Adult Learners in Higher Education: An Examination of Academic, Social and Environmental Needs as Perceived by Adult Learners and Faculty.

by

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Abstract

In recent years, colleges and universities have witnessed an increase in the number of adult learners entering higher education (Hardin, 2008; Osgood-Treston, 2001). The growth in adult students attending college encourages institutions to better understand the specific needs of the adult learner population. While adult learners may enter higher education for a variety reasons, nontraditional learners generally face similar challenges while pursuing academic endeavors. The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. This study used quantitative measures in its design by using the survey method. The survey, with a convenience sample of 136 adult learners and 74 faculty members was used to measure responses to each of the research questions. The dependent variables of this study were academic, social and environmental needs; whereas, the independent variables included adult learners and faculty members. To analyze the research data, three 2 x 2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were used to compare means between adult learners and faculty perceptions to academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners in a four-year setting.   The quantitative findings of the study indicated a statistically significant interaction occurred between part-time and full-time status in relation to academic needs. The results also indicated a statistically significant interaction occurred between part-time and full-time status regarding adult learner environmental needs   No other relationships were found through the analyses of participant data.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In recent years, colleges and universities have experienced continual growth amongst the adult student population. In 1980, less than 4 million college students were age 25 and older; this number expanded to 6 million by the year 2000 (Chao & Good, 2004). Wyatt (2011) advised the undergraduate student population on many college campuses throughout the United States now include a significant number of nontraditional students. Per the U.S. Department of Education (2005), as cited by Guidos and Dooris (2008), higher education institutes are estimated to rise by nearly 2 million students between 2000 and 2014. Knowles (1975) demonstrated that learning is as a lifelong process and should not be confined to youth only. Although adult learners have transformed the traditional characteristics of undergraduate students; the bureaucratic nature of many colleges and universities create a disconnect between the adult learner and the institution (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989).

A variety of influences have aided in escalating adult student enrollment across higher education. Ross-Gordon (2011) asserted some of the factors include shifting demands within the workplace, technological changes, and an aging population. While some adult learners access higher education to earn a degree, others engage in higher learning to acquire job specific skills to advance in their career (Kasworm, 2012). Schmidt (2013) proposed that, in recent years, more adults are changing jobs and shifting career paths than in the past. In many instances, career

changes often require additional education. Klein-Collins (2011) argued adult student enrollment increased as more adults associate higher learning with improved economic success. Accelerated programs and distance education have also aided non-traditional students in overcoming location and time related barriers that often exist in their pursuit of post-secondary education (Donaldson & Graham, 2002).

According to Wyatt (2011), adult learners face distinctive barriers to education in comparison to their traditional counterparts. Ross-Gordon (2011) suggested adult learners are challenged with maintaining multiple roles while furthering their education. For instance, the adult student community is comprised of a diverse group of full-time and part-time employees, parents, and community leaders (Coulter & Mandell, 2012). Although multiple life roles may provide social support for the learner, they also restrict the student's allocation of time toward academic study (Ross-Gordon, 2011). Adult learners are also challenged with overcoming a lack of academic preparation, while circumventing financial hurdles (Spellman, 2007). In addition to academic and financial barriers, adult students must overcome obstacles related to extensive family obligations, along with, cultural and social expectations and issues (Spellman, 2007). Merrill (2015) advised issues related to student retention and withdrawals is a complex interaction between student, institution and external influences.

Adult learners typically enter college with a wealth of life experience and previous academic involvement. However, because of their time away from the educational environment, many adult students face academic struggles (Worth & Stephens, 2011). Moreover, Klein-Collins (2011) suggested adult learners generally fear academic failure, especially if their previous participation in education was not a positive experience. These factors increase the risk of adult learners not completing their degree program. Additional research supports this idea by

describing adult learners as full-time employees who are part-time students with dependents (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Merrill (2015) advised returning to education for working adults is not an easy task, particularly if the objective is to pursue an undergraduate degree in higher education. Although higher education may help one secure a better future, adult learners typically experience academic challenges, struggles integrating into the institutional culture, as well as, obstacles in their personal lives (Merrill, 2015).

Kasworm (2008) argued that although some adults enter college to continue a previously interrupted academic journey, and others enter the higher education to embark upon a new unfamiliar territory; there exist a commonality amongst this student population. In comparison to their younger collegiate counterparts, adult learners, typically enter college with a desire to successfully manage the existing responsibilities in their lives, while adding new academic expectations associated with the role of student (Kasworm, 2008). Per Graham and Donaldson (1999), adult learners are often fearful of returning to school and typically have concerns regarding whether they have the same intellectual aptitude as the traditional-aged students on campus. Literature concerning adult learners has consistently highlighted feelings of alienation that exist amongst the adult student community (Plageman, 2011).

