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Exploring The Institutional And Programmatic Support Systems In Writing Studies For The Non-Traditional Student In California State Universities

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EXPLORING THE INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT
SYSTEMS IN WRITING STUDIES FOR THE NON-TRADITIONAL
STUDENT IN CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITIES

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Doctoral Program in Rhetoric and Composition

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Dean of the Graduate School

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Dedication

To my loving parents who have been there for me during every step of this journey. I couldn't have completed this without your unwavering love and support.

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CASSANDRA MOLLRING DULIN, M.A., Ed.D.

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This study surveys the learning characteristics of non-traditional students aged 24 years and older. Since the California State University (CSU) system enrolls a significant non-traditional student demographic, understanding the needs of this student base is a critical component to its success. This dissertation seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the CSU system: its history in the state of California, the context of its students and their needs, the policies and support structures it has in place to support the non-traditional student, how it defines the non-traditional student and how this definition is manifested in its goals and outcomes for the university. Institutional writing assessment programs at the CSU, such as the Writing Proficiency Screening Test (WPST), is also analyzed to understand what programmatic goals are directly related to the needs of non-traditional students and how these needs are met using certain pedagogical strategies and ideologies at the departmental level. This study continues to look further down the institutional chain at how composition faculty perceive the needs of their non-traditional students and the ways in which they address these needs through pedagogical ideologies, classroom activities, assessment practices, etc. The final and critical component of this study addresses the perspectives and experiences of non-traditional students at the CSU. These students provide insight into their experiences in the composition classroom and the problems they face as they juggle both educational responsibilities and those outside of the classroom. Finding out what has helped them remain successful, or what has deterred them from their educational goals as they navigate through the composition classroom and the institution will be useful information to institutional administrators in helping them understand and retain the non-traditional student.

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Chapter One: The California State University System

The current hot topic of discussion in U.S. colleges and universities is how to find ways of lowering student attrition rates while raising graduation rates. The data on first-time, full-time students is robust; however, the data on college students who enroll part-time, re-enroll after taking an extended break, or transfer in from another college or university is scarce since this type of information does not show up in federal statistical reports. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) website defines the non-traditional student as being older than 24 years old. Another identifying characteristic of the non-traditional student is her part-time and re-enrollment habits during her educational journey. This means that institutional decisions about non-traditional students can often be haphazard and incomplete.

Since the California State University (CSU) system enrolls a significant non-traditional student demographic, understanding the needs of this student base is a critical component to its success. This dissertation seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the CSU system: its history in the state of California, the context of its students and their needs, the policies and support structures it has in place to support the non-traditional student, how it defines the non-traditional student and how this definition is manifested in its goals and outcomes for the university. Institutional writing assessment programs at the CSU, such as the Writing Proficiency Test (WPT), will also be analyzed to understand what programmatic goals are directly related to the needs of non-traditional students and how these needs are met using certain pedagogical strategies and ideologies at the departmental level.

This study will continue to look further down the institutional chain at how composition faculty perceive the needs of their non-traditional students and the ways in which they address

these needs through pedagogical ideologies, classroom activities, assessment practices, etc. The final and critical component of this study will address the perspectives and experiences of non-traditional students at the CSU. These students can provide insight into their experiences in the composition classroom and the problems they face as they juggle both educational responsibilities and those outside of the classroom. Finding out what has helped them remain successful, or what has deterred them from their educational goals as they navigate through the composition classroom and the institution will be useful information to institutional administrators in helping them understand and retain the non-traditional student.

This chapter will briefly and selectively survey the history of higher education in the United States as it has influenced higher education in California. The historical foundation that is provided here gives the reader a closer look at how the CSU system is in a position to address the needs of the non-traditional student in many ways. These methods will be addressed in chapters three, four, and five. In order for us to make decisions and implement practices that support non-traditional students in higher education, we need to first understand the institutional structure of the CSU system and how it was formed over the last two hundred years.

Higher Education in the U.S. that Influences California Educational History

The normal school system was developed in response to the common school system revival during the mid-1800s. The U. S. common schools were a part of the public education system and supported education for primary and secondary grades in the 1800s. Before the antebellum period, schoolteachers did not receive specialized training. They were typically pulled from the community by local leaders, and, in some cases, teachers were relatives of a political or religious leader in town. A new awareness of the possibilities of public education as a way to “improve society by instilling uniform values in standardized elementary-level schools”

had risen up and began influencing education reformers (Ogren, 2005, p. 9). Schooling in the mid-1800s was unsystematic and disordered; curriculum was organized in a haphazard fashion according to the “whims of the community,” and “tailored to different parental interests and income levels” (Ogren, 2005, p. 10). This led school reformers, like Horace Mann, to call for “state-controlled education to instill republican virtue, Protestant morality, and capitalist sensibilities” (Ogren, 2005, p. 10). One way to accomplish this was to organize training for teachers in a unified and systematic approach.

The formation of the normal schools helped education advocates create a way of finding “a wider pool of better-prepared applicants as a step toward the professionalization of teaching” (Ogren, 2005, p. 11). Prior to normal schools, teachers were mostly white young men who were in college and in the process of learning another profession like law or ministry, or they were farmers or businessmen that arranged their teaching sessions to fit their working schedules. The structure of normal schools provided a more developed system of grooming and selecting qualified teachers who were devoted to longer and more organized teaching periods throughout the year (Ogren, 2005). In this sense, a cohesive establishment of teacher training led to the beginning establishment of the professionalization of primary and secondary teachers.

The first state-supported normal school in the United States was started in Massachusetts in 1839. By the 1920s, there were over 180 normal schools throughout the country. These were not prestigious institutions and did not provide bachelor’s degrees because the teaching profession did not require them for employment at this time. Some colleges offered “teachers classes” that supported the students who were considering a teaching profession; however, they were usually “just add-ons to the regular academic curriculum and rather thin in content,” which suggests that the college and university system were more focused on other professions (Ogren,

2005, p. 17). The normal school relieved the colleges and universities from having to prepare the nation's teachers, which was considered to be a low-status profession.

While the state normal institutions began as a place where future teachers could get training in pedagogy for teaching in the elementary grades, it later evolved into an institution of teacher training for the increasing numbers of faculty positions in the high school grades, which "the normals saw as an opportunity to gain prestige" within higher education (Ogren, 2003, p. 641). In the late 1800s, some normal schools began offering bachelor's degrees and calling themselves "colleges" instead of "schools." The normal colleges were driven to establish more prestige within the realm of higher education, and this trend led to changes in the schools to compete with other institutions. Most of the "state normal schools became teachers colleges during the 1920s and 1930s," and by the 1940s they evolved into an "all-purpose higher education" to keep up with increasing student attendance after World War II (Ogren, 2003, p. 642). By the 1960s many of the normal schools dropped the name "teachers college" and became "state colleges" that offered comprehensive degrees in a variety of disciplines (Ogren, 2003). These state colleges eventually evolved into the CSU system that is in place today. There are common themes that have perpetuated from the normal school system to its evolution into the state university system that has made it conducive to the education of non-traditional and disadvantaged student populations.

The normal school system in the 1800s and early 1900s were supportive of a variety of disadvantaged student populations that were not necessarily supported in regular institutions of higher education during that time. For example, women made up a majority of students who attended normal schools after the 1900s: "throughout the country the percentage of students who were women was consistently well over 50, and occasionally higher than 90%" (Ogren, 2003, p.

643). This is most likely due to the fact that more and more women were becoming teachers. Normal schools were a place for women to get a start in this profession.

The normal schools were also supportive of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. *Normalites* were “the daughters and sons of working people, many of whom were struggling financially” (Ogren, 2003, p. 644). Two-thirds of households with normal school students were lead by “skilled, semiskilled, unskilled, and agricultural workers,” which reflected the industry surrounding the normal school and its community (Ogren, 2003, p. 644). As a result, some normal schools accommodated for their students by opening later in the fall and earlier in the spring so that students could work on the farm with their families. Normal schools became famous for educating the poor.

The normal schools also developed a reputation for accommodating the nontraditional student of the time. The traditional-aged student in the late 1800s was 15-16 years old; however, most “normal-school students were older than the minimum state-stipulated” age (Ogren, 2003, p. 645). A mature, non-traditional-aged student was considered 20 years old. One student was quoted in 1882 in Westfield, Massachusetts in a discussion about his normal school saying “The pupils were all mature, no one under 20; the ages ranged as high as 26 or 28” (Ogren, 2003, p. 645). These students were characterized by the extensive work experience they had prior to enrolling in the normal school, and their need to continue working while they went to school.

Higher Education in California

The Progressive Era in the Early 1900s

The early 1900s was a time when California began building the state’s first system of higher education through a public tripartite system. The state had a collection of common colleges in some of the urban areas, state teachers colleges (once called normal schools), and two

universities. The Progressive Era of California's higher education development marked a change in the way that a college education was envisioned. This led to what was called the California Idea, which reformed the political and economic perceptions of higher education in the state. It was concluded that socioeconomic mobility in California could only be made possible through the dedication of the state and local governments to creating measures to provide equal access for all California students to higher education (Douglass, 2010b). It was found that the state could benefit culturally and economically by allowing more students access to a college education. Instead of a college education being a privilege to a select few students, it was now seen to be a right to all students who could benefit from it. The Progressive Era marked the beginning of educational growth in California and the increase of its presence in state government.

The development of the CSU system began in 1921 with a bill that brought the seven normal schools together under one centralized governance, the State Board of Education. These normal schools became state liberal arts colleges. They continued to focus on teacher training like other normal schools found around the country during this time; however, the teacher preparation programs evolved from two-year to four-year postsecondary degrees with the introduction of this new bill (Douglass, 2010b).

By 1930, about 20% of the college-age population in California enrolled in the higher education system. This was significantly higher than the national average of 10%. This growth was the result of a transformation in the California economy from agriculture, which did not require many postsecondary education graduates to sustain its functionality, to manufacturing and technology-based industries that did need a technically trained workforce. Many of the

vocational programs that surfaced in colleges around this time were designed to help re-train workers for the evolving job market (Douglass, 2010a).

The middle of the 20th century marked a series of events in California that would lead to the development of the largest public education systems in the country. California's higher education system faced a dramatic increase in enrollment between 1945 and 1960 (Douglass, 2010a). The end of World War II and the emergence of veterans with a G.I. Bill and a desire to go to college created an influx of students enrolling in the college system (Callan, 2014; Douglass, 2010a). After World War II, the Cold War-era brought on a surge in federal spending in electronics and aeronautics. This post-war period continued to make postsecondary education important to the economy. By 1960, the number of California residents taking advantage of higher education reached 45% of the population. This number broke records and almost doubled the national average at 25% of the total population (Douglass, 2010b). The state originally consisted of 43 community colleges (CC), 9 California State Universities (CSU), 2 University of California campuses (UC), and 69 private institutions. This infrastructure could not handle the amassing student base. New colleges were added to the state's public education system between 1945 and 1960 to support increased student enrollment: 21 new community colleges, 7 CSUs, and 4 UCs (Callan, 2014).

The Master Plan of 1960

By the late 1950s, the population boom of higher education in California led to a need by the state to become more involved in the coordination of new colleges and universities (Callan, 2014; Douglass, 2010a). Colleges began preparing for higher enrollment in higher education. The state needed a plan that would dedicate resources to the development of colleges and universities and their plans to manage the increased growth. A discussion of higher

education's organizational structure started in the 1930s with a study done by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that reported that the issues that had surfaced in higher education policy had "resulted in overlapping functions, waste, and inefficiency; lack of unified policy; and inequitable distribution of state funds" (Callan, 2014, p. 12). In 1960, California had developed the Master Plan, which made these issues facing higher education public policy (Callan, 2014). This plan became the "most influential effort to chart the future of a system of higher education in the annals of American higher education" seen to date (Douglass, 2010b, p.1). It was dedicated to bringing forth a balance within the three differentiated institutions across California regarding student access, quality, and the costs to taxpayers. This meant that the Master Plan would determine and coordinate where growth took place among the state's colleges and universities and articulate how each of the three types of institutions would grow and support the educational infrastructure (Callan, 2014).

The Master Plan organized the three institutions of higher learning (junior colleges, state universities, and the university of California system) found across the state, and drew up the various populations and the educational mission each sector would provide based on the needs of different types of students. The first institutional type was the junior colleges that made up the majority of institutions and where much of the growth occurred during this time. The junior colleges provided local access to higher education through the 14th grade to students, normally from local regions near the institution, who could benefit from enrollment. The second institutional type of higher education was made up of the state universities. This system provided bachelor's and master's level education for junior college transfer students and the top 30% of California's high school graduating class. The third type of college that made up the state higher education program covered under the Master Plan was the University of California (UC) system.

The UC system was promised in the Master Plan to be the only institution that could confer doctoral degrees alongside bachelor's and master's level degrees. This system was also granted the exclusive right to give professional degrees in medicine, law, dentistry, and veterinary medicine in the state. The university system is open to community college transfer students and the top 8th percentile among high school graduates. One of the provisions of the Master Plan was to create articulation agreements between colleges in order to make transfer from one institution to another possible to all qualified students (Callan, 2014). This supported student movement from associate degree granting institutions, like junior colleges, to the university system.

One of the purposes of The Master Plan was to attempt to strike a balance in the state's educational system so that the students enrolled in community colleges, approximately 60% of the total number of students in college in 1975, could transfer to the UC and CSU systems. It was predicted that half of all community college students would transfer after completing their two-year degree. The creators of The Master Plan did not plan for the constant population growth occurring in many parts of California between the 1960-1970s, and the popularity of the college degree. Californians were going to college for a variety of reasons outside the normal purview of two and four-year diplomas. They were taking advantage of adult education, vocational programs, and classes in English as a second language (Douglass, 2010b). The increased accessibility of higher education for all Californians created growth problems that would affect higher education in the state today.

The Declining Ideals of the Master Plan

The higher education system in California lead the country as one of the top five states in access from high school to college, and AA and BA/BS degree granting among 18-24 year old college students in the 1960s. This was all achieved at a very low cost to tax payers since the

state had resources to fund college education. The nation was impressed with results of the Master Plan: “The success of California’s higher education system, before and immediately after the 1960 Master Plan, garnered the attention of the world as a model system of mass higher education” (Douglass, 2010b, p. 12). Unfortunately, many factors have led to the decline of the major tenets of higher education that the Master Plan had promised to uphold in order to sustain a growing economy: meeting the demand for the state’s postsecondary enrollment through accessibility and affordability.

California saw major changes in state non-mandated expenditures that dramatically influenced higher education budgets. In 1978, Proposition 13 brought an end to the expanding public sector through tax revenues. This was an initiative that “reduced property taxes by about 60% and severely constrained future tax increases” (Callan, 2014, p. 12). This proposition led to the reduction of discretionary funds that were used to support higher education. A major drawback to this new proposition was the vulnerable position it placed higher education during economic recessions.

The Master Plan made the public higher education system in California public policy. This means that the decisions and goals of all public colleges and universities were determined by the state, and changes made by policymakers affected the entire system. Some issues that have arisen over the last few years are not covered under the purview of the outlined policy in the Master Plan and have led to problems in the system (Legislative Analyst’s Office, 2009). For example, the economic crisis in 2008 led to a reduced budget to higher education in all three major sectors: the CSU, UC, and community college systems (Legislative Analyst’s Office, 2009). Currently, the state does not have a policy set for the assignment of tuition fees to students. This has created yearly fluctuations in student fees that “have been unpredictable and

volatile, with little alignment to the cost of instruction or to the students' ability to pay" (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2009, p. 5). The state also lacks a policy that regulates enrollment growth at each public institution. This means that determining yearly enrollment and the corresponding state funding to support that enrollment has been placed on the shoulders of each institution's governing board. Some institutions argue that a common formula is needed to determine how much it costs for an institution to educate one student; unfortunately, this cannot happen because "there is not even consensus among state policymakers as to what it does or should cost to educate a university student" (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2009, p. 5). Other issues arise as a result of state entities getting budget cuts. The California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) is a state agency that is responsible for coordinating the higher education efforts in the state. The budget for this organization was cut in 2003 and is now under a threat of being eliminated entirely (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2009). These coordinating bodies were designed to uphold the goals outlined in the Master Plan; its deterioration has left the higher education system unregulated in regards to some of its influences on students. Regardless of the issues facing the environment of the California higher education, the CSU system aims to support student accessibility and affordability.

The California State University (CSU) System

According to the California State University (CSU) website, the CSU system is the largest and one of the most affordable university systems in the U.S. It is made up of 23 campuses and enrolls about 447,000 students a year. The CSU's broad vision and goals consist of three priorities for the institution: student access and success, service to the state, and sustaining institutional capacity for excellence (CSU Strategic Plan Goals, 2008). Its primary mission is "to provide access to baccalaureate, master's level and applied doctorate education" in

order to support California's knowledge-based economy (Office of the Chancellor, 2010, p. vii). It also supports the state through its applied research in local industry (solar energy, biotechnology, etc.).

The 23 universities that make up the extensive CSU system offer many types of degrees that cater to a variety of jobs that can be found all over California. The CSU system is at the center of the state's economy because it provides more graduates with degrees for local industry jobs than any other higher institution in the state. These jobs are very important to the local and regional economies. Many of these knowledge-based jobs are in fields like "green" industries, information technology, life sciences, and engineering. The CSU system is the top contributor of the state's teachers, policymakers, and social workers in support of the public sector. In 2007, the CSUs graduated almost 52% of the state's newly credentialed teachers (Office of the Chancellor, 2010).

A key component to the CSU mission is its ability to provide access to a variety of students with diverse needs: "the CSU has a long tradition of providing access to higher education to Californians from different ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds, making it the most diverse university system in the country" (Office of the Chancellor, 2010, p. xi). The targeted students in many of the CSU support programs are low income and non-traditional students. The average age of a CSU graduate is 26 and the average amount of time it takes for a student to graduate is 5.7 years. Thirty-six percent of undergraduate students work more than 30 hours a week.

In 2008, the CSU board of trustees adopted the *Access to Excellence* program that was designed to achieve eight goals and one of them was to reduce the existing achievement gaps in all of the CSUs. The Graduation Initiative was designed to improve graduation rates by closing

the achievement gap and remains a key initiative of the *Access to Excellence* (CSU 2011-2013 Executive Summary). In response, the CSU system provides support services that accommodate a diverse student body such as the Extended Opportunity Program (EOP) for low income and educationally disadvantaged students, the Affordable Learning Solutions program for low-income students who need help funding course material expenses, and the Academic Equity Scorecard that provides a framework for CSU programs to help support underrepresented populations on each campus. The CSU system in California is also positioned to support non-traditional-age students who work and support their families while attending school through online classes, flexible class schedules, and programs that provide financial aid.

CSU Stanislaus

This study will focus on one of the 23 campuses in the CSU system, California State University, Stanislaus in Turlock, California. CSU Stanislaus is one of the newer campuses of the CSU system. It came into existence in 1960, according to the university website. It was called Stanislaus State College and was located on the county fairgrounds until 1965 when it moved to its current location. It gained its current name as a California State University in 1968 and opened another campus in Stockton in 1998. Its total student population in 2013 consisted of 8,900 students with 1707 awarded Bachelor's degrees in programs such as business administration, nursing, psychology, biological sciences, and criminal justice.

CSU Stanislaus has a student population that closely resembles its local community. It is a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) with 44% of its student body being Hispanic or Latino, while 29% are Caucasian, according to the university website. The average age of first-time freshmen is 18 years old, and the average undergraduate student is 23 years old. The average age of its undergraduate population is possibly the result of a significant number of transfer students

from Modesto Junior College, San Joaquin Delta College, and Merced Community College District who have spent between two and six years at a community college before they enrolled at CSU Stanislaus. There are also many returning students who have taken time off from college and have returned to broaden their skills and career possibilities. Almost all the CSUs are considered “commuter campuses.” The on-campus housing community at CSU Stanislaus hosts a modest 700 students, about 7% of the total student body, so most students drive to campus from other areas of Turlock and nearby cities and towns. Many students work over 30 hours a week while taking classes, and the majority of students require financial assistance. This could be the result of a significant population of first-generation college students at CSU Stanislaus that come to the university system without many of the educational, economic, and cultural resources to support them in their educational journeys. This is why CSU Stanislaus has developed programs like the Faculty Mentor Program, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter three, that dedicates institutional resources to students with disadvantaged backgrounds.

Methodology

Sample

This study looks at one California State University campus as the starting point for understanding the non-traditional student in the CSU system and how this large demographic is perceived and supported. The campus that is studied in this research is CSU Stanislaus located in Turlock, California. This sample was chosen because it is my previous alma mater and where I currently have connections to faculty in the English department and the writing center. This sample choice has provided an advantage in securing more interviews, which has led to an opportunity to gather more in-depth data. The respondents who knew me from the master’s

program ten years ago were very supportive and connected me with other participants used in this study.

The participants in this study encompass a range of individuals from non-traditional students, composition lecturers, a technical and professional writing professor, the director of the first-year composition program, the English department chair, a librarian, the dean of the University Extended Education program, the director of the BSN-RN (bachelor's of nursing) program, and the director of Student Leadership and Development. These participants have allowed me to sample a variety of perspectives from students, faculty, program directors, and institutional deans and directors in order to craft an analysis of all levels of the institution.

Case Study Method

This research utilizes a case study qualitative design in collecting and analyzing data. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), a qualitative design method involves an interpretation approach in which people and phenomena are studied in their natural settings and the researcher makes sense of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative researchers are interested in learning how people “interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). This research utilizes a case study design in which an in-depth study and description of one or more occurrences of phenomena within its real-world context and setting reflects the perspectives of the participants directly and actively involved in the phenomena (Gall et al., 2007). In this study, CSU Stanislaus is analyzed and will contribute to an understanding “of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (Yin, 2003, p. 1) while using “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” to gather results (Merriam, 2009, p. 42).

In order to address my research questions, this study uses an interview methodology that involves in-depth interviews of institutional administrators, program directors, composition and technical and professional writing lecturers and faculty, and students that fall under the non-traditional student category. These participants were interviewed in person and by phone depending on their preferences and availability. The interview process is necessary when the researcher is interested in past events that can only be recollected through an interaction between participants of that event. A person-to-person interview is important in order to elicit special information specific to the study (Merriam, 2009). Interviews are highly adaptable and make it possible to obtain data from interviewees not normally revealed through other data collection methods. Three separate interview questions were designed for institutional administrators, writing program administrators and faculty, and students. The interviewees were asked a series of structured questions followed by open-form questions that allowed me to probe for deeper answers (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Follow-up questions were used to clarify unclear or vague responses.

This research also utilized an extensive document review as part of its data collection. The document review relied upon an analysis of school documents and websites that pertained to institutional goals, university history, student enrollment trends, and program descriptions.

Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical frameworks were used in this study to analyze the collected data. These frameworks assisted in the analysis and explanation of the data collected from the interviews and documentation review in this study. These frameworks also provide a lens for future recommendations and for the creation of additional frameworks for administrators and instructors who might benefit from this research.

