time to study and attend classes. The aspects that should be included in the design of an effective mentor program would include: time management; the steps in decision making; training more mentors; developing leadership skills; learning effective communication skills; developing academic skills; and making the students are of college resources for proper referral.

5.2.4 Research Question 4: Mentors

5.2.4.1 What important characteristics should mentors possess in order for them to be effective?

The participants had different ideas in defining a mentor. They did agree on some of the same words for a description on the characteristics of a mentor, such as; one that can be trusted enough to show respect, a very good listener, and share ideas without judgment. Mentors should process a positive attitude, communicate effectively, and understand confidentiality within the mentor relationship. (Farruggia, Bullen& Pierson, 2013) They need to have an awareness of college resources that they share with everyone, they should provide counselling or appropriate referral for additional student support when it is needed. Mentors need to have a positive relationship with the college community including students, faculty, staff and administrators. They need to be optimistic and encouraging toward the students. Mentors need to be honest and be able to identify when situations develop that need to address by a particular individual such as a psychologist.

5.2.5 Research Question 5: Other Supports

5.2.5.1 What other support systems are needed for women to complete their degree?

Research on student retention has primarily focused upon factors that influence the traditional student to persevere through graduation. The needs of traditional students continue to be analyzed, and programs that meet their needs continue to be initiated and evaluated to assess their ability to promote academic success. Colleges adapted and evolved, but as non-traditional women students began to enter post-secondary institutions and large numbers of these students

have not achieved their academic goals despite the adaptations that are already in place, further research is clearly necessary. The issues these nontraditional students must address are now being identified and analyzed to determine their special needs and to develop programs that meet them.

Obstacles that affect nontraditional student success include advising that is not adequate, not enough guidance from the college, and insufficient funding. Other obstacles to success for nontraditional women included lack of time, trying to balance school, work and family responsibilities and lacking time management skills, study skills and self-discipline and motivation. Additional obstacles include complex general education requirements, large class sizes, the amount of face time with faculty, limited course offerings, and the need for more high - quality tutors. In addition to mentoring, successful outcomes are improved with better advising and guidance counseling, more funding, allocation of additional time for class, better study habits, time management skills and self-discipline. (Berry, 2005; Bickerstaff, 2012; Brock, 2010; Cox, 2010; Dougherty, 2006; Eitel, 2009; Gibbs, 1974; Johnson J., 1997; Karp, 2012; Laborde, 2015; Lake Research, 2007; Ma, 2016; Metzner, 1987; Okun, 1996; Pascarella, 2002; Tinto, 2012; Quayle, 2007; White, 2001.)

The five participants specifically noted other support systems that were employed to help them complete their degrees, including:

- having family and close friends to supplement in the role of childcare,
- using the academic services for tutoring help,
- learning how to navigate the college system,
- understanding college resources available for students,
- talking to the counselors to relieve stress,

- sharing with the members of the cohort group, which they identified as the most important support system, and
- having a safe place to go on campus where you can voice your opinion and find solutions to issues that arise.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the mentoring program had on the experiences of the nontraditional women who participated in the cohort program. The primary limitation of the study was the small number of women who met the criteria for participation, and the even smaller number who were available to be interviewed. This researcher identified five women to be interviewed; this was difficult due to subject time constraints and avoiding long phone interviews. There were fourteen nontraditional women who completed the mentoring program and their degrees while in the program. Although other campuses within the community college offered mentor programs at that time, this study was limited to one campus because each of the mentor programs were structured and operated differently.

As the primary researcher for the study, I was asked by the participants to email a copy of the definitions I would be using to the participants. I was not able to comply due to fact that some of the women communicate with each other often and I asked them for their definition of a few words. I did not want their responses to influenced by information that was shared before their actual phone interview. Also, two of the women in the cohort could not be contacted for me to ask about participating in the study because the contact information was no longer valid.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

As a result of this study the researcher believes that mentoring programs can be highly effective and should be incorporated into community college retention programs to enhance student success. Each program should be cohort-based and targeted to the population that is to be served. Factors to be addressed in the design stage should include the focus of the program (such as academic discipline and/or demographic subgroup), objectives of the program, duration of the program, and the program's structure (such as individualized or group meetings), how training will be provided to both mentors and participants, and recruitment of mentors and participants, including mentor selection criteria.