The unique attributes of nontraditional students have resulted in new challenges for educational leaders in their attempt to address the needs of all students. To meet the needs of adult students, colleges and universities are encouraged to implement programs and services, and create a campus climate, that embraces adults in all academic programs (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002). While adult student enrollment has significantly increased over recent decades, institutions have continuously experienced low retention rates amongst this segment of students (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). To address declining retention rates, institutions have made

modification to admission policies and academic programming (Plageman, 2011). For instance, more institutions have developed accelerated programs, hybrid and distance learning courses, as well as, awarded college credit for life experiences (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

Academic Needs

Metzner and Bean (1987) asserted that academic needs are a critical component to the overall student experience, and has a major influence on the retention of adult learners. Watters (2003) asserted that as universities attract more adult learners, research suggests majority of adult learners lack the traditional academic skills and abilities possessed by traditional students entering the collegiate environment. Therefore, it is imperative to understand academic factors in higher education that affect student departure amongst adult learners. Although Tinto (1975) asserted that a student's primary focus, when entering college, is to feel socially integrated; they are also concerned with meeting the academic requirements as well.

Not all students enter the college setting with the necessary tools needed to meet the cognitive demands required to succeed at the collegiate level (Hlinka, 2017). While academic integration has been viewed as essential to student persistence in college (Tinto, 1993); little attention has been directed toward the capabilities of college students to reach higher levels of cognition that is required by college level work (Decker, 2013). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) asserted that student persistence is also influenced by faculty teaching abilities, coupled with the instructional design of the course, and the overall organization of the course materials.

Social Needs

Donaldson (1999) theorized that adult learners found learning experiences in the classroom, and interactions with their faculty, more meaningful than younger learners. Graham and Donaldson (1999) postulated that older learners are less involved in campus activities;

however, they employed various techniques to compensate for the limited time on campus (Donaldson, 1999). Astin (1984) defined student involvement in terms of student behavior; a higher level of student involvement was associated with student persistence, while limited engagement was connected to student departure. Chapman and Pascarella (1983) postulated that although student engagement varies across institutions, nontraditional students experience minimal levels of social integration regardless of the type of institution attended. Rosier (2016) suggested this is primarily due to the limited amount of time nontraditional students have to participate in social activities.

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) defined student engagement as the amount of time and effort a student dedicates toward his studies and other academic activities. Student engagement was also described in terms of the resources and support services institutions deploy to encourage student participation in campus activities designed to increase student persistence, satisfaction and completion (Kuh et al., 2008). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested the overall impact of postsecondary education is largely influenced by a student's individual involvement in the academic, interpersonal and extracurricular activities offered at the institution.

Much of the literature on student persistence highlights the importance of student integration as a significant contributor to persistence (Pascarella &Terenzini, 1983; Spady, 1971). Tinto (1989) asserted that an adequate network of peer support can substitute the need of student correspondence with the larger college environment. Spady (1971) advised student persistence is influenced by the student's individual perception of his integration into the institution's environment rather than an objective measure. Astin (1975) emphasized that the more a student becomes involved with others at the institution the greater the probability of

persistence. It is also argued the size of the institution may impact persistence rates amongst adult learners. Tinto (1975) hypothesized that smaller institutions may be able to enhance persistence due to lower student-faculty rations, which may lead to stronger student-faculty engagement. However, larger institutions may have the advantage of being more heterogeneous, providing a diverse set of student subcultures which may also further enhance social integration into the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Environmental Needs

Adult learners are less likely to earn a postsecondary degree, in comparison to their traditional counterparts, due to external factors (Rosier, 2016). Bean and Metzner (1985) suggested external environmental factors have a greater impact than academic variables on student persistence amongst adult learners. Although many adult learners enroll in postsecondary education on a part-time basis; a significant number of these students' express higher levels of concern regarding financial obligations in higher education than their traditional age counterparts (Chickering, 1974). Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) suggested the household income, total number of dependents in the household, along with the amount of financial aid received, are all important variables that determine the persistence rate of adult learners. Faircloth (2003) noted a significant number of adult students seek financial assistance in meeting the financial obligations of pursuing their academic objectives.

Spellman (2007) indicated that adults who pursue academic programs or training often face multiple barriers, such as, financial hardships, family obligations, and a lack of academic preparation. In many circumstances, adult learners are first generation college students, and because of this, support of family and peers is vital to their academic performance in higher education (Hardin, 2008). Ritt (2008) suggested personal barriers also consist of lack of

childcare services, fear of returning to school, work related activities and schedule conflicts. Although many employers value education, professional barriers remain constant exist in the workplace. Adult learners, who are employed, may have trouble adjusting their schedule to attend classes in the evening or on the weekends (Ritt, 2008).