Adult Learning Theory (ALT)

The non-traditional student who enters college has different experiences and motivations than the conventional recent high school graduate entering college. These students bring learning styles into the college setting that are the result of their life experiences and values that are different from the traditional student that enrolled right out of high school. Adult Learning Theory was created in the 1950s and 1960s as a way of addressing the needs of employees in the workplace when traditional pedagogical strategies were not effective. It was found that adults had a different way of thinking about learning, as well as motivational triggers that inspired the desire to learn. According to Knowles et al. (2005), the seminal theorist on adult learning theory, there are six assumptions about adult learners that characterize their learning preferences and attributes: 1.) They have a need to know why a particular type of learning activity is taking place and question anything that is arbitrarily imposed upon them; 2.) They are self-directed, independent, and have a psychological need to be seen as responsible for their learning they value own their learning; 3.) Their past experiences are deeply connected to their self identity and the way they perceive new learning situations; 4.) They are more engaged in the subject matter when they can see how it will help them in their current and future life situations; 5.) Adults develop new knowledge when they are placed in situations that ask them to call on their real-world experiences; 6.) They are driven by concrete goals and return to school specifically to address a task. This is an abbreviated summary of the six assumptions of adult learning; a comprehensive description will be provided in chapter four of this study. This framework will be used to understand the adult student in the writing classroom and assist in the development of pedagogical, programmatic, and institutional recommendations for the accommodation of non-traditional students in higher education.

Grounded Theory

This study will also use grounded theory as a way of creating a framework for data analysis that complements the adult learning theory lens. This provides flexibility to the researcher because “grounded theory aims to organize the many ideas which emerge from systematic data analysis and then to generate theory which is tested through further recursive analysis” (Magnotto, 1996, p.1). This process began with a coding of the interviews after they were transcribed. Each interview was reviewed; during this procedure, sections of the interviews were underlined and coded with a word or phrase that described what was discussed that related to adult learning. According to Joyce Neff Magnotto (1996), grounded theory requires that the researcher hold “conversations with the data” and think “about any regularities or patterns in the data base that relate to the research questions” (p. 2). Once the coding was completed, the topics or codes that were developed were organized into similar groups and assigned a concept that described the grouping. For example, a discussion of late work policies and accommodations arose from many of the faculty interviews in their description of classroom policies that are adjusted to fit the needs of adult students in their classes. It was coded as “late work.” Once it was clear that multiple interviews addressed this topic and had coded sections labeled “late work,” this data was then given an umbrella concept called “class policies,” which helped to link it with similar codes. Notes were then taken within each concept grouping to help frame what was happening in the coded groupings and how they connected to the overall concept. The memoing also helped to unveil the connection between each concept and its relationship to the six assumptions of andragogy. These emerging themes, and its connection to andragogy, provided the basis for the development of a three-tiered framework on adult learning in writing classrooms introduced in chapter five.

The Scope and Limitations of This Study

The student demographic for each of the 23 CSUs in California vary from institution to institution. Each university has its own programs and resources that are tailored to fit its student base. This means that the information gathered from one institution cannot be generalized to the other institutions within the state university system. One CSU in this study cannot exemplify all the CSUs. This also means that the student sample that represents the demographic at one CSU will be different for another CSU and that the non-traditional student definition is contextual for specific areas.

The participants in this study (institutional administrators, Writing Program Administrators, professors, lecturers, and students) cannot be indicative of what can be found in all of the CSUs across California. This sampling cannot speak for all other CSUs and can only represent the opinions and perspectives of the particular sample used in this study. It is also important to note that the participants may have been hesitant to respond truthfully during data collection because they may fear negative repercussions as a result of the critiquing and interrogating of institutional practices as part of this research. This may occur despite assurances of confidentiality. This is not an assessment of the institution in this sample. This is an exploration of one institution and the processes and procedures it uses to support the non-traditional student. The small sample size of this study restricts a larger understanding of many other points of view regarding how non-traditional students are perceived and supported at the institutional, programmatic, and classroom levels.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One: The California State University System surveys a discussion of the implementation of normal schools across the United States, higher education in California, the

CSU system, and the CSU Stanislaus as it pertains to the upcoming conversation in future chapters about how these systems and institutions are part of the ongoing discussion of non-traditional students. This chapter also discusses the details of the sample, the methodology of the research, the theoretical frameworks used to create interview questions for the research collection and data analysis, and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Two: A Description of The Non-Traditional Student begins with a description of the institutional responses to non-traditional students in higher education over the last hundred years leading up to today. This discussion also includes a description of the definition of a non-traditional student and the creation of adult education programs as a response to this growing student base in higher education. An introduction and an analysis of the non-traditional participants of this study are presented in this chapter as a way of creating a portrait of these students in the CSU system. The research in this chapter is organized according to the emerging themes from the data collection: their reasons for re-enrolling in higher education and their prior educational experiences, their involvement in the social activities that take place on campus, their perceptions of the traditional students in their classes at CSU Stanislaus, and their motivations behind finishing their degree.

Chapter Three: The Institutional and Programmatic Structures that Support the Non-Traditional Student begins with a detailed analysis of the University Extended Education (UEE) program at CSU Stanislaus and its accommodations for non-traditional and adult students who are in need of alternative educational delivery methods. This chapter also addresses the scheduling issues that non-traditional students face as a result of their responsibilities to their external lives outside of academia and the complications non-traditional students face when attempting to coordinate their class schedules with the on-campus and off-campus child

development centers. A discussion of the importance of the socialization of non-traditional students and its link to retention is provided along with a description of what social activities adult students participate on campus. A section of this chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the ways in which faculty are critical to the success of non-traditional students because they remain at the center of a student's academic experience and a critical component to the reduction of student attrition rates. New student orientation and tuition costs are described in this chapter in order for the reader to gain an understanding of the ways in which the needs of non-traditional students are not considered.

Chapter Four: *The Classroom Strategies that Support the Non-Traditional Student* begins with an in-depth description of Malcolm Knowles concept of Adult Learning Theory (ALT) and its assumptions in order to introduce the reader to the framework used to organize and analyze the data on non-traditional students in this study. The second section of this chapter deals with the self-concept of the non-traditional student and how self-directive activities and classroom procedures can be beneficial to these students. The third section of this chapter describes how the prior learning of adult students influences how they learn. The fourth section discusses the non-traditional student's orientation to learning by focusing on classroom writing activities and procedures that support her desire for skill building in her other writing endeavors inside and outside of class. The fifth section addresses the adult student's readiness to learn and engage in classroom writing activities like pre-writing and revision when it increases their writing abilities in the class.

Chapter Five: *An Adult Learning Paradigm* introduces an adult learning paradigm that writing teachers and administrators can use to think about their non-traditional students. When looking at the self-identity of non-traditional students, writing instructors can incorporate

learning methodologies that increase and support self-directive behaviors. Institutional administrators can look for ways to increase non-traditional student retention by acknowledging the prior learning experiences of older students. Writing faculty can also look for ways that connect adult students to their learning environment by incorporating activities like free writing as a way of getting students to think about their current perspectives and how these opinions originated and were shaped by their past experiences. This chapter also analyzes the social-epistemic view of writing and its influence on classroom procedures and activities that support the learning style of the non-traditional student.

This research contributes to the ongoing discussion of student learning in writing courses within all levels of higher education: community college, public and private universities, technical colleges, etc. It also adds to a conversation about the learning styles and needs of older students in writing classes and writing programs where research is generally lacking within the rhetoric and writing discourse community. The CSU system enrolls many non-traditional students. A case study of CSU Stanislaus provides an overview of the non-traditional student and an introduction to her needs at the classroom, programmatic, and institutional levels in order to encourage more discussion of the success and retention of this student base. This research is the starting point for more inquiries into non-traditional students in higher education.

Chapter Two: A Description of the Non-Traditional Student

Non-traditional students, aged 24 and older, represent a growing population within the total student body of higher education (Kasworm, 2003). According to Joseph Chen (2014), the percentage of students who were considered non-traditional by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2007 was 38.2% with a projected increase of 23% between 2010-2019, which is significantly higher than the 9% increase in traditional students during this timeframe. Of course, some colleges and universities experience more non-traditional student enrollment than others. With an average undergraduate student age of 23, the California State University (CSU) system sees high enrollments of non-traditional students who typically transfer in from local community colleges (CSU website). As seen in this study, some of these adult students have just recently taken their general education requirements, and others have waited several years before transferring or re-enrolling into the CSU system.

According to Carol E. Kasworm (2008), who is a leading specialist in adult education research, non-traditional students are motivated and inspired individuals who have articulated plans for their college degree; however, they also face extreme doubt and insecurity about their performance and abilities in the classroom. These behaviors may be evident to the professors who work with non-traditional students in their classes; others may not be aware of the insecurities they face. Not all non-traditional students are the same. We are all shaped by our life experiences; however, the external responsibilities of non-traditional students can be a little different as a result of their age. This study hopes to uncover how adult student learners are shaped by their previous educational and life experiences in unique ways and how that impacts their success in the classroom. Looking at one non-traditional student can in no way provide a

generalization of other non-traditional students with different backgrounds and situations. The perspectives of adult students by their professors will also vary; however, their insight will help to paint a picture of this diverse and complicated student population. According to a professor in this study, non-traditional students are unique:

They are go-getters because they've had a taste of what it means to try and build a career and exist in the real world. Those few moments where maybe they feel like their job is kicking them around or they're struggling, that sort of sets them up to just buckle down and be ready to do what needs to be done.

They have a significant amount of life experience when they enter the college classroom, and this presents them with benefits and barriers that they have to contend with over the course of their academic journey. Some of these benefits and barriers will be addressed in this chapter; others will be discussed in chapters three and four. The following research questions will be addressed: What is the history behind non-traditional students in higher education? Why do non-traditional students enroll in higher education? What kind of involvement does the non-traditional student have in the social activities on campus? What are the non-traditional students' perceptions of traditional students? What are their motivations behind finishing their degree?

To understand the characteristics of non-traditional students both inside and outside the classroom, this research utilizes a case study methodology where one institution is closely analyzed—at the student, program, department, and administrative levels—to gather in-depth data on how non-traditional students interpret their experiences, and the meaning behind these experiences, in order to understand how they construct their perceptions of their university experiences as older students at California State University, Stanislaus in Turlock, California. The purpose of this particular chapter is to provide a look at the non-traditional student as a

unique presence on the university campus, and their experiences in the literature program in the English Department. Three non-traditional students were interviewed and their experiences are the focus in the discussion here. Five professors were also interviewed for this study including one composition director, the department chair, an assistant professor in the program that teaches technical and professional writing, and two full-time lecturers.

Initially, this study was intended to focus on first-year composition. However, after the initial emails were sent out to faculty to elicit participation, it was discovered that non-traditional students take freshman composition courses at this institution a lot less frequently than traditional students. Non-traditional students generally arrive at CSU Stanislaus as transfer students from the neighboring community colleges in the area. As a result, the research gathered for this study involves upper-division English classes like business writing, grant writing, and the literature courses that are requirements for the Bachelor's degree. The non-traditional students who are at the center of the discussion for this chapter are juniors and seniors in the literature program. This means that their reported experiences does not include those they had in their freshman composition courses since that took place several years ago and in most cases at another institution, and will involve their experiences in upper-division literature courses with faculty that teach literature. Four of the five professors in this study do not teach literature and their input will be found mainly in chapters three, four, five.

Institutional Responses to Non-Traditional Students

Before World War II, William H. Maehl (2004) reports that college admissions consisted of an elite group of full-time students that made up about 5 percent of the nation's population. After the war, a changing workforce and its requirements to sustain the technological evolution over the years has required a more highly trained employee (Kasworm, 2003; Maehl, 2004).

Much of the curriculum in the early to middle 1900s has been adapted to fit this trend: liberal arts colleges migrated from offering the classics to the elite, to courses that focused on the changes that were taking place in the workforce. As many different types of students enrolled in higher education, the conception of the adult learner began to change.

The capacity for adults to learn was recognized after the war and many policies were put into place to accommodate adult students in higher education. The General Educational Development (GED) examination allowed those that did not complete the high school diploma to provide proof that they could meet the prerequisites for college-level coursework (Maehl, 2004). The Serviceman's Readjustment Act in 1944 provided veterans with resources that helped them enter college after they left the service. The G.I. Bill gave World War II veterans a stronger presence on college and university campuses across the country (Kasworm, 2003; Maehl, 2004). This act increased student enrollment in all educational institutions, especially through the development of community colleges across the nation (Maehl, 2004). As a result, getting a clearer understanding of this increased student base was an imperative to the development of higher education in all capacities.

The emergence of adult students in higher education has also had an influence in the development of literacy and writing studies pedagogy during the middle of the 20th century. The student population in higher education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was predominantly white and socioeconomically middle to upper class (Bannon, 2016; Hansman and Wilson, 1998). This began to change after World War II when veterans and non-traditional students began enrolling at colleges and universities. Students entered the composition classroom with varying degrees of writing and literacy abilities and faculty were placed into the difficult position of learning how to accommodate for all differences in educational backgrounds. The Dartmouth

Conference in 1966 convened with the purpose of addressing the emergent needs of the writing and composition discipline in order to establish pedagogical approaches to the teaching writing and reading (Bannon, 2016). Since then, many changes to writing pedagogy ideologies have been influenced by the changing student demographic. More discussion of this evolution will be addressed further in chapter five.

Many programs outside of composition studies also evolved to adjust pedagogy for the emergence of non-traditional student. By the 1960s, many colleges adjusted their college procedures to incorporate the needs of working adults who were also enrolled in their programs. Institutions began offering extension programs and night classes for students with certain degrees. New degree programs were created to assist the needs of non-traditional students in higher education. These services consisted of providing night classes to students in certain degree programs in order to accommodate their rigid working schedules and creating new degree programs that support their current work environments. For example, the University of Oklahoma created the University Without Walls consortium. This program offered government employees various programs, like a bachelor's degree in liberal arts, to support an advancement in their current jobs (Maehl, 2004). Many degree programs created for the non-traditional student during this time focused on supporting their professional life.

The programs offered to non-traditional students were sometimes conducted in unconventional settings such as a biological parks management training program taking place at a zoo or courses facilitated aboard ships, "industrial plants, in prisons, or on military bases" (Ruyle and Geiselman, 1974, p. 68). Some non-traditional programs were designed "for atypical students such as housewives or for new occupational groups such as teachers' aides and health paraprofessionals" so their processes were unconventional in that classes were held off-campus,

sometimes coursework was accelerated, and in many cases were facilitated using individualized styles of instruction (Ruyle and Geiselman, 1974, p. 69). By 1972, between one-fourth and one third of all colleges across the United States offered credit-earning degree programs that were tailored to the needs of non-traditional students (Ruyle and Geiselman, 1974). This number would continue to grow over the years.

The Non-Traditional Student Defined

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) website defines the non-traditional student as first being identifiable by being older than 24 years old. A traditional college student is most commonly considered to be a recent high school graduate between the ages of 18-23. There are three criteria, in conjunction with age, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, that help to support the decisions and behaviors of non-traditional students and describe their differences from traditional students: they diverge from normal college enrollment patterns by enrolling part-time and taking time off between semesters, they have financial and family responsibilities that are their primary goals before their education, and they might have unconventional high school credentials like a GED or a certificate of completion rather than a diploma.

One of the reasons non-traditional students are a significant research interest for educational institutions is the fact that they represent a majority of students that begin college and do not finish their degree. According to Paul Fain (2014), the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center conducted a study in 2014 and reported that non-traditional students aged 24-29 years old are the most common type of student that comes near to finishing their degree but do not complete it. The study called these students “potential completers” because they get very close to increasing their institution’s degree completion goals. Generally,

these potential completers have been out of education for two to six years and one fourth have been “enrolled in college continuously or intermittently for seven years or longer” and “about 36 percent spread their enrollments over four to six years” (Fain, 2014, p. 9). This complicates the educational journey of non-traditional students and makes it difficult for institutional personnel to track their progress through the system. Many of them never complete their degree.

It is very common for this student to have “stopped out” from college before they left for good. This means they took a break from college and returned at some point to continue. This population of potential completers makes up about 4 million students over the last two decades according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. These students constitute a large portion of educational capital that could be better understood in order to reduce student attrition rates and increase graduation rates. Understanding how this student base learns differently from traditional students is a step in understanding student attrition in non-traditional students.

Adult Students in Higher Education

Conversations about the characteristics of adult learning began in the early 1900s after World War I (Knowles, et al., 2005). According to *The Handbook for Adult Education* (1934), the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) was developed in 1926 as a way to organize groups that worked with adult students or who were conducting research on adult students involved in education, in order to share information and provide a platform for interaction. It was determined at this time that adult students in higher education were the subject of an important discussion in many educational settings and a unifying organization provided a place for educators and researchers to convene and learn from each other (*The Handbook for Adult Education*, 1934). The Carnegie Corporation of New York also began providing funding

for research projects that focused on adult students around the same time that AAAE was started. Many publications began surfacing as a result of the burgeoning interest in adult learning such as *The Meaning of Adult Education* published in 1926, *Adult Interests* in 1935, and *Adult Abilities* in 1938. The result of some of this research indicated “that adults could learn and that they possessed interests and abilities that were different from those of children” (Knowles, et al., 2005, p. 36-37). This began other waves of new research into adult learning theory.

Adult education continued to show up in many disciplines in the mid-1900s: clinical psychology, developmental psychology, and philosophy. The term “andragogy” surfaced after the attempt to bring all of the research from these other disciplines together into one cohesive framework that describes the critical characteristics of adult learning as it is differentiated from “pedagogy.” In 1968, Malcolm Knowles wrote an article titled “Andragogy, Not Pedagogy” that first publicly introduced the term in higher education in a journal called *Adult Leadership* (Knowles, et al., 2005). There are very distinct differences between pedagogy and andragogy.

Historically, the term “pedagogy” arose between the seventh and twelfth centuries as a way of describing and understanding the teaching experiences of the faculty who worked with young boys in religious private schools during this time. The pedagogical model that the faculty from these monastic and cathedral schools created influenced primary and secondary education; unfortunately, as adult education programs surfaced all over the country after World War I, the pedagogical model was utilized because it was the only one available to educators: “until fairly recently, adults have by and large been taught as if they were children” (Knowles, et al., 2005, p. 61). The pedagogical learning theories are very different from andragogical learning theories.

The pedagogical model places the teacher in a position to take “full responsibility for making all decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned,

and if it has been learned,” which leaves the learner in the “submissive role of following a teacher’s instructions” (Knowles, et al., 2005, p. 61-62). The learner, according to this model, knows that he or she must learn, and complete learning tasks, in order to pass and move on to the next level. It is not necessarily important that the learner understand how the learning activity affects his or her life. The learner is perceived as a passive, dependent participant in the learning environment and it is the teacher that determines when the he or she must learn. Prior life experiences are not a resource that the learner can use within the educational context; it is the experience of the teacher that matters in educational transactions since they are used to make curriculum decisions. Grades, and the approval of parents and teachers, are the external motivators for learners in the pedagogical model (Knowles et al., 2005). These basic tenets of pedagogy make assumptions about young learners and their inability to see themselves as having control over their learning and having life experiences that can be used to aid what and how they can learn.

The andragogical model was created by Malcolm Knowles using six basic assumptions about how the adult student learns and what motivates him or her to enter into the learning environment. These assumptions are the result of the biological, legal, social, and psychological definitions of “adult” compared to that of a child. For example, biologically we become adults when we reach reproduction age. Legally, we become adults when we can vote or marry without parental consent. Socially, we become adults when we support ourselves financially, or become parents and spouses in a family unit. Psychologically, we “become adults when we arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for our own lives, of being self-directing” (Knowles, 2005, p. 64). This last definition of adulthood is a critical component to the creation of the andragogical

assumptions outlined in Knowles (2005) framework. A description of Knowles' andragogical model will be addressed in more detail in chapter three of this project.

Educational Choices of Non-Traditional Students

Non-traditional students have a tendency to enroll in a variety of educational programs before they get their degree. Every situation is unique and "each adult enrolls in college with a complex set of beliefs, internal demands, and external pressures" (Kasworm, 2003, p. 5). Two of the non-traditional students in this study attended a community college prior to enrolling at CSU Stanislaus. It is very common for non-traditional students to begin their education at a community college: "Nationally, 58.7 percent of adult undergraduate students participate in two-year or under institution" (Kasworm, 2003, p. 7). The community college system provides convenient education to many students with non-traditional circumstances.

Non-traditional students often view higher education a little differently than traditional college students who enter academia in their late teens and early twenties. Depending on the institution, traditional students will make decisions that influence their daily lives like choosing to live on campus if they have left the immediate vicinity of their childhood home, restricting work hours to on-campus work study experiences or part-time work that doesn't interfere with their classes, and joining fraternities and sororities to enhance their social experiences. These activities make their college experience the focal point in their lives. Non-traditional students see their college experience as a secondary element that pivots around their personal lives and expectations: "College for most adults is not a physical separation from their past worlds" (Kasworm, 2008, p.27). This does not mean that their performance in college holds any less importance than those of traditional-aged students; however, the complexities of their lives add a dynamic that create competing forces between work, family, and school.

One of the non-traditional students in this study, Danielle, is a native to Stanislaus County and fulfilled her general education requirement in 5 years at the local community college before transferring to CSU Stanislaus. She originally started college at California State University (CSU) San Francisco, about 80 miles away, after she graduated high school. She discovered she was pregnant and left after her first semester to come back home to raise her child. Her decision to leave San Francisco is the result of the financial security she found being closer to her parents and within an economic environment that was more conducive to her socioeconomic status as a young, inexperienced, and poor college student. She enrolled at CSU Stanislaus during the spring semester while she was still pregnant; however, she had to drop all of her classes after 4 weeks because complications with her pregnancy required that she be on bed rest. She began her 5-year journey at a community college the following fall semester, one year after she left CSU San Francisco. This shows that many of the decisions that non-traditional students make are based on life experiences that directly influence their complicated situation. Their choices are tied to their immediate surroundings. It was important to Danielle that she continued her education. Her choices revealed a combination of her desires to remain a college student and a need to take care of her daughter. According to Kasworm (2003), “adult undergraduate students typically enroll in a college that is readily accessible, relevant to current life needs, cost-effective, flexible in course scheduling, and supportive of adult lifestyle commitments” (p. 7). Danielle’s pregnancy impeded her education at CSU San Francisco, yet she consistently made decisions that kept her enrolled in college while she tended to her responsibilities as a new mother.

A second non-traditional student in this study, Deidre, spent three years at a community college before graduating with her AA degree. After she got her AA degree, she began working

at a high school in her hometown as part of the office staff 18 years ago. She is currently the business manager of the office and completes the school budgets and manages the facility and maintenance orders. A few years ago she decided to get her BA so that she could eventually become a high school English teacher. Her employment at this high school has tethered her to a specific schedule that determines her life trajectory at this moment. She is a fixture at the high school and she makes decisions that support her life within it. Deidre is embedded in the life she lives outside of education:

I really love my high school. I was there all when my oldest son went and I would like to be there when my youngest son goes in a couple of years. We'll see what happens with teaching. If I teach, I may not be able to teach there. It depends on what openings are there and what is going on in the district. For me, I really like my job and I like where I am.

Deidre recently graduated with her BA from CSU Stanislaus, yet she continues to work in the same position she had before she finished her undergraduate work.

Deidre's decision to remain at the high school in a capacity that does not utilize her new skills reflects on the motivators that drive her decision-making. These decisions might be based on her desire to coordinate new job decisions with her family life. According to Kasworm (2003), about "25 percent of twenty-four to twenty-nine-year-olds, 69 percent of thirty-to thirty-nine-year-olds, and 58 percent of forty-year-old and older adult students are parents with dependent children" (p. 9). Many non-traditional students exit higher education in order to accommodate for their complex family lives, and, as shown in this study, their choices to return to school are contingent upon their ability to juggle both school and their family responsibilities. Deidre is purposefully remaining employed at this high school in order to be near her younger

son through his high school years. In this case, her educational plans are subservient to her role as a mother. Her desire to become a high school English teacher is a professional goal for the future when it doesn't interfere with her family's development.