5.5 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Overall, the researcher and the cohort members believe the mentor program relationships should be replicated. The development and operation of a formal or informal mentoring program requires administrative time and attention. Because the design of a competent program the content requires extensive thought and collaborative work. The program will require dedicated staff time during the beginning. The staff will need to have training and maybe conduct research. The program must be supervised so that it is conducted in line with the initial design. The program must be monitored for compliance with the regulations, modified if needed for better quality, and assessed to determine if the goals are being met.

These programs target special population students as with the nontraditional women in the community college. There were issues with not having enough mentors for the program or

time to meet with the mentor due to limited office hours and high demand. There were some communication concerns such as not enough workshops and the number of participants in the program. There were more students than originally planned. Everyone agreed the program had a positive impact on the women who participated. The program did make a significant difference in the lives of the women. Responses, personal experiences, careers, observations and interviews with these women confirmed that an effective mentor program can enable nontraditional women to succeed. Other research studies have arrived at very similar conclusions. (Eitel & martin, 2009)(Choy & MPR, 2001) (Bean & Metzner, 1985)

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in this research study and in the literature recommend further study in this area. The researcher suggest that the research examine the experiences of the participants in mentoring programs serving unique demographics. There is limited research on evaluation of the mentoring programs to determine what works and changes that would improve the value of the program for student and the college. As more nontraditional women enroll in post-secondary programs, community colleges need to adapt their scheduling, orientations, support services and resources in order to increase the retention and program completion rate of these women. In developing a future mentor program the following components need to be addressed; the program be supported by the institution with, trained committed staff and leadership, funding needed be provided; the program define its mission, goals and objections within the context of the college missions and goals; community partnerships be developed, mentors and mentees be matched appropriately, mentors be trained together so they receive the same information and a

clear understanding of their role and influence they have on mentees, and opportunities are available for developing networking relationships. Future research should focus on the experiences of mentorship relationships benefits to the mentees.

6.0 PERSONAL NOTE

The interview process was exciting to me because I would be able to spend time talking with pass protégés and finding out about where they are now and how they got there. These nontraditional women who participated in the community college mentor program who were now all graduates with multiple degrees continued their educational journey beyond my expectations. I wanted to hear their stories and they wanted to share with me how they prevailed in spite of the barriers they had to encounter. They needed a voice to help them to be able to share the information they learned that would support other women who will enroll in the community college. I had to become an active listener during the interviews and be aware of not interpreting their responses based upon my assumptions.

Because of the qualitative research design that enabled me to ask questions and dialogue with the participants, I was able to learn more about myself and the impact of the role I had as a mentor. I discovered how much I wanted to help these women out of every situation they encountered because I knew if they learned the skills needed to handle conflict they would be better equipped to address everyday situations as they arrived. I really felt some of their pain when they talked about some of the abusive situations they had to live through and how they managed to survive.

I remembered how lonely I felt being on my own with no one I could trust, laugh or joke with. I spent hours some days just praying my phone would ring and someone I knew from home

would be calling me. Sometimes when I went to the mailbox I found a letter or a card inside. I would read the card over again and it just made me feel happy that someone was thinking about me enough to write. If the card I received had money in the middle, I would hold on to that twenty dollars for weeks as a reminder it came from my mom or some other family member who cared about me. I wanted to share the stories of these women so they could share in helping other community college supporters to design and implement an effective mentor program for nontraditional women. This will support the retention efforts and completion rates for women in whatever they need to do for their future and the future of their families. Since the interviews, I have heard from cohort members and also read in new letters and emails the following regarding the women who participated in the interview process. These women wanted me to know the following updates and to share the information with others for encouragement.

Cher, the Special education elementary school teacher, called and said she will complete the Supervisor training Certificate program at the beginning of May 2017. She has applied for a new supervisory position at her job. She will let me know her status after the steps in the interview process.