Many adult learners often experience opposition in their personal and professional lives that may serve as a barrier to completing their academic endeavors. Kerka (1998) stated this type of obstacle may occur when either family, peers, or professional colleagues feel threatened by the adult student's goals or academic successes. Benshoff and Lewis (1992) hypothesized that adult learners generally experienced limited acceptance and support, from their peers and family, when their responsibilities as students took energy away from their personal and professional lives. However, with the support of family and friends, and appropriate study skills, adult learners are more likely to persist in higher education and do well in the academic programs (Dill & Henley, 1998).

Statement of the Research Problem

While the number of adult learners at four-year institutions continue to rise, it is imperative the relationship between adult learner and faculty improve as well. Although adult students make up a significant portion of student enrollment for many four-year institutions; there is a lack of investigation into the stated needs of adult learners attending four-year institutions and the perceived needs of adult learners according to faculty. While considerable research exists concerning traditional-age students attending four-year universities, and adult learners at community colleges, only limited research seeks to address the persistence of adult learners attending traditional four-year universities (Guidos & Dooris, 2008). Donaldson and Townsend (2007) argued that despite recent enrollment shifts in higher education, to include the

increasing number of adult students on college campuses, scholars have devoted limited attention to the adult student community and its impact on higher learning. Academic, social and environmental needs as distinguished by adult learners and faculty have not been explored collectively in the four-year university setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, in order to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. Observing these specific needs, through the perceptions of both adult learners and faculty, is essential to providing better support services, and an overall more conductive learning experience for nontraditional students. This study explored the relationships between the perceptions of part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members at four-year universities.

This study had three primary objectives: (1) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting; (2) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting; (3) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it determined whether a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty

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perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting. This study is also significant because it confirmed if a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting. In addition, the study is significant because it established whether a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting. At the present time, there is a lack of investigation into the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners attending four-year institutions.

This study focused on the relationship of the stated academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners to the perceptions of those needs by faculty members. Few studies were found that addressed specific needs of adult learners at a traditional four-year university. By addressing the relationship of adult learners and faculty perceptions, universities can better serve this specific population. The information obtained from this study can assist universities in better understanding the needs of adult learners. University faculty and administrators will find this information useful in developing appropriate learning environments for adult learners at their respective institutions. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding the perceived needs of adult learners on university campuses, as perceived by, adult learners and faculty at four-year institutions.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used in this study:

1. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting?

2. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting?

3. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting?

Limitations and Assumptions

Limitations

1. This study examined students and faculty at one university geographically located in southeast Alabama; thus, generalization beyond the institution within this study should be assumed with caution.

2. This study was limited to adult learners that were 19 years of age and over and attending a four-year university.

3. This study was limited to faculty members at a four-year university.

4. This study was limited to information collected from the Adult Learner Needs Survey.

Assumptions

1. The participants of the study will understand the self-report instrument and will answer all questions as truthful as possible.

2. Adult learners' responses to questions regarding their academic, social and environmental needs reflect their individual experiences of academic, social and environmental needs in the four-year university setting.

3. Faculty responses to questions about adult learners' academic, social and environmental needs reflect their individual perceptions regarding academic, social and environmental behaviors in the four-year university setting.

Definition of Terms

Academic Needs: These needs, in terms of this research study, include areas of education that could impact learning. These variables include but are not limited to: courses offerings, remedial courses, tutoring services, instructional delivery methods, faculty accessibility, and the teaching-learning process.

Adult learner: Used interchangeably with "nontraditional student" or "adult student." A male or a female student who is over the age of 19 years old who meets any of the following criteria: financially independent; employed full-time; postponed enrollment into postsecondary education; married; person with dependents; a commuter student.

Environmental Needs: These needs, in terms of this research study, are defined as needs or variables which encompass the external learning environment. They include: financial aid services, disability accommodations, library resources, career development, job placement, transportation and support systems from family/friends.

Faculty: Part-time and full-time instructors who are employed by a college or university.

Full-time faculty: A faculty member that is hired on a full-time status and teaches a full course load as defined by the institution.

Full-time student: A student who is enrolled in at least 12 credit hours or more in an academic semester.

Part-time faculty: A faculty member that is hired on a part-time status and teaches less than a full course load as defined by the institution.

Part-time student: A student who is enrolled in less than 12 credit hours in an academic semester.