Working a full-time job complicates educational planning for most non-traditional students. Deidre works full-time while also taking classes at CSU Stanislaus two afternoons a week. This would not have been possible without the patience and flexibility of her employer. She reflected on the support she received from the school principal:

I had a very understanding principal... I'm in a type of position where I'm behind the scenes more so I could come and go. My principal was very flexible with me, which was nice because...I could complete my degree inside a classroom. You have to be able to go during the day and for most people, you can't do that. If you work during the day, you can't go to class during the day.

Deidre was fortunate to have the ability to coordinate an acceptable work schedule with her boss in order for her to continue her education. Kasworm (2003) describes some non-traditional students as proactive planners "who [seek] out college studies after several years of thinking and strategizing" with purposeful plans for "a more complementary work situation, or negotiation with family for support of college attendance" (p. 6). Deidre made decisions that are conducive and accepted by her primary life responsibilities: her family and her job. She spent time cultivating a relationship with her boss and this led to a support structure that made her educational goals possible. She had time to think about how she would manage a full-time job and the part-time enrollment in English classes she would take for her BA. She planned her life so that she could become a college student and juggle her other responsibilities. Non-traditional students like Deidre learn negotiation skills in order to make life experiences, like going back to

college, manageable. Deciding to go back to college isn't an operation that can be completed independently by the non-traditional student. For non-traditional students like Danielle and Deidre, it requires the collaboration of family and work associates.

The third non-traditional student in this study is Jamie who enrolled, for the first time, at CSU Stanislaus after graduating high school. She was a full-time undergraduate for two years before she left to get married and raise her family. She returned 13 years later to finish her bachelor's degree. Upon her return she decided to change her major from child development to English: "I didn't want to do what I had been doing as a stay-at-home-mom for the last 13 years." The interesting aspect of Jamie's journey is that she found that her previous major, child development, was not something that she wanted to do all her life after spending the time raising her kids. An English degree gave her a way of diversifying her interests. Jamie got married and began a family halfway through her college education. She made the decision to re-enroll once it was conducive with her family responsibilities. In the same way that Danielle and Deidre made the decision to return to college, Jamie made sure that her family's needs were met before pursuing her own career dreams. The language that Jamie uses also indicated the complexities of decision-making for non-traditional students with children and spouses. She described the difficulties of attending night classes as a parent: "we just felt like three nights a week was too much to be gone." The use of "we" in her discussion of the problems she and her family face when she is absent three nights a week suggests that her choices are determined collaboratively by the needs of her first priority: her family.

This study revealed that non-traditional students choose academic paths that assist their educational needs and provide the least resistance from their work schedules and family obligations. These students make decisions about their classes based on their current familial

arrangement. Students who have young children, like Danielle and Jamie, choose to enroll in classes as long as it does not interfere with their child's upbringing. As will be discussed in chapter three, these students learn to negotiate their class schedule with their family responsibilities so that they can effectively juggle both roles as mother and student. Danielle and Jamie did not work while they attended CSU Stanislaus. Deidre, however, did work while she took classes. She does not have young children, but her choices reflected her need to balance her three life roles: mother, student, full-time employee.

The Involvement of Non-Traditional Students in the Social Activities of the University

Jamie spent 13 years as a stay-at-mom before she returned to complete her degree. By this time, she was already in her thirties and had many years of life experience. Many non-traditional students develop anxieties about returning to college as an older peer to traditional-aged students (Ntiri, Schindler, Henry, 2004). When asked about what it was like to come back to the world of academia as an undergrad where the majority of students are 18-22 years old, she stated that she was scared and intimidated by the idea:

I thought I would be the oldest one in all of my classes. I thought that I wouldn't have any friends and that I'd pretty much be on my own. I was really nervous about any group projects being assigned because I didn't think that younger students would even want to connect with me.

Non-traditional students like the ones in this study fear that they will not be able to associate with their younger peers. In Jamie's case, she remembered what it was like to be an undergraduate student at 20 years old; however, that vision was not in sync with her new identity as an older student with more life experience. In some instances, non-traditional students have

not had many interactions with traditional aged students as a result of their workplace setting and family lifestyle. This can create anxieties about the interactions that might occur in the classroom. Jamie recalled these unsettling feelings that came about every time she visited the first class session of the semester: “There was definitely a feeling that I was much older and in a very different place than everybody.” These anxieties about age differences also took place outside the classroom and varied in degrees depending on the social situation.

CSU Stanislaus has a social center at the middle of the campus that connects various popular classroom buildings. Students are required to walk through this quad in order to reach many of the liberal arts classes, such as English, on the western side of campus, and any science and engineering classes on the more eastern side of the school. The cafeteria, student services, and library surround the various sides of the quad and help to create its social center. The middle of the quad is a large grassy area with intermittent park benches for lounging, outdoor eating, and napping on the grass under the shade trees. This lounging park is then surrounded by wide cement walkways that connect the buildings on opposite sides of the quad. The walkways that line the grassy area are large enough for student fraternities, sororities, and other organizations that arrange communication tables for easy access to students as they walk through the social area. Jamie noted what it was like being an older student and walking through the social center on campus, “It was definitely different in that being on the quad and having fraternities and the sororities and the clubs going on.” This makes non-traditional students feel a little uneasy about being older than many of the students that are socially participating on campus. Most of the student organizations are targeted to young students because they require time-intensive memberships like sororities and fraternities, or they address traditional-age concerns like work study and study-abroad excursions that exclude older students with children and other demands.

Socially, some non-traditional students do not feel like they fit in with campus life as a result of their age and this leads to institutional alienation for some of them. Student engagement becomes an issue for these students as they juggle their academic, familial, and professional lives. As a result, “Adult learners may be less likely to engage with colleges than younger undergraduates due to competing responsibilities and developmental relevancy of such interaction.” (Pfahl, et al., 2010, p. 237). This naturally creates rifts in the social seam of student extra-curricular engagement. Jamie described her anxieties about entering campus as an older student: “I think going onto campus and entering into campus life, I just felt so disconnected.” Danielle corroborated this sentiment by admitting, “as an older student, I tend to stick to myself a little bit.” Both students realized that there might have been programs and social events that would have interested them: “I didn’t really realize until later that being an older student, I could have utilized all of those things in my own way. They were still open to me. I just didn’t really feel a part of campus life.” Their misconceptions were the result of the overwhelming number of traditional students that surrounded them on campus who were actively participating in traditional-age activities. In some ways, it seems that older students like those in this study are not open to many college activities and social events because there are not enough other non-traditional students that also participate. They are outnumbered in the college environment, and the differences between these two sets of students are expansive and clearly evident in the social areas on campus. This difference is manifested in the quad at CSU Stanislaus: “It seems like some of them, their personal lives are really, really important to them still, as opposed to their professional and student lives, so I have a lot of people in my classes that are involved in sororities who fall behind because they were at too many sorority events that week.” The differences lie in age and circumstance according to Danielle, “I feel that I guess they don’t

oftentimes take it [their classes] as seriously because they don't really have to yet," which adds to the divide between the two types of students.

The research from this study also suggests that non-traditional students do not see value in many of the social activities that take place on campus until they reflect on these benefits after they complete their program. Deidre stated:

I didn't get involved too much in extracurricular activities. That's not why I was there. I was there to go to class and then I would go home. I didn't go to the rec center. I didn't go to any of that, you know that type of stuff.

This reveals the perspectives of many non-traditional students that enroll in college with work responsibilities and families to support. Many of these students do not have the time (Allen and Zhang, 2016); yet, in this study it was evident that socializing was not part of the desired college experience. These students were not interested in a social integration with traditional, and even other adult students at the university. Jamie corroborated this sentiment by saying:

I went to school and I went home and had my own life and I enjoyed the friends I made, but I wasn't actively seeking any ways of socializing with people or clubs. I mean, I joined the Honor Society for the English department, but I wasn't looking for anything else. You know?

Older students like Deidre and Jamie purposefully avoided the social interactions that the campus provided to all students. This seems to support the idea that non-traditional students view their academic experiences as the most important activity during their time in college. From their perspective, if the social arena does not offer support to their academic goals, it is not worth the time and effort to participate.

Allen and Zhang (2016) conducted a study on non-traditional community college students in STEM fields who were transferring to an engineering program at a four-year university. They were interested in learning student motivations behind continued education in engineering fields and their approaches to learning in a university environment as older students. They found that adult students were not engaging in social activities outside of class because they “believed their academic success was best supported by not engaging in campus activities or student organizations, even though they understood the benefits they would obtain from their participation” (Allen & Zhang, 2016, p. 80). This study also found that adult students viewed the extracurricular social activities provided on campus as useful in helping the younger, more traditional-aged, students develop interpersonal and communication skills. The non-traditional students stated that they had already developed these skills in their life experiences prior to college enrollment. This seems to propose that non-traditional students do not always see the immediate benefit of the social activities on campus and it also implies that these students see themselves as being a different kind of student from the traditional-aged learners.

Many studies of non-traditional students seem to focus attention on the academic aspects of campus life for older students; however, it has been difficult to find research that addresses the social phobias that are developed as a result of being an older student among a predominantly younger student base. This study found that one way non-traditional students cope with these differences is by seeking out other older students in their classes. Most of the upper-division composition and literature classes had at least two or three non-traditional students according to Jamie. She said that this helped her to feel more at ease in the classroom. Deidre and Jamie became good friends and developed a social circle with a few of the other non-traditional students in their program. They purposefully chose to take certain classes together whenever

possible so that they could maintain their sense of community in the academic setting. Danielle was still in her twenties when she enrolled at CSU Stanislaus and found ways of blending in with the younger students: “I made a lot of friends in the classroom who were very willing to work with me and talk with me and collaborate with me who were all much younger than I was, than I am.”

The key to counseling and other campus support measures are to help “normalize [non-traditional students’] class experience rather than abandon them in a sea of traditional undergraduates;” however, this is not an easy task given the social structures of the campus (Ntiri, Schindler, Henry, 2004, p. 48). Overall, “Adult students have anxiety from being away from school for many years, maybe also from negative past experiences of education, and in some cases from doubts about the rigor of their study skills, thinking, or memory,” which all play out as they negotiate what it means to be a new, returning, or transfer student at a university with a robust social sphere (Ntiri, Schindler, Henry, 2004, p. 48).

Non-Traditional Student Perceptions of Traditional Students

The non-traditional students in this study see themselves as being very different socially, academically, and cognitively from traditional-aged students. These differences are manifested in classroom interactions between students and professors. There is very little literature that addresses the perceptions of non-traditional students and the way they perceive how traditional students behave in higher education. The interactions between adult students and traditional students are critical to the way non-traditional students see themselves as learners in an environment dominated by young students. All three non-traditional students in this study complained about the way younger students interacted with the professor in their classes. One of the questions that the adult students were asked in this research during the interview process was

“What do you perceive as the major differences between yourself and the traditional students in your classes?” The first responses to this question were negative and ultimately became the precursor to uncomfortable stories of traditional students behaving badly in their classes. Jamie described some of her experiences with the traditional students in her undergraduate courses:

I noticed people speak to the instructors in ways that I never was taught was okay and I saw it on a collective level. It wasn't just one or two people. It was a lot of people in a lot of my classes just you know, there's much more disrespect and challenging and arguing with the professor about assignments about what we were even going to discuss that day.

That was baffling to me at first.

The alarm of these behaviors exhibited by traditional students in the classroom resonated with all three non-traditional students in this study. Two of these students had attended college prior to re-enrolling after a significant amount of time away from higher education. The rude behaviors of the traditional students were obviously concerning to the adult students who did not remember their previous classroom experiences being this same way. In their interviews they wondered whether times had changed and whether the consequences of these changes affected the social dynamics of higher education. Deidre went on to discuss that this behavior was the result of a lack of respect on the part of the traditional student for the classroom: “There is a different attitude between me and the younger students about the respect to the professor.” According to Jamie, students were also very comfortable using foul language with other students in the class with the professor as a spectator. She was appalled that these students were not regulated in their speech and conduct in class:

I think the thing that was even more jarring for me was that the professor was allowing it.

I was like, I would never have even imagined speaking to a professor like that and having him just ignore the comment.

Non-traditional students see the professor as a leader and mediator of the class. When adult students perceive the professor making decisions that do not align with their view of proper classroom management, as seems to be the case with Jamie and Deidre above, it makes them feel uncomfortable. These non-traditional students found this behavior very disconcerting.

The perceptions of non-traditional students in this study regarding the poor behavior of the young students and the way the professor handled these situations seemed to transcend into other areas of classroom management. Jamie complained about the fact that professors would change assignments due to the complaints of traditional students:

They [the professors] would modify assignments based on the argument that students would give them and I was blown away by that. I was like I can't even imagine just doing that. You know? I mean, that when I first started and of course, professors will sometimes modify assignments if they felt like their workloads are getting too heavy, or ask the student, okay this is a lot maybe we will take it back a notch, but to have a student complain and argue and then the professor agreed to modify the assignment, I was shocked when that happened.

All of the non-traditional students in this study wished the professors were stricter with the classroom policies and behaviors of the traditional students. This speaks to the need of adult students to feel that their professor remains consistent in the actions and expectations of the students. Non-traditional students want rules to apply to the entire class. They want to know that the professor will stick to his original plans and keep policies in place according to his syllabus.

In some cases, adult students lose confidence in the instructor's ability to run the class. Danielle stated, "I think they were all very accommodating, sometimes too accommodating with the younger students. Like really, 'You're going to let them turn that in late?'" This suggests that adult students will question the actions of their professor when they are not handled to their perceived appropriateness. This also reflects one of the ways that a professor can lose credibility with the adult students in his class.

Another characteristic of traditional students that adult students experienced was the lack of student engagement with other students and in the content of the class. It was obvious when the younger students did not care about a class. Deidre described the way they would show up to her astronomy class without paper or pencils and ask to borrow them from their neighbors when they needed them. She laughed as she recalled a moment when a traditional student asked her for a scantron sheet in order to take the mid-term test. She didn't have an extra sheet, so he was forced to leave class in order to buy one. She stated:

It was super frustrating because those were kids who really didn't care about astronomy. I didn't care either, but you know, when you are in your 40s, you show up with pencils and scantrons and you're prepared. When you're a 20-year-old, you don't. That could be frustrating.

These issues do not negatively impact the performance of non-traditional students in their courses; however, it does affect the way the non-traditional student perceives the educational experience and the space in which they have to interact with that experience.

Another difference between adult students and younger college students is the perception of time. Adults recognize that there is a necessity to their dedication that is restricted by the movement of time. They have families to support, jobs to maintain, and relationships beyond the

classroom to preserve. Traditional students may also have these commitments; however, when the non-traditional students in this study were asked to reflect on the behaviors of younger students, their recollections indicate that in many cases these students do not perceive the same values of time as the older students. Deidre affirmed:

The older student is much more interested. They always are prepared and they're ready to go because it's their time and their time is valuable. We would watch the other kids drop the class or be thankful they got a 'C' and the older students, their time, they realized the value of their time. If they are going to be there, they're going to get the most out of the class. They expect that out of the professor too. They expect the professor to not give them busy work.

This study touches on an important difference between the older, more experienced students and their younger, more traditionally aged peers: their concept of time. Kasworm (2008) contends that this perception of time, or lack of in regards to some of the traditional students, is a key determinant in the way a student will engage with his or her surroundings.

An emotional engagement is predicated on the way a person views his future and the amount of time he is given to accomplish those goals. When people reach a certain age in their life, they begin to recognize their limitations, and as a result, observe the passing of time differently. This influences adult students and their reasons for enrolling in college later in life and their desire to complete the coursework and learn new skills that they can transfer into their adult lives outside of school. Danielle reflected on her perceptions of the differences between non-traditional and traditional students:

At 25, I realized, “Oh crap, I’m getting old. I have to finish this. I have to make sure I get the best grades I possibly can. This is my entire future.” But at 22 I don’t feel that they see that. A lot of them don’t know what they are going to do when they graduate.

Danielle defined what she saw as the difference in her perception of time at 22 years old and at 25 years old. Even though there is only a three-year gap between each age, this exemplifies that there is a moment in an adult student’s life where her concept of time changes, along with her perceived goals for the remaining time in her future. Kasworm (2008) further describes how the perception of time influences student engagement: “Part of this persistence and learning engagement is supported by the theory of socioemotional selectivity, which suggests that the perception of time that adult learners have plays a fundamental role regarding these emotional engagements in significant academic learning.” (Kasworm, 2008, p. 29-30). The adult students in this study plan by the schedule provided by their professor. They get frustrated when other students do not take a class seriously. It leads to comments like those from Danielle who stated, “But I don’t know if [traditional students] really appreciate all their classes to the same degree. Unless they know what they want to do and they’re passionate about it. For the most part, they don’t know that.” Some adult students perceive the actions of traditional students, or lack of, as being indicators of their relationship to time. As shown in this quote, they question whether the traditional student has the ability to see what they want to do with their future and whether this has an influence on their behavior in the classroom. This can lead frustrating interactions between adult students and traditional students in the learning environment.

Deidre was angry with the other students in her senior seminar class because she was the only person in the class engaging with the professor. The senior seminar classes are designed to be smaller and more intimate in order to dedicate more time to professor/student interaction with

course content. She was unhappy with this class and was complaining about it to Jamie from this study. Here is her recollection:

I was complaining to her [Jamie] about how bad my senior seminar class was. Not what he was teaching but the rest of the students. I was complaining how frustrated [I was], and a girl next to me said, "I'm in that class," and I looked at her and went, "Really? I didn't know that. Have you ever spoke?" She said "No." I went, "Why don't you speak? It would be nice if you spoke." I literally didn't know she was in the class. I was like, "We have a class with like 10 people" and I'm like, "I literally didn't know you were in the class because you sit there with your head down." I couldn't be apologetic because I was like, "You're the reason I'm annoyed."

This story captures the continued annoyance of Deidre's tirade on her experiences with some of the traditional students in her classes. She was especially irritated at the student who did not seem concerned that she had not participated in the class discussions. It is clear that Deidre wanted this student to feel unnoticed in the class, and embarrassed about this fact, through her agitated comments and recommendations. She complained that most class discussions consisted of a dialogue between herself and the professor while the traditional students sat quietly. Her frustration continued in her interview: "I was like, 'You're a senior. This is your senior seminar. You need to speak up and not sit there like an idiot.' Sometimes Dr. Corbin and I would be having conversations, like everyone else is sitting there, and I'm like, 'Really? You people suck.'"

According to the perspectives of the non-traditional students who participated in this study, they feel like they are more invested in their education than many of the traditional students. Deidre described how non-traditional students behave in the classroom:

The older student is not afraid to speak up. They will answer the questions. They will engage in a discussion with the professor. They will disagree with the professor if they feel they need to. They are not afraid; whereas, the younger students, you could still see so many of them sitting towards the back thinking “Don’t let them call on me.” The older student is sitting up in front, paying close attention and literally have a discussion.

Danielle maintained that their interactions within the classroom sphere is partly due to the fact that they are more interested in what the professor is saying compared to traditional students. They also have more life experience, and as a result “they have some context. They are not just there to memorize it. They are actually interested and they can connect things.” According to the students in this study, adult students have the ability to connect their life experience with what they learn in the classroom. This makes learning more fun and more effective. Deidre said that their involvement in the classroom setting enhances the class:

We knew what was going on in the news. We knew current events. We understood; whereas, the younger students didn’t always get it. They had learned what they learned in high school, but they weren’t watching the news. They didn’t know recent history. They just, you know, just because we’d been alive and lived through it, we knew it.

Based on the information collected in this research, non-traditional students contend that they are more engaged in the classroom with the professor and the content of the curriculum than traditional students. They also argue that their ability to connect their life experiences with classroom content makes it easier for them to engage with multiple aspects of the educational environment.

The Motivations Behind Finishing

Non-traditional students seem to be motivated by the external factors in their lives that affect the inner-workings of their personal lives. One of these external factors is the economic security of a college degree. For example, Jamie mentioned that:

Well, I think for me, my motivation was just I think just being able to accomplish that goal of having a degree and knowing that it's important and wanting to set that example for my kids that it's important to get an education. You know, now that I've finished and even later in my time at Stanislaus State, the idea of being employable and marketable certainly began to creep in.

Jamie is one of many women who spend their twenties and early thirties raising their children instead of getting their college degree only to find that once their last child has reached a certain age and no longer needs their constant assistance, they decide to accomplish personal goals of their own. According to a study conducted on non-traditional women in higher education, Annemarie Vaccaro and Cheryl D. Lovell (2010) discovered that women find inspiration for higher education participation through their children. Their investment and determination to complete their degree was motivated by their devotion to model what it means to be a college graduate to their young children. In Jamie's case, motherhood transcended the home. Her role as mother went beyond providing for her children at home. She also wants to model the importance of a college education: "women's educational investment directly influenced the aspirations and educational success of their children. Being a good student became equated with being a good role model and mother" (Vaccaro and Lovell, 2010, p. 169). Deidre has a son who is attending a state university in a nearby city, and she hopes that her experiences will help him find his way through the higher education system. She warned him that through her own experiences as a

CSU student at Stanislaus, he should never receive anything lower than a “C” in his classes. If he does, she knows that it is evidence that he is not trying his hardest. In this case, not only is she modeling what it means to be an educated mother to her children, she is also making it clear to her progeny that she understands the college discourse community and can speak to the various types of experiences her children will encounter when they transition into higher education themselves. This exemplifies the complex situation that women find themselves when they face their role as mothers who want to be good role models for their children both inside and outside of the home.

This research also uncovered evidence that suggests that non-traditional students desire to get a degree to fulfill their personal goals and self-enrichment. Jamie mentioned that this was an initial motivation once her youngest child was old enough to attend preschool. She stressed the importance to her at the time to have “something for herself,” which suggests that the all-encompassing job of motherhood leaves some women needing more when their children reach a point when they are attending school:

In the beginning, it was more about accomplishing a goal and it was about doing something for myself after thirteen years of being solely a stay-at-home mom. I did volunteer work in that time but just wanting to have something for myself, and also my husband was very passionate about me going back to school and finishing my degree as well. I was just that goal and that appreciation for education was the primary reason I went back.

The fact that Jamie began her studies at CSU Stanislaus as a freshman 15 years ago gives her a starting point when thinking about her education. She had already begun a process that was the result of her desire for a career some day in her life. She is planning on enrolling in a graduate

program for creative writing as soon as she is able. She is currently looking into online programs that offer more flexibility to her role as both student and full-time mother. Danielle mentioned that her motivation to finish was her dedication to a life outside of the hectic world of motherhood and negotiating class schedules and studying time. She described her current frame of mind as a senior finishing her last year of coursework: “My goal was to get out, to get finished. Which I know that sounds awful. There is a lot of learning. I get that but there’s also, you know, I had a goal, I wanted this done.” For many non-traditional students, education is a means to an end. A little stubbornness and drive is what it takes to finish.

Conclusion

Non-traditional students are a unique student base in colleges and universities across the nation. The three non-traditional students in this study cannot be generalized to represent the experiences and life situations of all older students in bachelor’s programs; however, this data can be used to support a base understanding of the life struggles that some of them face, and the variety of roles that they juggle on a daily basis as college students, mothers, and employees. These roles have an impact on their participation, or lack of participation, on a campus. More research needs to be conducted on the emotional impacts of non-traditional students on college campuses where a strong social presence can be found. CSU Stanislaus is a commuter school, but a visitor to the campus can feel the importance of the social center when it is flooded with students and organizations during lunch hour. This atmosphere can have effects on all of the student body that does not feel the same sense of participation, including non-traditional students. Developing more ways of learning about the characteristics of non-traditional students will benefit all learning environments.