Gina, the mental Health counselor, has applied to a doctorate degree program (PhD) at the university and she hopes to start taking classes fall 2017 after she completes two summer classes needed for entrance into the program.

Lisa, the College Career coach, will be applying to the RN program for the 2018, spring semester after she enrolls and completes, Anatomy II and Chemistry. She wants to help in the development of a mentoring program for women at her college campus location.

Penny, had her fourth surgery on her foot injured during the car accident years ago, and she is back to work part time until it heals.

Tyra's graduation: I could not attend in person, but my family and I were able to watch her graduate via live stream from a university in Ohio. As she marched across the platform Tyra tipped her cap and looked up at the roof, indicating thank you God, as she received her Doctor of Jurisprudence degree. I sent her a text message as she stepped off the ramp letting her know how very proud I was of her. Today she works for a union in Ohio and is studying to take the bar exams. Tyra sent me a wedding photo of her new husband and family two weeks ago. "Life is good today" she texted.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board

3500 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 383-1480
(412) 383-1508 (fax)
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

Memorandum

To: Gyndolyn Bradford
From: IRB Office
Date: 12/5/2016
IRB#: [PRO16090679](#)
Subject: Ten Years Later: A Study of Nontraditional Women Who Succeeded In a Community College Setting with the Help of Mentors

The above-referenced project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. Based on the information provided, this project meets all the necessary criteria for an exemption, and is hereby designated as "exempt" under section

45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Please note the following information:

- Investigators should consult with the IRB whenever questions arise about whether planned changes to an exempt study might alter the exempt status. Use the "**Send Comments to IRB Staff**" link displayed on study workspace to request a review to ensure it continues to meet the exempt category.
- It is important to close your study when finished by using the "**Study Completed**" link displayed on the study workspace.
- Exempt studies will be archived after 3 years unless you choose to extend the study. If your study is archived, you can continue conducting research activities as the IRB has made the determination that your project met one of the required exempt categories. The only caveat is that no changes can be made to the application. If a change is needed, you will need to submit a NEW Exempt application.

Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.

Figure 1. IRB Approval Letter

APPENDIX B

EMAIL FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

B.1 SCRIPT EMAILED TO POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES

Gyndolyn Bradford

Email Subject: Mentor Program Participating Study by Gyndolyn Bradford: Please Reply

This research study is being conducted by Gyndolyn Bradford, a student in the Graduate School of Education, Administrative and Policy Studies in Higher Education at the University of Pittsburgh. She is working on a dissertation. This research study is a requirement to fulfill the researcher's degree. The title of this study is "Ten Years Later: A Study of The Experiences of Nontraditional Women Who Succeeded in a Community College Setting with the Help of Mentors."

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to study community college graduates who participated in a mentoring program ten years ago to gain insight into the lasting effects of the mentoring program; to compile their recollections of their experiences with the program after they have acquired additional work and academic experience; and to analyze this information to identify opportunities for improving future mentoring programs for nontraditional students at the community college.

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project, nor are there any direct benefits to the participant. No payments will be made for participation.

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a telephone interview. The telephone interview will take between 60 minutes. You may select the date and time of the interview.
- Your data will be anonymous, which means that there will be no names or codes that link your response to you at any point. The information you provide will be treated confidentially.
- The records will be stored securely and electronic files will be password protected. Only the principal researcher, Gyndolyn Bradford will have access to the records.
- The records of this study will remain private and confidential. There will be no words linking you to the study and your identity will not be included in any sort of report that might be published.
- You have the right to get a summary of the results of this study. If you would like to have the summary, you can request the summary from the University of Pittsburgh, Oakland library.
- Your participation is strictly voluntary. If you do not participate, it will not harm your relationship with Gyndolyn Bradford.
- If you decide to participate, you can refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You may stop the interview at any time

IF YOU CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE:

Please reply to this email include the following information:

- Your preferred telephone number:
- Best time to call (days and times you prefer to be contacted):

IF YOU DO NOT CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE:

- Will you please reply to this email to verify that you have received this communication, noting that you will not participate?

Thank you very much for your cooperation,

Gyndolyn Bradford

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