Social Needs: These needs, in terms of this research study, are defined as needs or variables which address interactions within the learning setting. They include: social activities, clubs/organizations, social engagement with other students, developing friendships, serving others, service to the community through volunteer community work.

Traditional student: A student between the ages of 18 – 24 years who meets the following criteria: enrolls in post-secondary education within the same year that he/she graduates high school, financially dependent on others, without dependents/children, single, and is unemployed or employed no more than part-time.

<p align="center">Chapter Summary</p>

Chapter I provides the introduction to the research study, the statement of the research problem, research questions, and key definitions of terms. Chapter II discusses a review of literature regarding adult learners in higher education, characteristics adult learners, theoretical frameworks, as well as, the needs and challenges of adult learner students in the collegiate environment. Chapter III explores the procedures used in the research study; including the population and sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and measures used for data analyses. Chapter IV discusses the research study's findings, while Chapter V reveals the

summary of the research study, conclusions, implications, and potential areas for further

research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, in order to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. Observing these specific needs, through the perceptions of both adult learners and faculty, is essential to providing better support services, and an overall more conductive learning experience for nontraditional students. This study explored the relationships between the perceptions of part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members at four-year universities.

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, the landscape of higher education has constantly changed as more adults are entering and returning to colleges and universities (Hardin, 2008). While institutions have witnessed continued growth in nontraditional student enrollments, the

probability of this student group completing their degree has been significantly less than their traditional age counterparts (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Even though nontraditional students display a higher attrition rate than traditional students (Astin, 1975); the reasons why this rate is higher are not clearly understood (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Although a significant portion of research addresses the persistence of the traditional-age students, only a small percentage of literature addresses the adult learner's persistence at four-year institutions (Guidos & Dooris, 2008). While nontraditional students are occasionally combined with traditional students in studies of student attrition, very little research has been solely dedicated to adult learners and their dropout rate (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

During the mid-1990s, the adult learning community accounted for approximately 44% of overall student enrollment within post-secondary education; while at the turn of the century, 73% of undergraduate student enrollment was comprised of adult learners (Choy, 2002; Maehl, 2004). Most these students were categorized as nontraditional learners due to being financially independent, having children or dependents, or delayed enrollment into college after high school (Choy, 2002). It is argued that enrollment numbers amongst nontraditional adult learners will continue to rise, with recent figures, suggesting that adult learners will eventually account for half of student enrollment amongst college and universities (Hussar & Bailey, 2009). Although it was projected that by the year 2010, there would be 6.8 million adult learners enrolled in college and universities, the actual enrollment numbers surpassed this projection (Gaibraith & Shedd, 1990; Hardin, 2008). Adult learners who are 25 to 34 years of age are anticipated to hold the highest enrollment increases when compared to traditional students enrolling in college (Hussar & Bailey, 2009).

Adult learners make the decision to return to the educational forefront for several reasons. Kohl (2010) hypothesized that adult learners are returning to the classroom to update certain skill sets to be more competitive in the recent economy, and/or to remain current with technological advances witnessed throughout recent years. Houle (1961) postulated that adults also participate in educational programs to engage and socialize with others or to be intellectually challenged. Houle (1961) postulated that adults participate in educational programs to engage and socialize with others or to be intellectually challenged. Acknowledging the issues adults consider when enrolling in educational programs would help institutions better understand the choices adults consider when committing to higher education (Stein, Wanstreet & Trinko, 2011). As institutions gain a better understanding of these issues, they are better equipped to develop policies and strategies to help adults enroll.

For nontraditional students, dropout decisions are based on a set of variables which include, academic, environmental and social interaction (Metzner & Bean, 1987). Countryman (2006) advised, in higher education, adult students have different needs than their traditional-age peers. By addressing these needs, adult students are reassured that they can be successful in their pursuit of higher education (Countryman, 2006). According to the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2003), adult students whose needs are addressed by their institutions are more likely to continue their enrollment, achieve their academic goals, and become the institutions best supporters. However, a significant number of research universities display little interest in meeting the needs of undergraduates who desire to be part-time students, are full-time employees, and have experienced a break in schooling (Kasworm, 2010).

Hagedorn (2005) asserted adult learners typically face challenges while progressing through higher education. These challenges are due to institutional systems that are designed to

primarily accommodate the traditional student population (Hagedorn, 2005). As a result of changing student demographics, enrollment patterns, and societal needs for a well-educated workforce, research institutions' face critical challenges in modifying its mission and environment in support of the adult undergraduate (Kasworm, 2010). Traditional institutions must recognize that the undergraduate student population is aging, and in response to this trend, they must become receptive to adult student needs and expectations (Hagedorn, 2005).