Chapter Three: Institutional and Programmatic Structures that Support the Non-Traditional Student

The number of non-traditional students in higher education is at a consistent increase in many institutions across the U. S. (Gast, 2013). In fact, “the greatest increase in postsecondary enrollment from 2009 to 2020 is projected to be among students who are 25 and older” (Gast, 2013). Unfortunately, there are many gaps in the data on adult students. While there is some research on the enrollment patterns of non-traditional students, factors that influence their degree completion, and the impact of their education on their overall lifetime earnings, “few sources allow for analyzing information on adults’ enrollment choices, financing patterns, or other key information by both age and the interaction with age with other demographic characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and income” (Sandmann, 2010, p. 228). This means that it is critical for the success of non-traditional students in higher education that more information is gathered on what makes them successful in our institutions and what barriers they face as they navigate through this complex system. According to Thomas Valentine and Gordon G. Darkenwald (1990) in their discussion of the forces that prevent adults from enrolling in higher education, “if administrators and program planners wish to facilitate attendance and increase enrollments, they need to learn more about their learners and the things that make participation difficult or impossible” (p. 39).

As discussed in previous chapters, non-traditional students face challenges upon entering the academic arena. Adult students face time constraints which pose significant barriers to their ability to participate in typical collegiate activities that traditional students are able to take advantage of like social clubs, fraternities and sororities, student government, study abroad experiences, etc. (Kasworm, 2008). Adult students generally enroll in a degree program and

continue to juggle outside responsibilities that require their attention. They usually have families, children, and part-time or full-time jobs that occupy a substantial amount of their time. Adult students may lack schedule flexibility and this results in issues with class registration and their ability to utilize campus amenities like tutoring, childcare facilities, and counseling services. The lapse in time between their previous educational experiences, whether it was in high school or in an earlier college program, can create educational hurdles that also require special attention. According to Kristin M. De Vito (2009), “the traditional structure and organization of continuing higher education poses significant barriers to success,” and these obstructions can cause adult students drop out when they are not institutionally supported (p. 4).

This chapter seeks to understand how the institution provides constructs that allow non-traditional students to successfully move through the system in the attempt to increase student engagement. The considerable diversity among the non-traditional student population makes it difficult to generalize for all students that fall into this category (Valentine and Darkenwald, 1990); however, this research will attempt to analyze various aspects of the institution that influence the non-traditional student population in the hopes of learning more about how this student base is accommodated in order to create a framework for future institutional decisions about students. The following research question will be used to guide the discussion in this chapter: What institutional support structures and programs represent best practices for the non-traditional student?

The organization of this chapter will focus on a discussion of the University Extended Education program since it is geared towards the adult student in its delivery, structure, and goals. The rest of the discussion will pull from other areas from the institution that also support non-traditional students and provide a picture of CSU Stanislaus and its infrastructure. It is with

great disappointment that a discussion of the campus writing center is not included here. The researcher was not able to secure interviews with any of the writing center staff.

The terms “adult” and “non-traditional” will be used interchangeably in this chapter. As discussed in previous chapters, the term “non-traditional” consists of factors including age, educational background of parents, minority status, employment rates, etc. For the purpose of this study, however, “non-traditional” refers to students over the age of twenty-four.

Extended Education

University Extended Education (UEE) is a program that all 23 CSUs across California have incorporated into their institutions. It is an alternative method of course delivery in a variety of fields intended to support the needs of the local economy. The following is the CSU Stanislaus University Extended Education mission:

UEE supports the University’s mission by serving the Central Valley with innovative programs in alternative formats and locations. Collaborating with college partners, programs are designed to maximize access in order to meet the existing and emerging educational/workforce needs.

These innovative delivery methods include online degree implementation, evening classes facilitated during the week, and full-day Saturday classes. The UEE program director at the CSU Stanislaus campus, Dr. Holly Cameron, said that only programs that offer classes outside of the traditional format are a part of Extended Education. She stated that the University Extended Education program is different from the rest of the college because “it is geared toward the accelerated. It’s geared toward our working adult. It’s very blended now. Most people are working adults. The majority are non-traditional students.” According to Mark Fincher (2010), the non-traditional student populations at colleges and universities get “less support to facilitate

their success than do their traditional-age counterparts” and have therefore “been left out of the substantial efforts put toward retention enhancement” (p. 17). Retention methods at the academic and administrative levels can help to increase student engagement and lower student attrition. One such method is implemented through UEE at CSU Stanislaus, which offers non-traditional students the ability to matriculate into a program that fits their tight schedules and can lead to lower levels of attrition. In fact, Fincher (2010) admits, “efforts to enhance the success of non-traditional students may be even more productive than efforts made for traditional students” (p. 17). Retention enhancement is very important to all institutions across the United States; UEE programs, like those at the CSUs across the state, are a model for non-traditional student engagement.

Accelerated programs like University Extended Education at CSU Stanislaus require students to increase their learning output in a shortened period of time. Fincher (2010) states that traditional programs are condensed to fit an abridged schedule where “some of the time savings can be produced by streamlining processes, eliminating absences, increasing student workloads, and reducing breaks” (p. 15). The rest of the time reduction is attributed to facilitating a curriculum that requires students to learn at faster rates than the traditional semester schedule. Fincher (2010) says that this can only occur if students are given resources to enhance their learning efficiency through the use of tutoring services, web-based learning support structures, and a reduction in curriculum redundancy. He also says that student engagement can be increased through administrative constructs that promote student success like providing placement testing, affordable tuition, easy access to alternative scheduling, and any other administrative barriers to student participation.

Some UEE programs across the state focus on providing certificates in a variety of fields that serve a particular segment of the workforce; others also incorporate degree programs. These programs are designed for students who have been working in a field and who want to polish their skills with a certificate or a degree that will help them move into other positions in their company or discipline. CSU Stanislaus primarily provides bachelor's and master's degree programs to continuing students, many of which are full-time employees in their industry as reported by Dr. Holly Cameron:

We are focused on the degree completion. We have a criminal justice program, a health science, a bachelor of arts in social science, which is kind of general studies, and then we have a very unique program: the accelerated second bachelor of science in nursing, ASBSN.

Due to the impacted nature of higher education in California, the ASBSN is the only bachelor's program that allows students to return to school to pursue a second bachelor's degree in nursing. A second bachelor's in nursing supports the constant need for nurses in the various impacted areas in California. A Pre-Licensure Nursing Program Director and professor, MaryAnne, stated that many non-traditional students decide to pursue a nursing degree: "I want to come back for a year-plus and get my nursing degree like I always thought I wanted to." This program follows a full-time intensive schedule that generally meets every day and requires internships that take place during the week.

The bachelor's in nursing degree (BSN) is offered to undergraduates who have just finished their general education requirements and, according to Professor MaryAnne, are generally a mix of traditional-aged students with limited work experience, if any, in health sciences and non-traditional students with varied amounts of experience. The BSN also attracts

current registered nurses who would like to go back to school to increase their opportunities in the health field. Dr. Holly Cameron described how the UEE program fulfills the needs of the local economy by providing the Stanislaus county region with education that is relevant to the needs of the employers: “It helps those that want to get that bachelor’s degree. It’s an initiative across the state for nurses to have that complete undergrad degree so we’re filling the needs of whatever community that you’re in.” She continued to explain how each UEE program fits the area it serves. In populated, and highly educated cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego, the extended education programs also place an emphasis on professional programs. This is something that CSU Stanislaus hopes to achieve someday. The institution is also interested in expanding to provide more workforce development programs that neighboring institutions offer in a variety of different fields. One such example is the Extended University curriculum at UC Davis: “If you look up UC Davis extension, it’s humongous what they offer. They offer brewing beer.”

The University of Extended Education at CSU Stanislaus will also begin providing a fully online RN-BSN degree that students can complete in 14 months. This is a new program that starts in the fall. It is intended for working professionals who are already working as nurses in the field. This is the only RN-BSN program offered and also speaks to the need by current RNs to get a bachelor’s in their field. Another online program offered by UEE is a fully online MBA program designed for business executives who are unable to attend classes at the campus. Another MBA is scheduled for working professionals who attend classes on Saturdays. This program consists entirely of non-traditional students who move through the courses in 15 months in small, intimate cohorts. The Saturday sessions begin at 8am where students take one class until 12pm. After a lunch break, the next class begins at 1pm and ends at 5pm. This schedule

continues until the end of both courses after two months. The next two classes start up the following weekend. The bachelor's in health science is offered at a satellite campus located 40 miles north of CSU Stanislaus's main campus. It is also intended for working health professionals that need night courses to complete their degree. This works well for non-traditional students according to Dr. Cameron: "Two classes are offered every eight weeks. The entire program is to be completed within 17 months. It's not part-time. It's actually full-time." This location was chosen as a result of the research conducted on the demand for these professionals in this particular region of California's central valley.

Scheduling

The reason these programs are a part of UEE is because they provide alternative options in the design of its program delivery. According to Dr. Cameron, the EUU program "needs to be in a unique delivery format. That's usually the reason why it comes to our area." These degree programs are taught by academic faculty at the college who have agreed to help develop and administer their classes in unconventional formats in order to accommodate the working adult.

As we have seen, not all working students are the same. Dr. Cameron described this as an issue that remains a constant problem in the attempt to accommodate every kind of working adult:

Finding good times for all students is difficult. There is such a variety in desired class times because not all work schedules are the same. We need to be sure we can offer courses from 1:00-5:00 so that students can go full-time or from 8:00 to noon. We should be able to offer both and let them know that because they're all working. Some students may be working 8:00 to noon and want to come in from 1:00-5:00.

She stated that the end-of-semester student surveys they receive are helpful in providing them with feedback regarding the academic and administrative side to their educational experiences. However, this only incorporates the current students in their programs and does not reflect what potential students might want in a program. She said that as EUU develops over time it can deliver more diversity in their course formats that can be tailored to fit different types of work schedules. The variability in different work schedules is an ongoing issue that may always plague programs such as these. Constant research is needed to update practices and design future program agendas. Educational programs like UEE are an important part of institutions that are driven to supporting the local economy and assisting non-traditional students in their educational goals, which involve unusual circumstances. Discovering creative ways of administering classes to support this student base requires a cohesive program that can make decisions that lie outside the traditional academic realm of operation. Nitri, Schindler, and Henry (2004) remark that these priorities are the key instrument in the development of a program that communicates a sensitivity to adult needs.

This research project uncovered some interesting perspectives regarding the preferred schedules of non-traditional students. It is important to keep in mind that the non-traditional participants in this study were not students in the UEE program. They were undergraduate students who were completing English degrees that were part of the traditional academic schedule where some classes were delivered during the day and some were administered at night. One participant in this study worked a traditional 9 to 5 job and was given time off to attend day classes on alternating days of the week. Another participant was able to modify her work schedule to fit the times she took classes on campus, and the third participant did not work at all.

Two of the three non-traditional students in this study described night classes as troublesome as a result of the evening being a critical time for them to spend time with their families. Danielle said that night classes are acceptable when they are taken sparingly:

My daughter spends her day at school and the evening is the time when I can see her. I also work sometimes at night. It can seem like night classes are convenient, but in a lot of ways they really aren't.

Most of the classes offered in the English department, with the exception of some upper-level literature courses, are administered during the day before 5pm. This was convenient for Jamie whose children were home from school by the time she was also done with her classes. When asked about whether she would consider taking night classes she stated, "The evening classes become difficult, you know, if a non-traditional student has a family. It's one of those things that it's like: 'ugh, I don't want to have to be gone all this time at night.'"

For Jamie, scheduling was complicated because her youngest daughter was not yet old enough to attend the public school system. She had tried to enroll her daughter into the Child Development Center on campus, but she ended up on a waiting list. She did not know how long it would take before her daughter would be admitted, so she decided to use a private preschool that had space and where she could take her on the days she took her classes. She groaned that coordinating her classes with the schedules offered by the preschool was stressful and expensive: "I would say the most difficult part of college life for me was scheduling. Especially at a smaller university like Stanislaus State where you just have to take what's there. And sometimes what is there is completely inconvenient." Her daughter's preschool was organized around a payment schedule that operated in increments of four hours: a morning block and an afternoon block of time. The morning sessions were arranged from 8am-12:30pm, and the afternoon sessions ran

from 12:30pm-4:30pm. The Child Development Center on campus also follows this schedule. A class that was scheduled from 12pm-1:30pm two days a week, like the required Shakespeare course, would require her to pay for a full day of preschool for her daughter:

Then when she got to be preschool age, then they have morning sessions and afternoon sessions. The morning sessions are until 12:30, and the afternoon session are from 12:30 to 4:30. I was able to enroll her there, but say I have class from 10-2, well that means I have to put her in an entire days worth of preschool. They don't just watch your child for an hour and a half. You have to put them in the full session. I spent countless money on childcare you know. Which I got the financial aid for, so that is what it's there for so I used it, but I had to put her in the full-time childcare longer than I wanted to for her.

In situations such as these, Jamie was obligated to take her classes all on the same days so that she could minimize her daughter's time spent in childcare. Not only was it expensive, she also felt that her daughter was too young to spend full days in a pre-school. She felt that faculty should consider the decision to schedule their classes at times that were either in morning or in the afternoon in order to accommodate work schedules and the other schedules that their students have to contend with outside of school:

It would be nice if there were both options because I know that in my classes there are a lot of working professionals who need all evening classes. I don't need all evening classes so it'd be nice to at least have the option to take some earlier in the day.

Deidre has older children who are in high school and college. Her considerations in class selection were with her current working situation in mind. Because she works five days a week at a local high school, she preferred night classes when they were possible because her family obligations were a little different from those of Jamie. She stated that she preferred night classes

and would take them at every opportunity when given the chance. Her situation is unique and might not be common among non-traditional working adults since her employment can accommodate her class schedule:

A lot of times I would work, if I had two classes they were on Tuesday/Thursday, I would do, I would work half days and go to school and not go back to my job. I would take vacation days, change my schedule, do stuff to make up time but I tried to do just two days a week, also for the driving.

It is helpful when students such as Deidre can work out their class schedules with their current employer; however, she was still confined to a specific rhythm that can make taking classes problematic. She was given a tiny portion of the day to leave her work in Tracy, which is a forty-minute drive from the CSU Stanislaus campus, to take two classes within the given timeframe twice during the week. She said she had to compare spring and fall course offerings to see what classes were only taught in certain semesters at the times she could take off from work in order to plan for the next semester. She ended up speaking with some of the professors to survey the times they were teaching required courses the following semester.

According to Valentine and Darkenwald (1990), the time constraints of students should be a priority to faculty and administrators that make decisions regarding the scheduling of classes. This sends a message to students about their importance to the institution and the values that the university wishes to uphold in regards to their current and prospective students. This is critical to schools like CSU Stanislaus that cater to students who commute and constitute a large majority of working class students who are first-generation college students and who are not necessarily able to afford tuition without aid. This is in conjunction with a significant population of adult students, where the average age of undergraduates is 23 years old, according to the CSU

Stanislaus website. As seen in this research project, class scheduling is a critical element to the non-traditional student's academic life and "adult educators need to recognize that time constraints represent a serious and nearly universal deterrent to participation in adult education" and from previous research it was found that "items related to time were reported as substantially more important than any other items" (Valentine and Darkenwald, 1990, p. 39-40). It is essential that program planners find ways of making education more manageable to a diversity of students, and adult students are a part of this group.

Dr. Cameron confided that students can get a little overwhelmed by the intensity of some of the classes and their compacted time schedules in the UEE programs: "I see complaints that it's just too much in this certain amount of time, but we warn the students ahead of time." She said that many of the instructors offer their support to these adult students who work 40 hours a week and maintain families. She said that they tell these non-traditional students: "You will finish. You can see a light at the end of the tunnel in 17 months, but it is two classes. Plan your time accordingly." The schedule that these non-traditional students face is severe and encroaches upon many other aspects of their personal lives. This can lead to a lot of stress and frustration. Even though the programs provided by UEE are more convenient for the working adult, it still takes much dedication to complete. Dr. Cameron emphasized the use of cohorts as a way for these adults to connect with other students in their discipline. She said that this connection has contributed to much of the success their students in the completion of their degrees:

The exit feedback we get always states that the other students were helpful in getting them to the finish line. They comment on the helpful teachers but many of them describe the friends they made in the program and how helpful it was.

Not only did she say that the cohort system makes it less complicated to schedule students for classes, but she said that it also increases retention among the non-traditional students, as well as the few traditional students they enroll in their programs.

Socializing and Retention

Maintaining relationships with peers is important for student success in higher education according to the institutional administrators in this study. One way that the University Extended Education programs foster close relationships with peers is through the use of their cohort system: “In the cohort programs, it really helps if they have some peers.” The students in each cohort move through the program together. Professor MaryAnne teaches some of the UEE classes in the Nursing Program and admits that the cohort system is very effective at helping students cope with the intensity of the program. It is common that nursing students take classes and move through their degree coursework as a group. From her experiences, it has been successful at keeping students active in their classes because they tend to work together and create lasting friendships. She said that “the non-traditional students gravitate towards other older students in their classes and they seem to benefit more from these relationships than the younger students.” Non-traditional students who enter or re-enter higher education, and in this case, a nursing program, “are more nervous than the younger students” and the cohort process seems to alleviate this nervousness.

According to Miritello (1996), adult students desire camaraderie with their peers. She states that the students in her three-hour evening composition classes at DePaul University noticeably improved their writing and their class participation when she set aside time during their break for them to socialize and get know each other:

There are other factors that intensify the writing anxiety of the returning adults. Isolation is a major factor. Rushing from their jobs to campus for evening class, they literally race from the workplace into the classroom. Where is the time to talk with other adult learners like themselves? That fifteen-minute coffee break in the middle of a three-hour evening class is typically the only time they have to talk with one another. (p. 7).

This isolation that Miritello (1996) discusses speaks to the needs of non-traditional students in connecting with other individuals who have similar concerns regarding being older students in higher education outside of the socially accepted timeframe. They are nervous about their academic abilities and their capacity to learn as they once did when they were in high school or as freshmen in college twenty years ago. They fear rejection as well as failure. As a result, they tend to gravitate towards other non-traditional students when the opportunity arises. In a 2014 study of non-traditional engineering students transferring from a community college to a research university, it was found that these students sought out other adult students in their program: “the participants interacted with others in engineering programs but their interactions were mostly centered on academics and limited to peers in their age group (i.e. young adults and prime timers)” (Allen and Zhang, 2016, p. 80). They also found that they dedicated time to forming study groups and working on class projects together once they found other students they trusted. One participant in this study “indicated [that] most of his friends were adult learners, who ‘have the same stories or have gone through the same thing’” (Allen and Zhang, 2016, p. 80). The UEE program at CSU Stanislaus, and those at other CSUs in California, offer non-traditional students the option of enrolling into degree programs that bring adult students together into the same learning community.

Students who are not a part of the University Extended Education program can still find connections to other students in their classes. Two of the three non-traditional students in this study became close friends in their undergraduate English degree coursework. They found themselves planning classes together so that they could support each other inside and outside of class. Deidre talked about Jamie:

There were a couple of ladies that I made friends with who were younger than me but older than the others. They were in their 30s, close to 40, so we, the three of us, and one of them is Jamie. I don't know if you talked with her.

They would meet up in the cafeteria for lunch on the days they had classes together. Jamie recalled the time they spent together during breaks between classes: "Deidre understands what I am going through. She knows what it is like to have all these responsibilities on top of school. I really liked that. It made me feel supported." As much as they referred to each other during their interviews, it is evident that these two women are close and have depended on each other for support in their program. They play a critical role in each other's success in the program through their friendship and teamwork. Their connection made their experiences as non-traditional students more manageable and entertaining:

They [other non-traditionals] made a difference because they actually made it fun. You know, we were sort of in the same place, trying to do the same thing. They were serious about what they were doing. [Jamie] is very serious about what she's doing and I was very serious. It was important to me to make all A's. I'm going to get A's because I'm doing this. You have a different, when you're going back for yourself when you're older, you sort of have a different set of priorities and a lot of it is pride. That was really nice, getting to know them.

This is a critical element in their progress through the program. Their friendship was not only formed as a result of both being non-traditional students. As seen here, it is also built on a common education ideology that both women share as a result of their life experiences. Their success in their education journey is important to both women because it represents who they are and how their experience collection has molded them into who they are as returning students in college. Failure means more than just a letter on their transcript; it mirrors their inability to manage a life transition.

As discussed in chapter three, adult students are driven by the need to enhance their personal and working lives by re-enrolling in higher education. They have a goal to achieve that is generally linked to a life transition. Sharan B. Merriam (2005) describes transitions as “periods of change in our lives that seem to alternate with periods of stability” that open up a window for “making changes in some aspect of our lives—our values, perspectives, behaviors, roles, or activities” (p. 3-7). For many women, as with those from this study, a transition occurs with a change in their roles in their family. This causes a major life change for them. Transitions are not an easy or a comfortable situation for adult students to manage. Carlette Jackson Hardin (2008) describes these transitions as being motivating factors in adult student enrollment in higher education, as well obstacles that have to be managed by non-traditional students. She states that:

When coupled with the added stress of applying, enrolling, and attending classes, adult students often feel disoriented as they confront the transitions. Therefore, while adjusting to the challenges and rigors of college, many adult students are creating new identities in all areas of their lives. In fact, most adult college students are a portrait of life’s transitions. (p. 50)

Students learn strategies when dealing with the complications that come with life transitions. For Jamie, she was learning to cope with the fact that her children spent some evenings without her when she had to take night classes. She described this as a tough lesson when it first began during her second semester at CSU Stanislaus: “I was so sad that I couldn’t be home with my kids even if it was just for that one night a week. I called home during my breaks; I was always home before then.” This was a difficult time for her because it modified her various daily motherly roles: homework monitor, Internet supervisor, and video game regulator for her older children when they came home from school. She also felt like she was missing out on some of the enjoyable motherly experiences because she needed to take a night class like taking her son to his soccer practice or helping her daughter set up her science project at school the day before she was to present it. She had to adapt to the truth that other family members, like her mother, would be responsible for her children and some of their developmental experiences. She had to rely on other people to perform her duties and their dedication to do them to the best of their ability. She had to relinquish her control over the well being of her children for those three to four hours and that would be difficult for any conscientious mother. These were the sacrifices she made in order to go back to school and continue her education. According to Merriam (2005), adult educators need to be aware of this transitional phase and find ways to assist them through their transition successfully.

Faculty

The development of faculty in adult education has been linked to student success. The University Extended Education degree programs on the CSU Stanislaus campus use professors from the academic departments to teach their courses. These faculty are not funded through UEE: “We don’t hire the faculty. That all goes to the academic colleges. I have no faculty

reporting. The program supports itself and the faculty are still part of the college.” This means that the program is required to find and recruit faculty from the college’s academic programs that can teach in modified formats. Dr. Holly Cameron stated that she was tasked to seek out faculty that could teach in online formats and/or use accelerated curriculum and still cover all learning outcomes in order to maintain quality standards. In order to ensure this, all UEE faculty are required to get training.

According to Pappas and Jerman (2004), faculty training for adult accelerated programs falls into two different types of workshops. The first form of training focuses on helping professors learn the online formats and other distance technology that their institution offers to students. This type of training is important to the program because faculty need to know the basics of the presentation and delivery of the course content in order to successfully implement it with their students. Unfortunately, “because of competing time demands, [faculty] will often resist such training, [so], our advice is to require such training rather than make it an option” (p. 95). The second type of required training that Pappas and Jerman (2004) describe is a workshop dedicated to a discussion of adult learning styles and preferences in the classroom that contrast with traditional learners. They stress the importance of this training as a way of helping faculty acknowledge “adult students are not ‘simply’ older versions of the traditional-age students who sit in respectful silence in the lecture hall on campus” (p. 95). This kind of faculty development will ensure that professors are committed to the adult students in their courses.

Faculty remain at the center of a student’s academic experience and a critical component to his success. To many students, their professors are their only connection to the campus, their field of study, and, ultimately, their prospective performance in their degree program. If this is the case, an adult student’s relationship with his professor is an indicator of his academic

retention rate. Vincent Tinto (1997) agrees that contact with faculty “inside and outside the classroom serves directly to shape learning and persistence, but also because their actions, framed by pedagogical assumptions, shape the nature of the classroom communities and influence the degree and manner in which students become involved in learning in and beyond those settings” (p. 617). He says that academic and social involvement for all students is directly related to their classroom experiences with their professors. Deidre stated that all her professors at CSU Stanislaus were very understanding of her life outside of school and made it a habit to accommodate for her busy schedule. She described how one faculty member, Professor Antonio, rescheduled her final so that she could attend her son’s presentation at a speech day hosted by his high school. She made it clear that she gave a significant amount of notice for the rescheduling of her final: “I mean, of course you know, I was conscious enough to ask him a month and a half in advance and say ‘Look, this is coming up, this is up to you.’ Most of them were very understanding, very helpful.” This reveals the fact that non-traditional students, in many cases, are interested in sharing aspects of their lives with their professors. Professor Antonio is still in contact with the three non-traditional students from this study. In fact, he was the one who recommended them for this project. He invests his time into their well-being and they link him with their positive experiences at CSU Stanislaus. Deidre commented that Professor Antonio asked her about her son’s speech during their academic advising meeting the following semester. The positive relationships between faculty and students are forged in mutual respect. This respect is “reflected in classroom interactions between the faculty member and student, by subtle acknowledgement and respect of their adult status, and by faculty knowledge of the student’s name and potentially their work or family situation” (Kasworm, 2003, p. 89). The classroom is where a student’s relationship with the course content begins; the professor is that link between

the subject matter and its relationship with the real world through curriculum and pedagogy and student participation.

This study uncovered an issue pertaining to the perception of young teachers and this influence on non-traditional students. For example, Professor Steven commented on how his perceived age held ramifications in the classes he taught with a significant population of non-traditional students. He is forty, yet he looks 25. This fact complicated his business writing classes when he tried to incorporate inventive activities to teach business concepts and writing situations:

I don't look forty and so it's sort of exacerbated when I would come in with a fun activity that I thought would be engaging and it didn't make sense with how it was improving their professional skill set. Not only was it nonsensical or it didn't seem to pertain, but that's now compounded because I look, to many of them, like a child.

This relates to the Knowles, et al. (2005) precept that adults prefer learning experiences that involve connections to real-world situations. Part of the resistance of these non-traditional students lies in Professor Steven's inability to create a learning situation that aligned with their learning style. This might have gone unnoticed by the traditional students in this particular class, but the non-traditional students made it clear to him that they did not understand the relevance of the activity. He described one adult student sitting quietly and uninvolved with her group while the other traditional students worked on the activity. This was a passive aggressive way of showing resistance, but he noticed it. He admitted that he felt like "that activity was a failure. It was clear that it worked very well with one set of students, yet very poorly with the other. I went home that day feeling very defeated." The fact that he looked a lot younger than his actual age only compounded the problem by providing the resistant non-traditional students with a reason

for his perceived inadequacy. Miritello (1996) describes the age difference between younger teachers and older students as a barrier to learning. Her institution faced difficulties when students in the evening composition classes showed a hesitance to use the writing center because the tutors were considerably younger than the composition students:

This age difference is understandably an issue for adult learners who would like to use the services of the Writing Center, but feel uncomfortable about working with someone who is quite a bit younger than themselves. (p. 8)

This is a concept not commonly addressed in the literature involving adult student learning. With the increase of non-traditional students enrolling in AA and BA/BS degree programs across the United States, discussing age disparities involving young teaching assistants and lecturers working with students that are ten and sometimes twenty years older is worth investigating. As Miritello (1996) states, “Age difference is an issue that we cannot dismiss easily” (p. 8). Future research should be given to this issue. In this study, Professor Steven provided some approaches to the age difference he felt his students noticed and responded to in his classes.

One way that Professor Steven avoids these situations is to provide activities that situate adult learners within the real-world context of his business writing classes. He said the non-traditional students appreciate the applicability of classroom activities. Another strategy that he uses to gain the credibility of his adult students is to plan every detail of the class session. Looking prepared reduces the potential anxiety of non-traditional students. He described his procedure for the preparation of effective curriculum:

I try to make sure that I know my material solid. I have coffee in the morning. I make sure I get a good night’s sleep. I don’t want to have even a little lapse in the class where I’m looking back in my notes going, ‘Oh, wait, what comes next?’ We are moving

forward at least in those first weeks so that the initial impression they get is that ‘this guy has a lot to offer me, let’s go with it.’ I feel like if the first two lesson plans we go through are sharp, and there’s a noticeable aura of professionalism, then we’re good.

As Professor Steven described this issue during his interview, it was clear that he felt his preparation was essential to his ability to relate and connect with his adult students. To lose this ability at the beginning of the semester is to possibly lose the credibility of the non-traditional students in his class.

Another way that Professor Steven avoids the age issue in his classes is to dress professionally and alter the physical qualities that are ascribed to youth: “I did dress up for a while, at least until I got a sort of reputation established. In terms of sort of chiseling away at the negative attitude about youthfulness, for a while I grew my beard out a little more than I usually do.” He concluded that his experiences with the non-traditional students in his business writing classes improved as he discovered ways to relate and connect with them. This remains a consistent discussion in the literature involving adult learning: faculty are the key catalysts in making connections with the students at the institution. According to Kasworm (2003), professors who developed relationships with their students early in the semester cultivated trust and a positive learning environment. This relationship relied on an implicit and often nonverbal set of actions that developed a sense of connectedness between the student and the faculty member” (p. 89). Professor Steven learned to begin this trust with his adult students by making himself look the part of a professor that was closer to their age group. Another way he prepares for this connection is to make sure he gains their confidence by being especially prepared for class sessions. He admitted that achieving their approval is a necessary step in the delicate relationship of a professor and his non-traditional students.

Fostering good relationships between students and faculty is important to CSU Stanislaus. It not only strengthens the interactions found in the classroom, it leads to deeper connections between the student and the rest of the university. Alexander W. Astin (1999) focuses much of his research on student involvement theory. He posits that students have a finite amount of time in their schedules to devote to their college experiences. As we have seen in this study, non-traditional students may have less time than traditional students to dedicate to educational activities inside and outside of class. Since a student's time is limited, the "time and energy that the student invests in family, friends, job, and other outside activities represent a reduction in the time and energy the student has to devote to educational development." (p. 523). This suggests that a student's time is a valuable commodity to the daily operations of the university, and the theory of student involvement asks educational leaders to assess what personal time the student is willing to give up in order to support her educational needs. This theory has roots in the longstanding discussions about retention; according to Astin (1999), university administrators and personnel need to make it their concern to understand that the "extent to which students can achieve particular developmental goals is a direct function of the time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains" and to develop programs accordingly (p. 522).

One such program at CSU Stanislaus is the Faculty Mentor Program housed in the Office of Student Leadership and Development. It was implemented in 1987 and its purpose is to increase student success by creating more interaction between students and faculty outside of class. It brings together two of the concepts discussed in this section on faculty: increasing student connections with the faculty on campus, and providing programs that benefit students in the limited time they have to dedicate to educational activities. This program is directed to

include first-generation undergraduate students who have educational or economic disadvantages compared to the rest of the population of students. Protégés, student participants, are chosen through an application process that includes an interview, a written response, and an orientation session. Faculty mentors must also receive training in order to participate. The program consists of several faculty mentors spread out across the campus in a variety of disciplines.

According to the CSU website, the Faculty Mentor Program provides benefits to both student and faculty mentor: “This mentoring relationship improves academic achievement, increases the retention and graduation of underrepresented minority students, and develops a better faculty understanding of minority students.” One of the participants in this study, Dr. Connie Lowry, is one of the coordinators for this program. She said that the underlying dedication of the Faculty Mentor Program is designed to support the faculty and student interaction and retention. When questioned about the number of non-traditional students who participate in this program, she admitted that few of them are older than twenty-four:

Not many of them are non-traditional, but we do get a few. One of the students that is our student assistant for this program was once in the [Faculty Mentor Program], and she is wonderful. She was older than the other students in the program, probably 24.

Unfortunately, the program is limited to students who are first-generation college students. This means that any non-traditional students with college-educated parents are excluded from participating.

New Student Orientation

All new students at CSU Stanislaus are required to attend new student orientation. This becomes one of the first activities that students participate involving the entire institution. The University Extended Education program provides its own orientation using a modified delivery

format that fits the degree program's particular style. For example, an online program incorporates an online orientation for its students. The orientations designed for the rest of the university is, according to Dr. Connie Lowry, a complex endeavor for the Office of Student Leadership and Development: "We work with every academic department to coordinate advising, to coordinate the new student orientation program in and of itself, the curriculum, how the date of it is actually going to run." There are two different types of orientations for new students designed for incoming freshmen and transfer students. They are full-day events held on separate dates. Three dates are scheduled for new freshman and three dates are dedicated to new transfer students. The orientations generally take place in two locations every semester: at the main campus in Turlock, and at the satellite campus in Stockton for transfer students.

Two of the non-traditional students in this study were required to attend the new student transfer orientation before they could enroll in their upper-division courses. Both women had taken transferable courses at community colleges, and the orientation was developed to introduce them to the CSU Stanislaus environment and its procedures. Attending the orientation is mandatory and a student cannot enroll in classes until she attends the advising portion that releases a hold on her registration abilities. Danielle explained that from her experiences, about 25% of the transfer students in her orientation were non-traditional. She made an interesting point that this number could be larger simply because some people who are almost thirty years old look like they are 22. It is not always easy to distinguish between the non-traditional students and the traditional ones simply on their appearance.

Both Danielle and Deidre described their orientation experiences disparagingly. Danielle recollected her experiences at her orientation:

It was really, really a waste of time beyond that [registering for classes]. I know Stanislaus. They have a lot feeding from Delta College and Modesto Junior College [both community colleges], so it was really geared for them. For me, I was like ‘Oh lord, let me register for my classes and get me out of here because it just doesn’t work.’

Danielle did not feel that any of the activities and information provided at the orientation was of any value to her. The only benefit that she got out of the orientation was the ability to register for her classes, which she says she should have been able to do at home. Deidre provided a little more in-depth description of the orientation itself. She described the environment being more tailored to the needs of the traditional students. Financial banks and lending companies had tables set up to enroll students in their first credit card and checking accounts. Many of the student clubs were there to encourage more membership in student organizations. These services did not seem to impress Deidre who stated:

All the clubs are out there. All the young kids came with their parents, which was great because that’s what you do. Your parents go off to one side, and you’re over there. I’m standing in lines and the Wells Fargo people are coming, trying to get people signed up for checking accounts and they just looked at me. I’m like ‘Yeah, dude, got multiple retirements, got a mortgage, got a house...just pass me by.’

There is something a little bit humiliating about an older adult being forced to attend the events that are clearly designed with the traditional student in mind. It’s an “in your face” kind of situation where the non-traditional student is unavoidably uncomfortable and insecure about what he or she is doing.

The non-traditional students in this study did not seem to benefit from their orientation experience. Penny J. Rice (2003) describes the importance of student services in helping adult

students become integrated into the university by creating programs that best fit them: “Incoming adult students benefit from a unique orientation program that addresses their needs and situations” (p. 55). Danielle claimed that the non-traditional students at CSU Stanislaus should have their own orientation. She recognized that making class registration contingent on the transfer orientation attendance is needed for younger transfer students who might want to participate in the social portions of the school if they are made visible to them at a mandatory orientation activity. She, however, sees it differently as an older student:

Yes, you can’t register if you don’t go to orientation. You just can’t. I get it. I get why they do that. They’re really trying to get the majority of their students involved but for someone like me, it’s quite different.

Getting involved into the social realm of the university was clearly not a goal for Danielle. She had intended to go to her classes and go home at the end of the day to her daughter. The clubs, sororities, and the college social life are not temptations for many non-traditional students. Rice (2003) recommends the implementation of a support or discussion group that originates during an orientation targeted to the adult student population. She states that orientations are good ways for all new students to meet each other and create connections with others who have similar life experiences. Instituting activities that bring adult students together increases their likelihood of forming social groups, which will enhance their college experience because “sharing each other’s joys and concerns provides an atmosphere of support and information. It also helps adult students feel ‘normal’ at pivotal times throughout the semester” (p. 56). Instead of new student orientation wasting a non-traditional student’s valuable time, it can be a critical time where adult students can socialize with others who might eventually become a support network that will increase their chances of graduation.

Costs of Higher Education

The cost of education is a frustrating issue for all college students. Lorilee R. Sandmann (2010) asserts that a shortage of time and money is the main reason adult students drop out of school. She also warns “this situation will likely persist, as the cost of higher education is projected to continue increasing at a rate that exceeds the Consumer Price Index, the nation’s basic metric of inflation” (p. 227). Because most adult students fund their education themselves, this creates a risky situation for student success initiative and retention rates (Sandmann, 2010).

The CSU system has a universal tuition undergraduate pricing structure of \$5,472 per year at the full-time rate, and \$3,174 at the part-time rate. The overall college costs at different CSUs will fluctuate with the cost of living; however, the tuition prices are the same at every campus. The non-traditional students in this study found the tuition payment structure very exasperating and unfair, which was the result of their circumstances as older students with responsibilities outside of class. For example, Jamie complained that the full-time payment arrangement began at 7 units. This means that the student pays the same amount of money for three classes as she would if she were taking four classes:

That’s sort of frustrating for the older student because you can’t maximize the number of units to dollars. If I’m taking two classes, I’m still paying. If I’m taking three classes, I’m paying as much as if I was taking five classes. That’s kind of frustrating.

This means that students are paying the maximum amount of money for a minimum amount of units. All three of the non-traditional students in this study had a goal of graduating from CSU Stanislaus in two years after matriculation. In order to do this, they needed to take more than six units of courses each semester. Danielle ended up taking three classes each semester along with summer and winter classes when she got lucky and the right courses were offered during these

times. At nine units each semester, she was paying the full tuition price, the same amount she would pay for 12 or 15 hours.

This research uncovered the unfortunate truths of the costs of a university education for non-traditional students. The only two scenarios that keep adult students from overpaying in their tuition are as follows: 1.) The student takes two classes a semester for four years without going over the six-unit limit, and 2.) The student takes at least four classes a semester and completes the degree in two years. Two of the non-traditional students in this project took more than six units each semester; they typically enrolled in three classes each semester, which equals nine units. Danielle and Jamie were both determined to finish in two years. Deidre works a full-time job while she enrolled in classes, so she was content with two courses a semester: “I never took full advantage of the number of units I could take per semester only because for me, it didn’t work, working full time.” This both limits non-traditional students in their ability to complete the coursework in a short amount of time if they are driven to complete quickly and cost is an issue, and it disproportionately raises the amount they will invest in their education if they decide to take three classes a semester. Unfortunately, “many adults overestimate the costs involved in adult education; in this case, promotional materials should include the kind of information that will allow students to access realistically the costs of participation” (Valentine and Darkenwald, 1990, p. 40-41). The research that addresses student costs in higher education focuses on alternative means of funding education through grants and loans. More research needs to be conducted on the ways in which tuition structures influence student populations like non-traditional students that fund much of their tuition on their own.

Conclusion

The data collected from one California State University, like the one in this study, cannot be generalized to represent all 22 other CSUs across the state. Each institution makes decisions about its programs according to the local economy and the student base that it serves. The information that this study has gathered about one institution can provide suggestions for other colleges and institutions about the ways it serves its local population, which includes non-traditional students. Since each California State University addresses their diverse student populations in unique ways, a closer look at other CSUs not analyzed in this study can provide more resources for institutional programs that accommodate underrepresented students like non-traditional students.

More research also needs to be conducted on the institutional programs like University Extended Education and the ways these administrative structures can continue to support adult students. Looking at other instructional formats that accommodate the interests of working non-traditional students would benefit enrollment and retention rates. For example, perhaps some programs can be delivered to adults in workplace settings to enhance the learning environment. MBA programs can be administered in locations where students are asked to utilize resources found in the business environment.

A closer look at the influences of activities like the Faculty Mentor Programs on non-traditional students can provide insight into the creation of other programs that might also help integrate adult students into the institution. Non-traditional students can benefit from mentorships that connect them with local industry and prospective employers in their discipline. This can potentially help them associate their participation on the college campus with their future employment opportunities. Developing more ways of learning about the institutional

structure of the CSU system and the ways in which it accommodates its diverse student population can offer other institutions new ways of addressing these students.

Chapter Four: Classroom Strategies that Support the Non-Traditional Student

Danielle, Deidre, and Jamie are non-traditional students who decided to enroll at CSU Stanislaus for a variety of reasons. Danielle wanted to get a better paying job and decided that a bachelor's degree would give her more options on the job market. Deidre spent much of her adult life working in the office at a local high school with dreams of becoming a teacher. CSU Stanislaus was the most convenient location for her to complete her degree after a long break. Jamie wanted to continue her education at CSU Stanislaus after a 13-year break from college to have children. She wants to pursue her passion in creative writing and model for her kids the importance of a college education. All of these women have different interests and different life circumstances; their narratives are important in the ongoing discussion of non-traditional students and their journeys in higher education.

The diversity of non-traditional student histories and backgrounds adds a complexity to the discussion of the needs of this student base. Adult students face many forces outside their academic life that can be more demanding and complex than their traditional student counterparts' challenges?. Many non-traditional students have considerable work and family responsibilities that can put significant time constraints and add additional pressures as they move through their coursework in their degree programs. These qualities are not the only difference between non-traditional students and traditional students in college classes. According to Malcolm Knowles, et al. (2005), the life experiences of the adult student prior to college enrollment have been found to influence how he or she learns in the classroom. Their work and family responsibilities, along with their previous life experience adds a dimension to their classroom persona that needs to be considered when making educational decisions about them.

This chapter is designed to introduce the non-traditional student in the writing classroom and the learning characteristics that define her as a student. The following research questions will be addressed throughout the discussion: What are the cultural and educational characteristics (needs/contributions) of the non-traditional students in the writing classroom? How are non-traditional students supported in the classroom? What learning strategies represent the best practices for the non-traditional student in the writing classroom?

Since the enrollment of adult students continues to rise in higher education across the nation, it is becoming more important for educators in all disciplines to find a way of gaining an understanding of how these students learn. Faculty spend the most impact time with non-traditional students in the academic realm of the university. They make decisions about these students in their classes and this has the most effect on their persistence in higher education. This chapter looks closely at the faculty perspectives based on their experiences with non-traditional students in their writing and literature courses. The analysis will use data collected from the interviews of five professors in the English Department at CSU Stanislaus. Professor Antonio is the department chair and a literature professor; Professor Colin is the Director of First-Year Composition and a composition professor; Professor Mark is a composition professor, Professors Steven and Tony are full-time lecturers.

Andragogy: An Analytical Framework

This study will use Malcolm Knowles, et al. (2005) concept of andragogy, which constitutes a description of the common qualities that the non-traditional student brings with her to the college classroom. In the 1950s, Malcolm Knowles, a seminal theorist on adult learning theory, began looking at how and why adults are motivated to learn. He was the first to introduce the concept that adults learn differently than children. This was motivated by the increasing

interest in adult education at that time; and since then, andragogy has been analyzed and critiqued by researchers in many fields. Andragogy is a learning theory that places the learner at the center of the discussion about how adults learn best and the characteristics they bring with them to the classroom. In 1980, he created a set of adult learning characteristics that influence the way they learn in a variety of learning environments. The core assumptions about adults in learning environments are “invaluable in shaping the learning process to be more conducive to adults” by helping professors and curriculum developers understand the adult learner as unique from the traditional, younger college students (Knowles, et al., 2005, p. 2).

Pedagogy is very different from andragogy. The pedagogical model, “designed for teaching children, assigns to the teacher full responsibility for all decision making about the learning content, method, timing, and evaluation” where the learner plays “a submissive role in the educational dynamics” (Knowles, et al., 2005, p. 72). Andragogy places the teacher in the role of a facilitator and the responsibility of learning into the hands of students. The goal of that facilitator, according to Knowles, et al. (2005), is to encourage students to become more self-directed. Knowles’ model has also since grown from four to six assumptions due to continuing research in adult learning.

The following outline briefly describes the six assumptions that make up the adult learner. These assumptions will be used in this chapter to analyze how non-traditional students learn in writing classrooms. Four of the six assumptions listed here will be used as a way to describe the non-traditional student from the data collected in this study in order to begin a conversation about the pedagogical best practices for adult students, which will be addressed in the last chapter of this project.

Andragogical Model:

1. **The Need to Know:** In this assumption about adult learning, it is important to recognize that adults need a substantiated reason for a learning activity prior to accepting to participate in it. When adults learn on their own, they “invest considerable energy in probing into the benefits they will gain from learning it and the negative consequences of not learning it” (Knowles, 2005, p. 64). This means that it is necessary for adult educators to reinforce the reasons why learning should take place when working with adult students. Adults understand where their gaps in skills and knowledge occur; a tool that adult educators can use in learning environments to show why learning is important to adult students is by providing “real or simulated experiences in which the learners discover for themselves the gaps between where they are now and where they want to be” (Knowles, 2005, p. 65). Educators that help adult students see the value of an activity may see an increase participation rates.
2. **The Learners’ Self-Concept:** This assumption dictates that adults are aware that they are responsible for their behaviors and decisions. Adults make decisions that affect their material lives on a daily basis; as a result, “they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction” (Knowles, 2005, p. 65). When adults are not treated as designers of their world, they develop resentment towards those they feel “are imposing their wills on them” (Knowles, 2005, p. 65). This is an issue in many educational settings for adults. The negative behavior that is manifested from adults in these situations is the tendency to flee the situation and drop out of school. Arranging curriculum that takes into consideration adults’ need to be self-directing will limit the drop out rates of adult learners.

3. **The Role of the Learners' Experiences:** This assumption posits the adult learner as a repository of experiences that influence the way in which he or she thinks in and out of educational settings. These accumulated experiences create more heterogeneity among adult students “in terms of background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals,” which means that greater emphasis needs to be “placed on individuation of teaching and learning strategies” for instructors (Knowles, 2005, p. 66). This also means that these experiences become the adult learners' best resource in learning; therefore, “the emphasis in adult education is on experiential techniques...[that] tap into the experience of the learners, such as group discussion, simulation exercises, problem solving activities, case methods,” etc., rather than through typical lecture formats (Knowles, 2005, p. 66). Adults value their life experiences and when these are ignored or not seen as being valued in the classroom, the adult student consequently sees the instructor as personally rejecting him or her as a person. This causes many issues in the educational environment. The accumulation of life experiences that influence an adult's thinking and learning in educational situations can also cause them to be biased. This can prevent them from being open to new ways of thinking. Educators need to be aware of this tendency and try to help their adult learners analyze their ways of thinking and habits of mind.
4. **Readiness to Learn:** Adult students live in the real world where they make decisions that determine how they do in real-life situations. In this case, the assumption of adult learning is that adult students want to learn the things that will help them “cope effectively with their real-life situations” (Knowles, 2005, p. 67). This assumption suggests that instructors need to consider the timing involved with content and learning: “the importance of timing learning experiences [need] to coincide with those

developmental tasks” when students are “moving from one developmental stage to the next” (Knowles, 2005, p. 67). Adult educators can encourage readiness in adults through “models of superior performance, career counseling, simulation exercises, and other techniques” (Knowles, 2005, p. 67). Once an adult sees the benefit on their lives behind a learning activity, he or she becomes more ready to engage in the situation.

5. Orientation to Learning: In this assumption, adults have a different orientation to learning than children. Pedagogy places the student into a position to learn subject matter in a series of categories that organize that subject matter into themes. Adults are more life-centered in their experiences with learning and “are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations” (Knowles, 2005, p. 67). Adults develop new knowledge when they are placed in situations that ask them to call on their real-world experiences. For example, adult students in composition courses were better able to learn grammar when it was taught using their own writing as a basis for understanding the rules. Adult students use their prior experiences to guide their learning process in higher education. Instructors of adult programs will find more success with adult learners when “new curricula organized around life situations and the acquisition of coping skills (e.g. coping with the world of work, of local government and community services, of health, of the family, of consuming)” are created to support the adult orientation to learning (Knowles, 2005, p. 68).
6. Motivation: As result of adult learners being a member of the real-world and being financially, legally, socially, and psychologically responsible for their successes and failures, the assumption is that adults are most responsive to the “internal pressures (the

desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like)” as well as external motivators like “better jobs, promotions, higher salaries” (Knowles, 2005, p. 68). Adult students find motivation in learning that is directly tied to developing their real-world lives outside of the education environment. This is a big contrast to the young student’s motivation tied to getting good grades and pleasing the teacher and parents in the pedagogy model. Educators that understand the motivations of adult students may be able to find ways to connect them in the classroom.

These six assumptions about the learning characteristics of adult students in higher education have provided educators with a way of conceptualizing the adult learner. This chapter will use assumptions #2 (The Learner’s Self Concept), #3 (Prior Experiences of the Learner), #4 (Readiness to Learn), and #5 (Orientation to Learning) as a way to organize and analyze the data from this study.

The Self-Concept of Non-Traditional Students

Knowles, et al. (2005) postulate that adults develop a sense of self that dictates that they are responsible for their life decisions and the successes and failures that come along with the choices they make. The moment they conceptualize themselves as conscientious adults capable of determining their needs, as well as learn to develop ways of fulfilling those needs through action, they cultivate “a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction” and “resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them” (p. 65). Many adult students understand their personal and educational needs and, in many cases, develop an understanding of what they need to do to be the type of student they want to be. Unfortunately, this means that an adult student can consider a teaching situation to be insensitive to their orientation to learning when it does not support their

desire to be independent. Adult students enter higher education with prior life experiences that have contributed to their overall sense of self and they value educational experiences that recognize this quality.

Many times non-traditional students enter the academic arena with negative experiences that influence how they view themselves as students and what they perceive as threatening their role as a student and their goal of graduation. One of the non-traditional students in this study, Danielle, came to CSU Stanislaus with an AA degree in math from a community college in the area. She previously had trouble enrolling in the required math classes at this community college, and once enrolled, the high-stakes testing that took place prevented her from moving forward in her desire to become a math teacher. She got exhausted and frustrated with the process, so she decided to major in English when she finally transferred to Stanislaus. Kasworm (2008) depicts adult students as being very conscious of their past experiences in education and consequently “enter the classroom with an evolving and sometimes conflicted learner identity” (p. 28). These kinds of experiences influence the way adult learners interact with their current educational decisions and how they perceive themselves as learners.

Non-traditional students can be seen to be more interested in learning the content of their classes because they have a clear picture of the purpose their education holds in their future. As discussed in chapter two, they are motivated by their ability to see their future and how their education will positively influence their future selves. As a result, they learn to take responsibility for themselves in the classroom. This research uncovered the ways in which professors perceive student accountability from the non-traditional students in their classes and the actions the faculty in this study took to ensure student success. Four out of the five professors in this study described adult students as being better able to handle classroom policies when

adjustments needed to be made to accommodate these students' hectic life schedules. For example, when a non-traditional student requests an extension on an assignment, the professors in this study remarked that adult students are more apt to follow through with the adjusted deadline than a traditional student.

One professor in this study, Mark, said that non-traditional students are more equipped to manage both their family and work lives in conjunction with their academic ones compared to the younger, more traditional aged students: "I would say they were a little more proactive than the typical 18 year old freshman." In a lot of cases, adult students feel guilty about missing a deadline and the effects it might have on their relationship with their professor. Another professor, Steven, suggested that their workplace experiences might be the cause of this self-conscious awareness of the effects of their actions on the learning environment:

I've had students explaining that they won't be in class next week and it's a very apologetic, hands in front of them, and putting forth an excuse of "Look, I have to go to the doctor for this appointment and I can't reschedule it." I get the sense that they are more accustomed to a normal work environment that they had to say [when taking time off from work] "I'm not going to be here on Wednesday." The boss is going to be a little bit frustrated and "well, we just need to get someone to fill in on your tasks then."

Conceptualizing school as synonymous with the work environment seems to be the case for some adult students. This shows that non-traditional students see themselves as being directly responsible for their academic success and the mediator between their non-academic and academic lives. The workplace has a way of shaping the academic identity of adult students; they draw on these experiences as a way of dealing with similar situations they encounter in the classroom. Missing class means missing a workday that ultimately impacts a variety of systems

that influence their performance: harming their ability to meet deadlines, falling behind in coursework, injuring relationships with peers or professors, etc. These can translate into serious problems when confronted in the workplace setting. It seems as though adult students consider their behaviors as students a little more carefully than a traditional student. Another professor, Colin, described his perception of non-traditional student behavior in his classes:

They don't complain about anything. That's been my perception of re-entry students is at least a work ethic that this is not the fifth year of high school for them. This is, "I'm coming back and I'm going to get this done and I'm not going to waste my time."

Other behaviors discussed by CSU Stanislaus professors include the higher participation of non-traditional student visits during their office hours, more frequent emails containing questions about reading and writing assignments, and continual alerts regarding a need to miss class or late arrivals due to issues in their schedules. Professor Mark commented that the non-traditional students do not take advantage of any exceptions made to the course schedule: "That's the thing with freshman. If I give them that leeway, a lot of times people take advantage of it." This behavior could be due to the fact that they have been conditioned to consider their academic selves similar to their workplace identity. They cannot subtract their prior experiences from their self-concept of their academic selves. An adult student sees herself as being the one who is in control of her grades and her progress in her classes.

Late work seems to be addressed on a student-by-student basis when it involves non-traditional students in writing classrooms. Most instructors in this study have a statement in their syllabus that acknowledges their policy on late work. Many have commented that it is there in order to enforce classroom policy with traditional students that have a reputation of pushing

boundaries and abusing and neglecting predetermined due dates and assignment submission requirements. Professor Mark stated:

A couple of semesters back I was teaching a first-year comp and I had a veteran student in that class. A lot of my freshman policies are designed with freshman in mind. If it's due on this date, no exceptions, blah, blah, blah, because I have to do a little more hand-holding [with freshmen].

However, this “hand-holding” is not a condition of non-traditional students within the class. One of the reasons traditional students are kept to a strict assignment submission policy is the result of a lack of work ethic. Professor Colin said that young students often take advantage of moments when they are given extensions on their assignments:

My experiences with that has been I'm still stern and I still tell them “It's not Monday but by Friday, it's a zero.” They [non-traditional students] never miss it. Where more likely or not, the freshman who's treating this as their fifth year of high school, Friday will come and go when you'll get an email next Monday and they will have missed class and said “This other tragic thing happened in the meantime” and that will go on and on. Where you don't get that with the older students.

Non-traditional students run into situations where they need to address a real-world problem in their family or the workplace. Yet, somehow they find ways of juggling both family and their job, while also incorporating the deadlines that arise through school. Perhaps it is their past experiences with deadlines and the repercussions that follow when they are unmet that are at play in the mindset of non-traditional students. According to Professor Colin, “Now if I feel like the work ethic and stuff isn't there, then that would be a different situation, but that's never been the situation. The work ethic has always been there.” This supports the contrasting beliefs

between traditional college students and non-traditional students: traditional students tend to perceive college as an extension of high school since that is their closest educational experience, many non-traditional students have spent time in the workforce catering to a set of rules designed to maximize time and money within a structure that values actions for the greater good of a business, company, or their family.

The diversity of non-traditional students should be considered when thinking about making concessions for them in the class. Their backgrounds can be considerably more taxing and complex than traditional students that make up a majority in college classes. Work and family responsibilities can put significant time constraints and add pressure to adult students. Ntiri, Schindler, Henry (2004) contend that college should “acknowledge these assets and constraints and take them seriously by structuring course delivery modalities to allow students maximum flexibility in terms of time to engage the courses” (p. 48). The experiences of the participants in this study suggest that non-traditional students had a different work ethic compared to traditional students. Professor Mark described the non-traditional students in his classes: “They were a lot more responsible with deadlines and catching up and things like that.” In some cases, deadlines affect trajectories and the impending actions of other processes within a workplace. Even though many traditional students also work part-time, and in some cases, full-time jobs while they complete their degree, they don’t seem to value deadlines in their writing classes quite like the non-traditional students. Perhaps this transcends work experience, since the majority of CSU Stanislaus students, including the younger traditional students, simultaneously work while they go to school. This seems to indicate that the work experience of the non-traditional students is not the contributor to their adherence to classroom policies regarding assignment deadlines. The data from this study suggests that a student’s dedication to classroom

procedures may be linked to their age, and the time that they spend as an adult in the world before they come to college.

The faculty participants in this study supported non-traditional students in their classes by creating some allowances that were not explicitly stated in the syllabus. Professor Mark relayed what commonly occurs in his classes involving non-traditional students and deadlines:

I found myself a lot of times having to keep him [non-traditional student] after class to just say “Hey, man, listen. It says this in the syllabus. I understand you have to go away this weekend for training stuff. Don’t freak out about that. I have to do a little less hand-holding with you so I trust that you’re going to get this done.” I found that a lot of the policies in my freshman level class were designed specifically with traditional freshman in mind.

These exceptions were allowed as a result of an inherent trust that non-traditional students would be true to their word and follow through with their commitments when deadlines were adjusted. The faculty in this research do not seem bothered by the idea of making these accommodations to non-traditional students and seem to have positive experiences with this procedure according to Professor Colin:

I do things a little bit unfairly for them [traditional freshmen] sometimes. By that, I mean I will allow somebody who has that kind of military work ethic, who’s been in the military that comes back and says “Listen, I can’t do this at this time,” I give them the benefit of the doubt more than I would a freshman. That’s probably not a fair way. I still think it’s the right way. It’s not an equal way to treat students.

The comments made by Professors Colin, Mark, and Steven suggest that non-traditional students have justifiable reasons for missing class and assignment deadlines. Adult students have real-

world demands that can occasionally interfere with their ability to participate in their classes. These professors are open to adapting certain class policies to help the non-traditional student manage both their personal and educational lives because these students, from their experience, have proven to follow through with the readjustments they are given.

In some cases, adult students can be insulted by admonishments from faculty when they are late or absent and the cause of this behavior is out of their control: “Women in this study [adult students] expressed frustration with faculty members who scolded them for missing class or arriving late without regard to their circumstances” (Sandmann, 2010, p. 223). This may be the result of a clash between what Knowles, et al. (2005) call the intellectual model and how adult students ultimately see themselves. He goes on to support this by stating that when professors treat non-traditional students like passive learners, it “creates a conflict within them between their intellectual model, learner equals dependent, and the deeper, perhaps subconscious, psychological need to be self-directing” (p. 65). As a result of their age, adult students may sometimes enter higher education with the perceived notion that a classroom is a place where students are told what to do by their professors and reprimanded when certain guidelines and instructions are not followed through grading procedures and classroom rules directed at attendance, assignment submission, and late work policy. The educational setting, in some cases, is enough to spark a reaction from non-traditional students before the interaction between students and a teacher even begins: “The minute adults walk into an activity labeled ‘education,’ ‘training,’ or anything synonymous, they hark back to their conditioning in their previous school experience, put on their dunce hats or dependency, fold their arms, sit back, and say ‘teach me’” (Knowles, et al., 2005, p. 65). Adult students can exhibit an assortment of

behaviors as a result of their negative educational experiences from previous college-level work and high school after they enroll in a four-year institution.

Knowles, et al. (2005) describe the flight or fight response that may arise out of adult students who are not given the opportunity to develop and/or maintain their autonomy in their classes: a “typical method of dealing with psychological conflict is to try to flee from the situation causing it, which probably accounts in part for the high dropout rate in much voluntary adult education” (Knowles, et al., 2005, p. 65). Educators need to respond to this issue by understanding the need for adult students to be recognized as self-directed learners who are responsible for their situation and their learning, and who want to take more control of their educational experiences as they return to higher education. Preparation for this student base consists of organizing curriculum that involves placing the non-traditional student in a context that supports more self-directed learning.

How Prior Life Experiences Enhance and Detract from Adult Learning

The role of non-traditional students’ prior life experiences and learning is a critical resource that they bring to the classroom. According to Malcolm Knowles et al. (2005), all adults bring unique experiences with them when they enter higher education and this “experience serves to shape or inhibit new learning” (p. 190). Adults with many years of involvement in the workplace and time spent raising families cannot help but bring this experience to the academic setting. As seen in chapter two, these influences guide the way they think and make decisions. This experience poses benefits as well as disadvantages to the non-traditional student in our classrooms. New knowledge is perceived through a lens that is developed by a current mental model of thinking. This wealth of experience can also lead to barriers in new learning because adult students are less willing to change their mental models compared to younger students.

According to Peter Senge (1990), a mental schema, or model, are “deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting” that take form as a result of our prior experiences in the world (p. 174). An adult student’s mental schema has been in use for many years; altering that paradigm requires a re-evaluation of existing beliefs, and this can be quite difficult for many students (Knowles et al., 2005).

Chris Argyris (1990) describes two ways that information gets processed in a learning environment. The first method is what he terms as “theories-in-use,” or single-loop learning. This mental schema consists of the method of operation and thinking that a student already possesses. A student shows up to a learning situation with “espoused theories of action...that people report as governing their actions” (Argyris, 1990, p. 345). In this sense, adult learners look for ways to relate new learning with current mental paradigms in order to make sense of them. Once new knowledge aligns with adopted ways of thinking, adults feel confident and ready to learn. A second method of information processing is discussed by Argyris (1990) called double-loop learning. This type of learning can be problematic for adult students who are unwilling to relegate their mental schema, built from prior experiences, and “develop problem-solving skills that question the theories’ governing values” (Argyris, 1990, p. 345). Knowles et al. (2005) call this difficult process “unlearning” because students must first break down existing beliefs in order to adapt to new ways of thinking.

Professor Mark described the classroom dynamic in his upper-division grant writing class. He believes that the prior experiences of the adult students in his classes make the class more enjoyable to teach because what occurs throughout the semester is a collaboration of real-world experiences between students and content. He said that “when we would talk about the workplace or what grant writers do, people would be able to say ‘Yeah, I was at this nonprofit

and we had a grant writer and these are the types of things they did.” This is an example of single-loop learning because students build on their prior knowledge that adds to an existing mental paradigm. They don’t have to revise the way they perceived the world in order to create new knowledge. They simply build on their original knowledge of grant writing. Professor Mark continued to discuss how the adult learner’s experiences assisted his class discussions in his grant writing class: “It made the class a lot more meaningful and it felt more relevant because there were direct connections to the real world through their experiences.” One of the benefits of this kind of interaction with course content is the motivation exhibited by these adult students that help them invest in the class assignments and get excited about writing: “They were people who, hey, my church lost funding and we have to build a building so I want to write a grant for that. It made it a lot more interesting.” He mentioned that this led to an atypical interest in writing that he wishes he could encourage in his other writing courses that were not so closely tied to his students’ lives outside of class. He went on to say that “they really actually cared about these grants because they were writing about stuff that was important to them.” Kasworm (2008) states “because of complex individual identities, adult students best learn through key acts of meaning making connected to their adult identities” (p. 30). Finding ways of connecting adult students to their learning environment will increase their ability to learn course content.

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, these life experiences can also negatively affect the learning environment, and the ability of the adult student to learn new processes and mental schema in the classroom. Professor Antonio remarked in his interview that adult students had difficulty adapting to the learning environment as a result of their inability to adjust to new ways of writing. He recalled a time in one of his literature classes when an older student complained about a type of reader response the students were asked to write about on a piece of literature

they had read in class. She struggled with the process of looking at the reading through a particular lens she was called upon to use in her analysis, and she made it clear that she was not happy about it. He continued making sense of this phenomenon that occurs in his classes from time to time:

You've got all these experiences that you can draw on to provide a framework for understanding a relationship, for understanding a dynamic in a text. At the same time, if I can't find it and I'm that student, I don't know what to write. If I can't put it in my immediate framework, all of a sudden I am lost.

This is a situation where an adult student's mental framework, her habit of thinking about a text a certain way, prevented her from opening her mind to other ways of reflecting about it. She was unable to tap into her repertoire of life experiences to aid her in producing an analysis for the assigned reader response. Professor Antonio was asking her to perceive of the analysis process in a way that conflicted with her current mental schema. Knowles et al. (2005) warn adult educators to be prepared for this type of resistance. They say that adult learners "develop mental habits, biases, and presuppositions that tend to cause us to close our minds to new ideas, fresh perceptions, and alternate ways of thinking" (p. 66).

Professor Antonio also reported that sometimes "with a 50, 55, 60 year old who will run the line on you that you can't teach an old dog new tricks and this is just the way I write" is a common response. These are excuses that he says are their attempts to validate their inability to find a solution to the problem they see as a set issue. Knowles et al. (2005) recommend that adult educators find ways of helping these resistant students understand their learning and thinking habits. Instead of resolving to demand, "This is the way things operate in this classroom," teachers can help students recognize the issue and the ideological conflicts that originate because

they are in school to test new mental habits. Professor Antonio commented that his response to the situation was to question the student's logic:

It's also manifestly undone by the fact that they're in college to learn new tricks, but because they're declaring this with all their passion and their heart and not succeeding. You really have to approach it a little more delicately. You have to remind them of those salient facts that they are actually at the university to learn new tricks.

Adult students come to a college classroom with the experience of having success in many types of life situations. This means that one way of thinking has worked for that student in multiple settings and has been affirmed by the feeling of success. These adult non-traditional students may not have needed to change their mental schema as a result of this triumph. According to Professor Antonio, the class facilitator needs to understand how his students might perceive this situation and how they might not understand why this resistance goes against their purpose for being in college. Suddenly, a situation such as this becomes emotionally charged because the student feels defensive. Knowles et al. (2005) state that an adult student's identity is closely intertwined with her past experience: "to adults, experience is who they are" (p.66). This interconnectedness between identity and their learning experiences prior to college enrollment makes Argyris's (1990) double-looped learning very difficult.

The research on adult learning continues to support that connections between faculty and non-traditional students are critical to the learning process. Kasworm (2003) suggests that deep-level learning is incumbent on the instructor's ability to help adult students connect current learning with their past experiences. This expands learning and validates their roles as students with a certain level of life expertise. Unfortunately, any educational situation where their "experiences are ignored or devalued, adults will perceive this as rejecting not only their

experience, but rejecting themselves as persons” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 67). Kasworm (2008) reiterates this point: “The most powerful influences on adults are class-related learning successes and their relationships with faculty validating their adult identity as worthy and valued” (p. 30). The key is to provide non-traditional students with a balance between a respect and appreciation for their prior experiences outside of the educational setting and a desire for them to construct new ways of thinking about the concepts and content of the course. A classroom facilitator can take advantage of this repertoire of experience to enhance the learning capability of the adult students in their classes.

The Non-Traditional Student’s Orientation to Learning

As discussed in chapter two, non-traditional students enroll in higher education as a direct response to their external environments: a desire for more financial freedom, more time in their schedule to fulfill personal goals that are suddenly attainable because their children are in school, and the need to model the importance of education to their children. This means that adults enter college with the intention of accomplishing specific goals that will enhance their lives. They walk into their classes with a perceived vision of how they want their educational journey to play out and influence their future. Knowles, et al. (2005) portray adult students as task-centered and “motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations” (p. 67). According to Jonathan I. Compton, Elizabeth Cox, and Frankie Santos Laanan (2006), adult learners show up to the classroom with their work and life experience as a part of their educational toolbox. As a result, Kasworm (2008) suggests that adult “collegiate learning should be anchored and reinforced through their practical world experiences and their current adult role identities” (p. 31). Many adult students want to know why they need to learn a process or a particular concept and how it

ties in with their comprehensive educational and life plan. They want to know where their hard work will take them and how it will benefit their future. As a result, class facilitators need to understand that their non-traditional students might require a substantiated reason for a particular activity or assignment and how it will serve their needs in future activities and assignments. This orientation to learning will manifest in a variety of ways in the classroom.

The professors in this study described some interesting common characteristics of the non-traditional students in their classes that support their unique orientation to learning. Professor Steven remarked on his difficulty in transitioning from a predominantly traditional student base in his first-year composition courses as a graduate assistant in the master's program to the upper-division business writing courses he taught after he graduated and started working as a full-time lecturer. He had learned to set up his classes with certain types of writing and discussion activities that worked well for traditional students. He learned to make his curriculum entertaining by incorporating discussions using social media technologies such as Twitter and group discussions inside and outside of class involving the use of Google docs. He said that the traditional students enjoy using multiple types of media in their writing assignments and this encouraged more participation and involvement in the writing process. He was surprised when he taught his first business writing course, where there is a 40-50% non-traditional student population, and he heard complaints from the non-traditional students that it was not helping them prepare for the use of their degree:

Any of the instructors who go from that into teaching the upper-division courses, it's a little disheartening that sort of response you get to activities that used to be fun in the classroom and engaging, getting students up and moving around and making it more of an activity. To see those same activities responded with rolling eyes and a huff, it's sad. It

makes people feel like maybe they're not as good a teacher as they thought they were. I know I went through that.

He described his feeling of inadequacy over the reactions he received from the non-traditional students using the same activities that worked well in his other classes. The context of the class itself also plays a role in the expectations of the students. If they are expecting to learn about business writing, they might not want the same kind group discussion activities that work well in freshman composition classes where students are more motivated to complete them when they are fun and active. A business writing class might elicit different expectations:

They don't seem to care much if something is fun, and I get that a lot in the anonymous feedback that I ask like "I don't really understand why we did this" or "how is this going to help with the job I have now?"

If some adult students cannot make an immediate connection to the way a class activity or writing assignment will assist them in the professional setting, they do not respond positively. The students in Professor Steven's class were verbally reactive to certain aspects of his curriculum that they did not find useful. In many cases, adult students just need verification that what they are learning will contribute to their lives and potential career in some way. If faculty describe the assignment or activity for students in a way that highlighted the learning outcomes that will contribute to future writing and learning endeavors, non-traditional students might accept the learning experiences that may not seem immediately relevant at first.

Professor Steven also described the learning styles of his non-traditional students and the differences between the adult students and the more traditional-aged students in his classes:

I had a couple of people who would be like, "Wait, why are we doing this part? What is this for?" I had to do a lot of, I wouldn't say justifying, but I had to be a lot more

transparent and clear about what all of this was designed for and why we were doing things, which wasn't a bad thing. It made me realize I should be more transparent in all of my classes, because freshman probably wouldn't ask that question. They would just talk about it with each other after class.

This describes one of the assumptions of adult learning from Knowles', et al. (2005) framework. The 'orientation to learning' assumption about adult students posits that "adults are life-centered (or task centered or problem-centered) in their orientation to learning" (p. 67). The difference between the non-traditional and the traditional student is their previous life experience that distinguishes the learning they need. This study reveals that non-traditional students in writing courses need to be valued for their experiences outside the classroom through classroom procedures that help them connect it to new knowledge. Kasworm (2008) states that adult students develop two types of inner voices that are the result of their life experiences that influence the way they think and learn in the classroom. The two voices are the outside voice and the cynical voice. Both voices are the constructs of their non-academic selves and work as mental filters to help them reaffirm who they are in relation to their current roles and beliefs within their current contexts. As a result, "adults operating from these two voices selectively engage in learning knowledge that does not contradict their understandings of how they see themselves and their worlds" (p. 31). This explains the outspoken resistance to classroom experiences that do not relate course material to current workforce contexts.

Danielle revealed the close attachment non-traditional students have with their cognitive abilities and its relationship to their adult worlds:

We're more able, the non-traditional students, to relate a lot of stuff back to reality and the way the world actually works, as opposed to the idea that you have in your head when

you're younger as to how the world works. Most of us have families or have children, and so when you're discussing mothers or fathers, there's actual real insight into that, as opposed to just speculation.

Much of successful learning for non-traditional students occur when it is connected to their life roles. They engage in content that is closely tied to their own experiences. In cases such as these, the adult student will find ways of connecting to a class discussion or content by drawing on their repertoire of experience. Danielle found a discussion of a novel she read in her literature class relatable to her life. Her role as a mother gave her a way to connect with the story. In other cases, such as those in the business writing class where non-traditional students could not see the connection between the class activity and its relationship with their external worlds, they shut down and show their frustrations because they feel it is wasting their time. They do not find value in education when it is presented without context.

This emphasis on context in the learning environment is what David A. Kolb (1984) calls "experiential learning." Experiential learning is the "process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 41). He states that knowledge is created when students are allowed to recognize their beliefs and current worlds and apply them to the classroom content. Knowledge is constantly revised based on the learning experiences that influence a student. Experience always intervenes in the learning process and continuously modifies the belief system and the knowledge base of the learner. According to Christopher Chavez (2006), both Knowles' concept of andragogy, and Kolb's discussion of experiential learning can help teachers develop curricula that "allow students to understand what they already know more deeply and, more important, learn what new knowledge they have yet to learn" (p. 148).

The classroom facilitator has been reported as an important instrument in helping adult students negotiate new meaning in the classroom. According to Kasworm (2003), instructors can incorporate “integrated adult-identified prior knowledge into the course content either by classroom interpersonal engagements or by applied learning activities such as case-study projects” in their classes (p. 85). Integrating applied learning activities is key to the concept of experiential learning. It helps students to understand their current knowledge based on their beliefs and roles as adults through their lived experiences, and it provides a context for them to adapt it to new knowledge when it is required. Professor Mark confirmed that students are naturally more interested in topics that add to their inventory of knowledge, and this promotes more willingness for them to actively participate in the learning process. The students feel more comfortable with familiar content:

I’ll preface that it’s not the first time for most of them. They’ve been writing something that wasn’t an academic essay. There were students who were like “hey, this is how I write at work. I don’t have to put fluff in things, you just say stuff clearly.” I saw people struggle less with writing in this class just because I think it mirrored the writing they actually do in life a lot more closely than many other courses.

Kolb (2015) states that learning is not necessarily the absorption of new content by the student, but rather it is the interaction between the content of the activity and the experience of the learner, where both transform each other. In Professor Mark’s grant writing class, students were able to take their workplace writing experience and build on it by through writing activities tailored to their specific grant. Students were given the opportunity to choose their topics and funding agencies. For some of these students, this was practice for the job they currently held. Knowles, et al. (2005) corroborate how this class is very applicable and beneficial to adult

students since “experiential learning approaches have the dual benefit of appealing to the adult learner’s experience base as well as increasing the likelihood of performance change after training” (p. 199).

As discussed in the previous section, the mental schema that adult students contend with is the result of their past experiences. However, this does not necessarily mean that learning will be easy for non-traditional students. Miritello (1996) mentions that not all workplace writing experiences translate to the classroom. She describes a student who held a position at an urban hospital where she wrote reports and communicated with clients through written transactions. These experiences were not enough to support her writing practice in her writing class at the university. Miritello (1996) concludes that the reason her workplace writing skills did not transfer to the academic classroom was the difference in audience. On the job, she knew what the reader was already expected to know about the topic before he read her report. She was familiar with the information disparities among her audiences in the hospital and could tailor her writing according to that knowledge. She felt differently about her English class. She also found herself struggling to conceptualize the purpose in her assignments. The reports she created at the hospital functioned as information that alerted personnel of a particular situation or emergency and apprised them of the medical condition of patients. Her on-the-job writing was supposed to be succinct and direct. She had difficulty transitioning from one writing situation to another.

This implies that not all real-world experience is equal and adds to an adult student’s educational journey. Knowles, et al. (2005) respond to this issue by claiming that adult education instructors can make sure that the past experiences that are beneficial and supportive of the current learning that face non-traditional students in their classes are made useful by providing

new information in real-world contexts. This allows students to draw on their experiences when it is helpful to them.

Adult Students' Readiness to Learn and Their Influences

All students are enrolled in higher education for a particular purpose. As discussed in chapter two, the reasons for adult students can be different from those of traditional students. This is the direct result of their age and their prior life experiences. According to Knowles, et al. (2005), “adults generally become ready to learn when their life situation creates a need to know” and they bring with them an eagerness to succeed as a result of this drive (p. 194). Unfortunately, not all non-traditional students have the ability to be self-directed and take control of their learning, particularly in a writing class where feedback is so important; this is a result of their past experiences with learning and their level of self confidence. Daniel D. Pratt (1988) states that adults enter the classroom with different levels of self-assuredness that classroom facilitators need to recognize and support. In order for a student to be a self-directed learner, she will need to possess both direction and internal support. A student needs direction “when they lack the necessary knowledge or skills to make informed choices” and a student’s “need for support comes from a lack of commitment to the goals (motivation) or lack of confidence in one’s ability to accomplish the goals” (p. 165-166). A writing teacher can provide both direction and support to students who are in need. Some adult students have great competence in a course’s subject matter but still require a substantial amount of support with their writing. In this sense, they are not quite as independent as a student with high subject matter competence and a low need for dependence on the instructor. Both Knowles, et al. (2005) and Pratt (1988) assert that faculty are responsible for assessing whether a student needs direction, or support, or both.

The writing classroom calls for students to develop an understanding of the writing process, like invention and revision, as well as the rhetorical situation in which certain writing acts take place. Instructor feedback to student writing is a critical component to the way students approach their writing and what they learn through the steps of its process: writing, responding, and re-writing. Feedback is a form of direction for writing students. The more a student receives aid on assignment expectations and formative assessments on her rough drafts of writing projects, the more equipped she is to evolve her skills for other writing ventures. This study found that adult students are more receptive to feedback on their class assignments once they develop a relationship with their professor and in many cases they demand this feedback in order to improve. Professor Steven stated, “They definitely wanted a lot of feedback. I’d get emails like ‘Hey, you wrote that comment. I changed this paragraph, can you take a look at it?’ There was a wanting to improve.” Professor Steven’s opinion regarding the difference between the reaction from the traditional student and a non-traditional student regarding instructor feedback on final drafts of an essay:

They want to make use of the feedback and change and grow as a writer. Whereas the younger students still see it more as a justification for their score. While not okay, “I understand why I got” and that’s the end of the equation.

This represents the differences in the way students interpret the value of the direction they are given in class. The traditional student seems to conceptualize comments as summative in nature: they are the concluding statements that defend a letter grade on an assignment. As mentioned in Professor Steven’s statement above, traditional students tend to see feedback as the justification for an immutable score on an assignment in the grade book. Whereas, the perception of the

professors in this study indicate that the non-traditional students in their classes tend to view feedback as an ongoing conversation between themselves and the instructor.

Pratt (1998) claims that students who require a substantial amount of direction in the beginning of a course should gain more agency over time once they develop their skills. The andragogical model, according to Knowles (2005), reiterates the need for adult educators to provide direction to students in order to build their competence in the subject matter. Adult students are products of their environment; their eagerness to learn and perform well is a natural motivator that, in many cases, will encourage them to grow through the direction they are provided by their professors. Two professors in this study commented on the benefits they saw when non-traditional students received feedback on their assignments and revised them for their final drafts. Professor Mark stated, “I would say that I didn’t feel like comments I wrote on papers were just going off into the void.” He described the non-traditional student as being proactive about getting more direction on her assignments if she needed it: “I knew the older students would come into my office and they’d want to talk about how to improve.” Professor Colin said that some of the non-traditional students in his classes have been more impervious to harsh criticism than the traditional students. He contends that this is the result of their readiness to learn what they need to learn in order to do well in the class and complete with a high score:

I oftentimes offend people [who are] not thinking I’m helping because of the way I say things. What I’ve noticed with older students is they want that. They want to know exactly what’s wrong with it, exactly what they need to do to fix it. They don’t care about their feelings or your feelings or whatever. It’s like: “I’m not going to get my feelings hurt. I need an A in this class. I need to pass this class or you tell me what’s going to

happen.” Or they will just say they will tell me what’s going to happen, what they’re able to do or whatever.

Traditional students tend to see feedback as a cumulative description of their skill level reinforced by the assignment of a letter grade in conjunction to the instructor comments. According to Professor Colin, non-traditional students seem to understand that the direction they receive from their professors can help them become better writers: “Once you get them receptive, they’re more interested in making changes to their own, not just the assignment, but their own approach to doing things.” In this sense, adult students come into the writing classroom aware that they are more dependent on the instructor for direction in the learning process in order to become more competent in the subject matter.

Feedback, as discussed above, is one way that instructors in this study provide direction for students in their classes. Another way that writing faculty help non-traditional students is by modeling writing tasks. Professor Tony is one of the professors in this study who works with students who have failed the writing proficiency exam at least three times and are taking his class to develop basic paragraphing and content organization of on-demand, in-class writing. The writing proficiency screening test (WPST) is a required exam that measures writing competencies. All students, including transfers, must take this test before they can take a mandatory, upper-division, writing-intensive course in their major. The test is given multiple times a year and students can retake the test until they pass it. Full-time faculty provide a class once a semester that offers students practice and direction for the WPST. An analysis of this class has postulated some interesting and contradictory information on non-traditional students.

Professor Tony, who is currently the only professor who facilitates the WPST support class each semester, states that about 60% of the student base for the course is non-traditional

and many of these students are transfers from local community colleges. To prepare students for the exam, this professor supports his curriculum by modeling different aspects of writing for his students. He walks students through paragraph construction starting with topic sentence creation and idea development through the use of examples:

A lot of times it is on developing paragraphs and really getting them set with topic sentences and check back from the support of the paragraph, the questions on this one paragraph, focus on the topic of the paragraph. Focusing on how does the paragraph relate to the thesis or whatever your central point is for the whole essay and then does the essay respond to what the prompt was actually asking.

He maintained that most of these students fail the test because they cannot organize their thoughts and develop them with proper support. Grammar issues are a problem for a few of the students in his class. Providing students with models of successful essays has been one way that he feels works with the older students:

I use a lot of examples. And from experience they seem to grasp concepts at least the ideas and elements that I am trying to get across to actual examples. Looking at an example that is not very successful and looking at why they might not be successful and what we can do. What might be done to improve it and make it more successful. I apply that to pretty much everything. As far as talking about the structure whether it's involving a thesis statement or developing a paragraph.

The non-traditional students in this class are in need of extra assistance with their writing in order for them to pass the proficiency exam. Knowles, et al. (2005) argue that adult students will enroll in courses and perform at varying levels of proficiency as a result of their previous experiences. In the case of the WPST support class, it is up to the professor to discover the

competence level of each student and design protocols that will help her out. Their readiness to learn is determined by how much they practice their writing with the professor. Unfortunately, many of the non-traditional students in his WPST support course do not take the time to work on their writing:

The ones that I am getting in the 3000 that are older, non-traditional second language individuals are more typically the ones that struggle with doing their work and struggle coming to class. Struggle with being in class on time, struggle with participating with whatever we are doing in class.

Some of them do not attend the required one-hour tutoring service provided for the class each week. This behavior does not match the tendencies that other faculty in this study have perceived from their experiences with non-traditional students. This may speak to the type of class this is and the way adult students understand their own needs. These are students that have most likely struggled with their writing skills since they have been in higher education.

The performance of adult students in different learning situations is influenced by the amount of direction they need from their professors to achieve high competence in the subject matter, as discussed above, and the level of support they receive from their instructors to stay committed to their goals. The level of support a student needs is dependent on her confidence in her abilities and her motivation to complete the needed tasks to be successful in the course: “When learners are both committed and confident of their ability, they can be relatively self supporting. When they lack both, they may need more support than it is reasonable to expect from a teacher” (Pratt, 1988, p. 166). When students lack confidence and need motivation to successfully complete their work, the learning situation can be compromised. Professor Tony expressed his confusion and frustration with many of his non-traditional students:

So, having to take extra semesters of school to take the class, and you would think with all that these students would be ultra motivated, work extra hard to try and overcome the challenges that they are trying to deal with. But, the reality is actually quite the opposite. Even under these circumstances, many of them are relatively unmotivated and it is difficult for me to get them motivated to work harder.

He stated that students treat the course as any other class that assigns homework where they continue to put in the bare minimum of effort like they would in any of their other classes. This class may just represent the non-traditional students that for whatever reason do not succeed in higher education. A willingness to participate in class activities and talk about their writing with the instructor and their peers shows a readiness to learn that some of these students in the WPST class fail to exhibit.

This study did not attempt to uncover these particular students in more detail to understand whether they remained at CSU Stanislaus or whether they sought out other types of campus services to help with the WPST, like the tutoring services in the writing center. It is important to stress that many of the unmotivated students discussed by the WPST professor in this study did not pass the WPST after taking his class. On average, about 50% of the course will pass the WPST after taking this preparatory class. Not all of these writing classes constitute non-traditional students such as these. This class posed an interesting contradiction to the other data collected from the writing and literature professors in this study. It is possible that this WPST course is an exception as a result of it being a place for students who may also struggle with learning behaviors that interfere with their learning abilities and habits, such as a lack of motivation or a resentment of their failure on the test. In order for more clarity on this issue, more research would need to be conducted on the non-traditional students in WPST support

courses. This research could not garner enough information to make a substantiated analysis. The support that a professor provides in the class continues to be an important discussion of the adult student achievement in higher education.

The relationship a non-traditional student has with her professor is a key to helping her remain successful. Knowles, et al. (2005) describe how the term ‘support’ “refers to the affective encouragement the learner needs from others” and influences a non-traditional student’ readiness to learn (p. 195). Much of the classroom support for students is from the professor and other students in the class. Deidre described how her professors made an impact on her time at CSU Stanislaus: “I genuinely enjoyed my professors. I think when you’re a returning student and you’re closer to the age of most of your professors, you have a different rapport with them.” As discussed in chapter three, a college professor remains at the center of a non-traditional student’s academic experience and is a critical component of her success. Some non-traditional students develop a deep connection with their instructors and this influences how they perceive their academic journey. The academic and social involvement for all students is directly related to their classroom experiences with their professors.

Conclusion

This chapter draws on the perspectives of five CSU professors regarding their experiences with the non-traditional students in their classes. The research on adult learning continues to support that connections between faculty and non-traditional students are critical to the learning process. This study found that many professors find ways of accommodating the external lives of adult students and making adjustments to the course schedule on an individual basis when it is needed. It was also found that adult students could be relied upon to follow through with their new deadlines. More research can be collected on the interactions between

adult students and their professors and how they play a role in student retention and eventual graduation.

This research also began to uncover data on how some non-traditional students perform on timed writing like the writing proficiency screening test (WPST) in the CSU system. This study only looked at one professor and his experiences with adult students in his WPST preparatory class; however, a closer look at other preparatory classes such as these across multiple CSU campuses might help to ascertain where non-traditional students struggle in writing situations where high-stakes, timed writing takes place. This also means that more research can be conducted on the adult transfer students that enter the CSU and are placed into situations where they have to draw on writing skills that they have not used in many years since they left the community college system. In what ways are community college writing classrooms supporting their potential transfer students with skills that can be used for success on these mandatory skills tests? Understanding the prior learning experiences of non-traditional students can help educators learn how they can be supported in other writing situations once they transfer to the California State University system. These kinds of experiences influence the way adult learners interact with their current educational decisions and how they perceive themselves as learners.

Chapter Five: An Adult Learning Paradigm

This chapter seeks to conceptualize a way of looking at adult learning to inform institutional and pedagogical practices that enhance the learning of all students: both traditional and non-traditional. Again drawing upon Malcolm Knowles' concept of adult learning theory that defines how adults learn as a result of their time spent outside the classroom after graduating from high school, this discussion analyzes the data collected from the previous three chapters: the non-traditional student's identity and her prior educational background from chapter two, the institutional constructs that support adult learning from chapter three, and the classroom strategies that influence adult learning from chapter four. Traditional college students may not have the same life experiences as adult students as a result of their age; however, they can benefit from curriculum and pedagogy that supports the non-traditional student. The end result of this chapter is to communicate a holistic way of understanding adult learning as it pertains to the classroom.

(SELF) LEARNER: Learner Self-Identity:

This study confirmed findings that are commonly addressed in the literature regarding the various backgrounds of adult learners in higher education. One such finding is that non-traditional students have a tendency to enroll in a variety of educational programs before they attain their bachelor's degree. As seen with two of the non-traditional participants in this study, adult students have a tendency to enroll at a four-year university as a transfer student from a community college. One participant completed her AA degree at a community college, worked for 25 years, and returned to enroll in a university for her bachelor's degree. Upon her return, she arrived on the CSU campus with a basic understanding of the university. The community college

system provides convenient education to many students with non-traditional circumstances. This experience means that they enroll at a university with a partially developed understanding of the higher education structure and its processes.

This research also uncovered the role of education in their adult lives as students, employees, and mothers/fathers. Their reasons for attending college are in direct support of their immediate responsibilities to their personal lives and the needs they foresee. Their motivation seems to stem from their desire to increase their performance in the workplace, expand their opportunities in their career, and provide a role model for their children. Their educational choices are tied directly to their personal worlds. This study revealed that non-traditional students choose academic paths that assist their educational needs and provide the least resistance from their work schedules and family obligations.

This study also discovered that non-traditional students arrive at a four-year institution with prior educational experiences that influence the way they perceive their learning environment. If they struggled at a previous institution, that experience affects the way they make decisions about the type of classes they take, the way they behave in a course based on a particular teaching method, and the way they perceive a particular assignment. Fortunately, non-traditional students are motivated by their ability to see their future and how their education will positively influence their future lives. As a result, they generally learn to take responsibility for themselves in the classroom. This study found that according to their professors, non-traditional students had more accountability for their learning than traditional students. When adult students had outside priorities that required that they miss class or an assignment, they usually notified their professors long before the due date, and when accommodations were made, like extending an assignment deadline or a final project, they were trusted to follow through with their

extension. They took responsibility for their hectic life schedules and did what was needed to complete their work for the course. Adult students draw on their prior experiences in education, work, and personal lives to help them in the university classroom.

The adult student's school identity is closely tied with her work identity as seen by the behaviors discussed by the non-traditional students and the professors in this study. Non-traditional students see themselves as being directly responsible for their academic success and the mediator between their non-academic and academic lives. The CSU Stanislaus professors in this study stated that non-traditional students visited their office hours much more regularly than traditional students with questions and concerns about the class, they wrote them more frequent emails containing questions about reading and writing assignments, and they provided constant alerts regarding a need to miss class or arrive late due to issues in their schedules. They are involved in their education and make it their priority to access available resources in order to be successful in their courses. Adult students are self-directed and take pride in their ability utilize their academic resources and manage their time in order to accomplish their educational goals.

Directed Self-Learning

According to this study, many non-traditional students are self-regulating and are able to manage their academic responsibilities without much assistance from their professors. As discovered in chapter four, some adult students are more capable of self-direction than others since this quality is tied to confidence levels of each student. Writing classrooms tend to have an embedded self-directing quality that can be seen in the structure of writing acts that take place during the development phase of the writing process. Writing professors oversee activities like pre-writing, essay draft development, peer review, and revision practices that help students understand how invention and drafting work together in producing a final project. Writing

faculty can capitalize on this process and find ways of enhancing the self-directing nature of the writing classroom by giving adult students, or any capable student of all ages, more experiences that help them build self-regulating behaviors.

Self-directed learning has been part of the central discussion of adult learning for many years (Garrison, 1997; Merriam, 2001). Knowles, et al. (2005) states that the inherent self-directedness of adult learners is an innate human characteristic that surfaces from their desire to continue to learn. Age is not necessarily always an indicator that a student is ready for self-directed learning; however, it has been found that it has a close connection to a learner's autonomy and many adults exhibit autonomous characteristics as a result of their prior life experiences. According to self-directed learning theory, the adult learner has a need to "learn on one's own" and much of the research surrounding this issue focuses on the external factors that contribute to a learning environment that accommodates this type of learning. Brookfield (1985) posits that self-directed learning requires two activities: a conducive learning environment with activities that promote self-direction, and internal reflection capabilities of the learner who is aware of his or her self-knowledge. The data collected from this study suggest that non-traditional students are aware of their abilities in the classroom. The fact that they visit their professor at his or her office hours to inquire about an issue with an assignment means that they can identify their struggles and understand how to seek answers for those problems.

Self-directed learning requires that students take full responsibility of a learning situation with only a minimum assistance from faculty or the institution (Brookfield; 1985; Garrison, 1997; Grow, 1991). Not all students enter a learning environment with the ability to be self-regulating. According to Gerald O. Grow (1991), faculty need to discover how self-directed students are in their classes and align teaching ideologies and methods to match the learning

stages of self-direction. He says there are four stages of self-direction competency in adult students. Each stage requires that students gain skills to reach the next level of self-direction. Dependent learners reside in the lowest level of competency; these learners have low self-direction and require an authority figure in the classroom to provide them with explicit directions for an activity or assignment that details exactly what is to be done, how it is to be completed, and when it is due. These students are generally those in primary and secondary education. The second stage labels students as interested learners when they require a professor that is a motivator in the classroom. These students are interested in learning; however, they require a purpose and a reason for accomplishing a writing task. They need “a directive but highly supportive approach that reinforces [their] willingness and enthusiasm” to learn (Grow, 1991. p. 131). The third stage of self-directed learning is where involved students are able to explore their subjects and activities without a lot of direction but require help in their abilities to work with others and in finding ways to learn from them. The teacher becomes a facilitator to students at this stage where they help students find the tools and methods for learning, and ways of interpreting their experiences. Writing pedagogy often privileges this kind of decentered classroom where the instructor is more of a facilitator who makes suggestions to students about their writing and encourages activities that enable students to look at their writing in new ways. The last, and final, stage in which students are very self-directed requires a teacher who is a consultant. These learners thrive in an autonomous environment where they take responsibility for their learning, direction, and productivity (Grow, 1991).

Not all non-traditional students will be able to reach the last stage of self-direction. However, this discussion is important to our responsibility to accommodate to a diverse population of students in our classes is for faculty to understand that many non-traditional, as

well as traditional students, can thrive in classes arranged with their needs in mind as a part of the development of the class. Grow (1991) states that good teaching means understanding where a student falls in the range of self-direction and provides the type of assistance that fits with the students. The difficulty comes from the reality that not all students are equal in their ability to be self-directed. This means that faculty need to discover ways of accommodating diversity in student abilities and understand how students develop self-directed learning competencies. One of the ways that self-directed learning can be integrated into a college-level writing course is through the use of a type of assessment called learning/grading contracts.

Asao Inoue (2014) found that writing assessment is inherently subjective and biased, and tends to “unevenly affect social, ethnic, and racial populations other than the local dominant White one” because it “produce[s] failure as a product in the system, reifying it and then naturalizing failure in student populations (p. 334-335). As a result, failure becomes “intertwined with students’ and teachers’ conflicting ideological stances as much as with teachers’ phenomenological reading practices that may presuppose error” (p. 333). He suggests that writing classes should find another way of conceptualizing failure. Inoue’s (2014) research on writing assessment contributes to this study because student success is not just the result of inherent writing ability. He found that another contributor to writing development, not necessarily addressed in assignment rubrics, is the noncognitive qualities exhibited by students. According to Inoue (2014), the noncognitive dimensions of student writing consists of behaviors outside the exhibited academic writing abilities such as persistence and responsibility that are just as important to their success in their work as the cognitive. Motivation was found to be extremely influential in the “scholastic engagement” of students and led to greater affects on academic achievement in a number of measures. He posits that grading contracts encourages

students to write because it changes the way they are graded on their writing. Instead of being graded on the end product of their writing assignment, students are assessed according to the effort, progress, and development that they outlined in their grading contracts. This supports a type of self-directive learning.

A grading contract changes the dimensions of assessment. Inoue's model of contract grading places emphasis on the production of text rather than the evaluation of the final draft. He states that contract grading "does not produce grades or evaluations by teachers; instead, it produces judgments, investigations, negotiations, and discussion among students and with the teacher about expectations, new drafts, and future practices" (Inoue, 2014, p. 346). This creates an assessment structure similar to what adult students find in the workplace prior to their re-enrollment at a four-year university. The writing professor becomes a facilitator in their students' writing; self-directed students are given the freedom to manage their writing journey based on the expectations set forth at the beginning of the class or the assignment. They are graded on their accomplishment of these expectations. A writing professor and a student can sit down at the beginning of the semester and create an action plan that encompasses a set a of expectations for drafts so that "more informed and purposeful decisions about those drafts (and the students) can be generated by students and teachers together" (Inoue, 2014, p. 346). This supports individual writing development among students as well as promotes more self-directed and purposeful learning. More research on this topic is needed to further its development in writing instruction.

Self-directed learning strategies at the classroom level can benefit the natural orientation of non-traditional student learners. Faculty can find many ways of encouraging more self-regulation in students by analyzing their current pedagogical ideologies and incorporating activities that encourage students to take responsibility for their learning. Some may argue that

all students can profit from classroom activities that enhance self-direction and that this should be a goal for all types of pedagogies in learning environments serving the learning orientations of adult students (Merriam, 2001). This study suggests that more can be done to accommodate the non-traditional student by aligning pedagogy with their learning orientations. This research also recognizes that more can be done at the institutional level to support adult students with prior experience and alternative learning.

Prior Learning Assessments (PLA)

Institutionally, adult students can be served by finding ways of valuing their prior educational and workplace experiences. Since an adult's identity is closely tied to her experiences outside the classroom before she enrolled in the university, acknowledging this experience can help her feel supported by the institution. Costs and time commitments are not the only educational concerns that pose problems for non-traditional students that have to mediate between their coursework and their external responsibilities in their personal lives. Their prior learning experiences in the workforce and through other educational endeavors supplement the knowledge that non-traditional students bring with them into the classroom, yet much of this goes unnoticed when they enroll into a degree program. A prior learning assessment (PLA) is "the process by which an individual's learning is assessed and evaluated for purposes of granting college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training" (Klein-Collins and Wertheim, 2013, p. 51) and is becoming more popular within institutions as a result of the "greater awareness of the links between education and the workplace" (White, 2013, p. 103). This research discovered that prior learning assessments can support student retention by providing adult students a way to get credit for the learning experiences that they possess that is also important to their prospective degree program. Angela Gast (2013) agrees that prior learning

supports the adult student by giving them credit for their current knowledge in the discipline since “adults returning to the classroom often do so with a great deal of life experience, which in some cases may be deemed equivalent to college-level learning” (p. 21).

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is a nonprofit organization that was developed in 1974 and provides colleges and universities with educational strategies that support adult students (Compton, Cox, and Laanan, 2006; Klein-Collins and Wertheim, 2013; CAEL website). CAEL continuously conducts research on adult student needs, including the benefits and intricacies of implementing prior learning assessments in adult programs. According to their website, they also provide information on recommendations for adult student services, training for staff in adult student development programs, strategies and tools for institutions interested in implementing PLA programs on their campus, institutions with connections to workforce development to help institutions align their program goals with workforce needs. CAEL insists that prior learning assessment is a way for institutions to increase their retention and graduation rates. They found that “adult students who earned prior learning assessment (PLA) credits were two and a half times more likely to persist to graduation than those adult students who did not earn PLAs” (Gast, 2013, p. 21). Klein-Collins and Wertheim (2013) predict that providing adult students with opportunities to collect PLA credits helps to motivate students because they save money on tuition, and they are able to enter a program with accrued credit. This new momentum in program implementation of PLA credits is likely to continue in universities as well as in federal and state governments: PLA has been gaining respect and acceptance in higher education and the public sector, largely coinciding with the emphasis on improving rates of degree completion” (p. 51).

Dr. Holly Cameron, the institutional administrator in the University Extended Education program at CSU Stanislaus, is an advocate for prior learning assessments (PLA) because it was successfully used at her previous institution before coming to Stanislaus. She said that prior learning assessment can measure a student's competency in various aspects of a field when they have been in the profession for a long time. She said that it works very well in fields like nursing, real estate, business, and human resources programs. One way an institution can assess students is through a test:

In the human resource management field, there are exams that you can take. There is a lower level and then a senior level. If somebody had passed a lower level, we automatically, gave them three hours of credit that went with the human resource management course. If they had shown that they passed senior level, then we would give them additional three hours for the senior level HR course.

Another way that students can be assessed for prior learning is through a portfolio process:

The other way too is using a portfolio process where then they have to show proof of these 20 years of being in human resources and they they've done compensation analysis and they've done hiring. You can put it together in a packet and then a faculty member assesses it for credit.

According to Dr. Cameron, these types of assessments can require much time and energy for faculty and program administrators to create. She stated that CSU Stanislaus is hesitant to implement PLAs because they require the development of various types of measurement tools, yet their benefits have been shown to help non-traditional students: "Studies show that students are much more likely to complete degree studies if PLA is incorporated" (White, 2013, p. 103). The ubiquitous focus on degree completion throughout the institution and throughout the

university system across the nation has made the implementation of PLAs in a variety of programs critical to student success (Gast, 2013; White, 2013).

PLAs also serve to make the costs of higher education more manageable for adult students with families and other financial obligations. According to Dr. Cameron, prior learning assessment lowers the cost of getting a degree. The costs associated with assessing prior learning are primarily the result of the fees incurred by the student for the review of the test or the portfolio by faculty in the department. At her previous institution, the costs of reviewing prior learning created both institutional and faculty costs: “We would charge actually \$225 for a 3-unit course. We would pay the faculty member \$75 and \$150 was really administrative cost. \$225 is still a little costly and we required [faculty] to take a course on how to do it.” In this case, if a student wanted to satisfy a course requirement by using her prior learning from a work experience she had before she enrolled in the program, she could submit a portfolio or complete a test, administered by the department, to measure her knowledge related to that course. The student would pay \$225 for this assessment. In some degree programs like real estate, having a real estate license eliminated the need for a student to take one of the courses in the program. Demonstrating this learning required the student to show proof of the license. Showing proof of a real estate license, according to Dr. Cameron, did not incur any costs by the student. However, if the student were trying to prove a course competency by providing a portfolio of her work or taking a test that measured her knowledge about the course as a result of her prior work experiences, the review of this artifact would require a fee by the student. The program would be responsible for determining acceptable prior learning and a way to assess that knowledge.

Incorporating prior learning assessment into an institutional degree program would require faculty to create a way to assess student learning outcomes of a particular course and

design a set of expectations for equivalency tests and demonstrations. Faculty would need to agree on a process of assessment that would accurately measure the value of the prior experiences of a student and its alignment with course standards. This is especially critical when students are attempting to use prior learning to exit a prerequisite course. Using PLA as an option for non-traditional students with considerable work experience in their field of study substantiates the value that these students bring to higher education in that “what individuals know is more important than where or how they acquired that knowledge” (Klein-Collins and Wertheim, 2013, p. 54). This accommodation encourages the likelihood that adult students will feel more supported in higher education programs.

PROCESS: Prior Experiences as Places for Learning

One of the questions that this study aimed to answer was how adult students learn best in their writing classrooms. In order to understand the non-traditional student and the perceptions regarding what supports them and what hinders them, this project revealed details about their identity and how closely it is tied to their prior experiences in the world before they enrolled in college. While the previous section also addresses student identity, this discussion focuses on the adult student’s previous experiences as a way of helping her with invention and the development of her ideas in her writing. This discussion attempts to promote new ways of thinking about prior experience and its role in the learning and writing process.

The role of the adult student’s prior life experiences and learning is a critical resource that she brings to the classroom. Malcolm Knowles et al. (2005) state that these life experiences can aid, as well as obstruct, a non-traditional student’s learning in the college classroom. It was found in chapter three that non-traditional students see their world through a lens. This lens is influenced by prior learning and experience and ultimately shapes the way she receives and

processes new information. Adult students use this lens as guide as they navigate through their courses. A few of the professors in this study discovered that the adult students in their classes had difficulty adapting to the learning environment as a result of their inability to adjust to new ways of thinking and writing. Professor Antonio found that some of his adult students had difficulty writing a reader response about a novel they had read in his class because it forced them to look at it with a lens that they had never used in their prior experience. This is something that all students, traditional and non-traditional, must face in their academic career; however, one of the adult students in Professor Antonio's class clearly showed that she was distressed about the assignment. This issue revealed that some non-traditional students have difficulty thinking outside their mental schema and face it with resistance. Malcolm et al. (2005) posit that an adult student's mental schema has been in use for many years; altering that paradigm requires a re-evaluation of existing beliefs, and this can be quite difficult for many students.

Finding ways of connecting adult students to their learning environment will increase their ability to learn course content. The key is to provide non-traditional students with a balance between a respect and appreciation for their prior experiences outside of the educational setting, and a desire for them to construct new ways of thinking about the concepts and content of the course. A classroom facilitator can take advantage of this repertoire of experience to enhance the learning capability of the adult students in their classes.

One way to support non-traditional students in the class is to provide transformative learning opportunities. Jack Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory is one of the only educational theories developed within the adult learning discipline. It takes a psychoanalytical approach by describing learners as possessing "a set of assumption—broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience"

(Mezirow, 2000, p. 17). This filter determines how an adult student will react in learning situations that challenge new ways of thinking. Mezirow (2000) refers to the term *perspective transformation* when a student recognizes how her assumptions about life influences the way she interprets the world around her. Perspective transformation is a process of “becoming critically aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation” in learning environments (p. 4). Hoggan (2016) adds that this kind of learning can lead to positive changes in a learner’s habitual way of understanding her world. A change in perspective can lead to a “more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, reflective, and self-directed” mental schema (p. 61). Mezirow (2000) also describes the term *disorienting dilemma* as the moment when an adult student’s current mental schema conflicts with an experience, in a learning environment or in other types of life situations, they encounter. This moment requires a process of “critical dialogue and critical self-reflection as a means of uncovering and critically assessing tacit assumptions” that a learning facilitator can encourage in class (Hoggan, 2016, p. 61).

Professor Antonio’s literature student and her resistance to a reader response in his class, demonstrates a situation where an adult student’s mental framework, her habit of thinking about a text a certain way, prevented her from opening her mind to other ways of reflecting about it. She could not find ways of accessing her repository of life experiences to aid her in producing an analysis for the assigned reader response. Professor Antonio was asking her to perceive of the analysis process in a way that conflicted with her current mental schema. Faculty that face such issues with the adult students in their writing classes can use a variety of techniques to help them work through their disorienting dilemmas and achieve a perspective transformation.

Free writing is one activity that adult students can connect with their current ways of thinking and gain an understanding of how they think, why they think that way, and where a habit of mind originated. Free writing provides students with a way to explore without the inhibition of their habits of the mind. Two of the non-traditional students in this study found free writing to be a good way to mull over a new topic in class or help with the introduction to a new assignment. Deidre described her experiences with free writing in some of her literature classes:

[On beginning writing for a new assignment] What really worked for me was free writing. Literally, you sit down for half an hour and you just write. You just write, write, write, write, write. You are not looking up. You are not worrying about your spelling. You're just writing, writing, writing. You are writing what you think of. Then from there, you pick up what stood out to you. [The professor] had more than that, but that's the one that worked for me. That's the one that made the most sense.

Deidre described a process here that ultimately allows her to explore what she thinks about on a topic in her literature class. This exploration can lead down many paths that are controlled by the student and by the direction provided by the instructor. Deidre's professor can stipulate a direction he would like the students to follow in a given free write. For example, a writing instructor can provide the following prompt to his students: Why do you think Smith's argument is effective or ineffective? This type of prompt focuses the student on a particular topic. Once the student identifies a particular method of thinking about an issue, the instructor can help the student to understand what has led to this kind of opinion. The instructor might then provide another prompt to the students in the class: What past experiences have led you to this given mindset? As the student investigates her past, she can begin to recognize two things: 1. that her past experiences really do influence how she views the world around her, and 2. that her

interpretations of the world are shaped by these experiences. This awareness can begin the transformative process when she can see why she thinks the way she thinks.

Free writing can be frustrating to many students, especially to those who are not comfortable with exploration or unknown destinations. Another non-traditional student, Danielle, described her experiences with free writing in a literature class:

You've got poems you're working with and you have to either examine one poem or compare two poems or two themes in poems. You're sitting down and going 'Where is this leading me? What does this even mean?' You've got to follow it through and so you're just writing about it to get some sort of an idea, a jumping off point.

Free writing requires a release of inhibitions that many writing students struggle with in composition classes and literature classes. As a result, students need to practice it in their classes in order to begin feeling comfortable with its format and technique. If faculty can capitalize on their students' rich life experiences as a way of getting them to think about rhetorical and literary concepts in class while also encouraging transformative learning, adult students might find their writing classes to be more engaging and more connected to their prior learning and life experiences.

This study revealed that adult students are motivated to learn when they can foresee how it will benefit their current situation in the workplace and their continued learning in other classes. They are more involved in classes that are connected to their prior experiences outside of academia; they ascribe value to learning situations that build on their current repertoire of abilities. For example, Professor Mark found great success in his grant writing classes because his adult students were more invested in the writing activities. He stated that the real-world applicability of the writing content contributed to an overall dedication by students to join the

learning community of the classroom. He found that the high participation rates of his students in his grant writing classes indicated that his adult students “were more willing to just raise their hand and participate and talk from day one.” Adult students are more motivated to participate in the writing culture of the classroom when that writing is connected to real-world applicability. Group work within the learning environment can be used to help make this connection for all students in a writing classroom.

Creating group activities that draw out students’ real world experiences and tie them in with the writing curriculum can help all students, not just adult students, perceive their writing as being a part of their world. As previously mentioned above, free writing can be used as a way of helping adult students conceptualize their prior experiences as a contributor to their current knowledge. It is a step in the personal actualization process that helps students understand why they think the way that they do. In other words, it provides the student with a stronger awareness of her identity and how it can be reflected in her thinking and writing. Free writing is also a technique used in the invention process for drawing out possible ideas for writing. Group activities can be created for students to share and discuss how their free writing has led to a position on a particular argument and its connection to the real world. For example, students can be asked to free write about a current event that makes them angry. They can be given the freedom to freely express why they are angry and what should be done to solve it. Then students can be placed into groups to share their ideas with other members of the class. Their group members can respond to their free writes and provide feedback regarding their solutions to the issue. These steps can be the beginning stages of the invention process for an Online Opinion Piece assignment. Adult students may find that their prior knowledge of current events allows them to contribute to the topics and ideas of their group members. This may also benefit the

other group members who are in groups with adult students and who may lack this background knowledge in a particular topic. In a sense, this type of activity can develop an adult student's skills at invention, help them recognize how they are situated in their own knowledge, and conceptualize the classroom as a social community where writing and idea development can evolve through the mediation with their peers.

Conclusion

This study reveals some interesting information about non-traditional students in the writing classroom and contributes to the ongoing discussion of student learning in writing courses within all levels of higher education: community college, public and private universities, technical colleges, etc. It also adds to a conversation about the learning styles and needs of older students in writing classes and writing programs where research is generally lacking within the rhetoric and writing discourse community. When looking at the self-identity of non-traditional students, writing instructors can incorporate learning methodologies that increase and support self-directive behaviors. Institutional administrators can look for ways to increase non-traditional student retention by acknowledging the prior learning experiences of older students. Writing faculty can also look for ways that connect adult students to their learning environment by incorporating activities like free writing as a way of getting students to think about their current perspectives and how these opinions originated and were shaped by their past experiences. A case study of one university provides an overview of the non-traditional student and an introduction to her needs at the classroom, programmatic, and institutional levels in order to encourage more discussion of the success and retention of this student base. This research is the starting point for more inquiries into non-traditional students in higher education.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions for Non-Traditional Students

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been a college student at CSU Stanislaus or another institution?
3. Have you taken any time off from school? If so, how much time? Why did you take time off?
4. Have you attended any other institutions besides CSU Stanislaus? If so, how long? Why did you leave?
5. Are you enjoying your time here at CSU Stanislaus?
6. What do you enjoy most about being a college student?
7. What do you enjoy least about being a college student?
8. What is your definition of what it means to be a successful college student?
9. What kind of career do you want once you graduate?
10. What motivates you to finish a college degree?
11. What aspects of college do you struggle with the most?
12. Have you accessed any student support programs? What programs? How did it/they help you? Or, why haven't you accessed any student support programs?
13. What kinds of programs do you think this campus should implement in order to make going to college more accommodating for you? How would they help you?
14. How do you feel about the composition classes you have taken so far?
15. How would you describe yourself as a writing student?
16. What kinds of skills helped you the most in your composition classes?
17. What kinds of activities helped you become a better writer in your composition classes?
18. What kinds of activities were not as valuable for you?
19. What were you hoping to get out of your writing classes?
20. What aspects of your composition class do you feel was a waste of time for you?
21. Did you participate in the Early Start program?
22. When do you hope to graduate?
23. Do you have any concerns about being able to graduate? If so, what are they?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Composition Faculty

1. What is your favorite part of teaching writing here at CSU Stanislaus?
2. How many of your students are non-traditional age?
3. From your experience, are they different from traditional students who are 18 years old? If so, in what ways?
4. How would you describe them as students?
5. How would you describe them as writers? Are they different writers than traditional age students?
6. Are their needs different than traditional age students? If so, how?
7. What underlying pedagogic theory do you use to support non-traditional students in your classroom?
8. How do the first-year composition classes support non-traditional students?
9. What kinds of activities help non-traditional students in the classroom?
10. What classroom/homework policies are created with them in mind?
11. What kinds of pedagogical and/or curricular challenges do writing teachers face in regards to these students?
12. What types of professional development activities have helped teachers better prepare for non-traditional students?
13. What kinds of tutoring services do you provide that support the non-traditional student?
14. Do you plan certain learning activities with the non-traditional student in mind?

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Program Administrators

(Writing Program Administrator, Writing Center Director, First-Year Composition Director, English department Chair):

1. What are the departmental goals for composition/writing students?
2. How many of your students are non-traditional age?
3. From your experience, are they different from traditional students who are 18 years old? If so, in what ways?
4. How would you describe them as students?
5. How would you describe them as writers? Are they different writers than traditional age students?
6. How do the first-year composition classes support non-traditional students?
7. What kinds of activities help non-traditional students in the classroom?
8. What kinds of pedagogical and/or curricular challenges do writing teachers face in regards to these students?
9. What types of professional development activities have helped teachers better prepare for non-traditional students?
10. What kinds of tutoring services do you provide that support the non-traditional student?

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Institutional Administrators

1. What are the educational goals of the university?
2. What is the institution definition of a non-traditional student?
3. What characteristics set them apart from the traditional student?
4. What difficulties do non-traditional students face?
5. What kinds of activities/programs do they need to be successful?
6. What structures are in place to support non-traditional students?
7. What do they need in the classroom to be successful?
8. What professional development is provided to faculty/administrators to support this group?

Appendix E: Consent Form

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Exploring the Institutional and Programmatic Support Systems in Writing Studies for Non-Traditional Students in California State Universities

Principal Investigator: Cassandra Dulin

UTEP: English

In this consent form, “you” always means the study subject. If you are a legally authorized representative (such as a parent or guardian), please remember that “you” refers to the study subject.

1. Introduction

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. Please take your time making a decision and feel free to discuss it with your friends and family. Before agreeing to take part in this research study, it is important that you read the consent form that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

2. Why is this study being done?

You have been asked to take part in a research study that seeks to learn more about the non-traditional college student at the California State University in order to make recommendations to writing instructors, program directors, and institutional administrators regarding the needs of this student base.

Approximately, 15 participants, will be enrolling in this study at CSU Stanislaus.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are an institutional administrator, a writing center director, an English department chair, a Freshman Composition director, a composition instructor, or a non-traditional aged student.

If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last about 1-1½ hours of your total time.

3. What is involved in this study?

If you agree to take part in this study, the researcher will ask you to participate in an interview that will take anywhere between 1-1 ½ hours.

4. What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

There are no known risks associated with this research.

5. What will happen if I am injured in this study?

The University of Texas at El Paso and its affiliates do not offer to pay for or cover the cost of medical treatment for research related illness or injury. No funds have been set aside to pay or reimburse you in the event of such injury or illness. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form. You should report any such injury to Cassandra Dulin at (209)406-8029 and to the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

6. What are the benefits to taking part in this study?

There will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. This research may help us to understand the non-traditional student a little better in order to make better institutional, programmatic, curricular, and pedagogical decisions for this student base.

7. What other options are there?

You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

8. Who is paying for this study?

This study is currently unfunded.

9. What are my costs?

There are no direct costs. This study will be conducted on the CSU Stanislaus campus or over the phone at a time that is convenient for you.

10. Will I be paid to participate in this study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this research study.

11. What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a member of the research group so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if he or she thinks that being in the study may cause you harm.

12. Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Cassandra Dulin at 209-406-8029 or cassandra.dulin@gmail.com.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

13. What about confidentiality?

Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name. All records will be labeled with pseudonyms and stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. All interviews will be audio recorded and these files will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected computer. The audio files and their transcriptions will be destroyed six months after the completion of this study.

The results of this research study may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your identity will not be disclosed in those presentations.

14. Mandatory reporting:

If information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

15. Authorization Statement:

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I will get a copy of this consent form now and can get information on results of the study later if I wish.

Participant name: _____
Signature: _____

Date: _____
Time: _____

Consent form explained/witnessed by:

Printed name: _____
Signature: _____

Date: _____
Time: _____

Educational Vita

Cassandra Dulin is a native Californian who earned a Bachelor's of Science degree in Business and a doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. She earned a Master's degree from California State University, Stanislaus in English. In 2012, she entered the PhD program in Rhetoric and Composition. During her time at UTEP, Cassandra worked as an Assistant Director in First-Year Composition in the English Department and teaches rhetoric and writing classes as an assistant instructor. She also has also presented at a variety of conferences including the 4Cs, NCTE, TYCA, and the WPA Conference.

As a result of her research, she has a published article called "California Dreams: Working Class Writers at the CSU" in an edited book *Class in the Composition Classroom: Pedagogy and the Working Class* coming out in 2016. She is currently working on another article called "Dismantling Writing Assessment: Towards Collaborative Rubrics" that is forthcoming in an edited book *Beyond the Frontier: Innovations in First-Year Composition* in 2017.

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This thesis/dissertation was typed by Cassandra Dulin.