Defining Adult Learners

Knowles (1978) described the adult learner through traits associated with the principles of learner centeredness. These traits entailed the following:

- The learner has full responsibility for his own learning.

- The subject matter has relevance and meaning for the learner.

- Involvement and participation are necessary for learning.

- The relationship between learners shows helping styles and learner self-responsibility.

- The teacher is a facilitator and resource person.

- The learner sees him/herself differently as a result of the learning experience.

- The learner experiences confluences.

Dill and Henley (1998) asserted adult learners are nontraditional students, who enter higher education after being away from high school for at least one year, and carry out multiple responsibilities while pursuing their academic endeavors. Some of the responsibilities adult learners generally manage while enrolled in school, include being a parent, employee, and spouse (Dill & Henley, 1998). Hirschorn (1988) described the adult learner as being twenty-four years of age older and returning to the learning environment after experiencing a break in their education. Markle (2015) defined the nontraditional learner as a student who displays one of the

following characteristics: enrolls in college after a five year departure from high school, 25 years of age or older, or carries out responsibilities associated with the role of a spouse or caretaker. According to Kinsella (1998), adult learners are typically married, employed, and carry out parental responsibilities in the home. Cross (1980) described the nontraditional student as one who engages in education either part-time or full-time, while simultaneously maintaining employment and family obligations.

Horn and Carroll (1996) characterized nontraditional students through criteria that relate to specific choices and behaviors that could increase student attrition in higher education. The three sets of criteria used to categorize the adult learner included: (1) enrollment patterns (2) financial and family status and (3) high school graduation status. According to Horn and Carroll (1996), adult learners are defined as students who possess any of the following characteristics:

- Delayed enrollment into postsecondary education one year or more after high school.

- Having a dependent, other than their spouse.

- Employed full-time while enrolled in school.

- Being financially independent from their parents.

- Did not earn a high school diploma, but obtained a certificate of completion.

Bull and Kimball (2000) proposed adult learners bring wide-ranging experiences into the classroom setting. Kasworm and Marienau (1997) suggested adults hold a rich tapestry of experience, generally obtained, through previous schooling, community engagement, and prior experiential learning opportunities. While the adult student community is comprised of a diverse set of students, varying in age and other demographics, many adult students share a commonality of self-directed learning. Researchers have argued adult learners are self-directed learners who are motivated to learn and committed to achieving their academic goals (Bull & Kimball, 2000;

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Carlan, 2001; Knowles, 1978). Knowles (1980) asserted when individuals define themselves as adults, they develop a self-directing personality. This type of personality helps adults view themselves as being capable of managing their own lives and making their own decisions. However, while adults are typically self-directing in all aspects of their lives, when participating in educational activities, they often perceive their role as a learner as being a dependent and passive participant (Knowles, 1980).

Researchers have also described adult learners as being achievement oriented, highly motivated, and independent students; however, non-traditional students need flexible schedules and instruction appropriate for their developmental level (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992; Cross, 1980). Adult learners often appreciate active approaches to learning that connect academic learning with prior life experiences (Benshoff, 1991; Benshoff & Lewis, 1992). Knowles (1980) proposed four key assumptions which characterized the adult learner as one who (1) has an independent self-concept and seeks to direct his own learning (2) has gained a reservoir of experiences that provide a rich resource for learning (3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles and 4) is performance-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge.

Markle (2015) asserted, adult learners, may view their educational aspirations as selfish objectives. This perspective typically leads to feelings associated with guilt, when the student dedicates time toward school obligations; reducing the amount of time spent with their family (Markle, 2015). Giancola, Grawitch and Borchert (2009) suggested adult learners experience various levels of stress while balancing multiple responsibilities at home, school, and at their place of employment. Although, returning to school may be rewarding for adult learners; Butler (2007) argued this decision creates another role domain in one's life that competes with existing limited resources; such as, the student's overall finances, time and energy. Adult learners often

struggle to find an adequate balance between the demands of their personal life, education and work (Eastmond, 1998). Benshoff and Lewis (1992) indicated two of the most important concerns adult learners face when enrolling in school relate to their personal finances and family matters.

Adult learners are also characterized by their ability to successfully engage in self-directed learning. Knowles (1975) defined self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18). Knowles (1975) argued while some labels used in literature to describe self-directed learning may imply learning in isolation; self-directed learning generally occurs in a collaborative setting with teachers, mentors, peers and helpers. It is also argued that as individuals mature, they naturally develop a need for independence from their parents, as well as, their teachers (Knowles, 1975). Adults typically enter the learning environment as proactive learners who, in many cases, retains and utilizes what they have learned better than their reactive counterparts (Knowles, 1975).

Theoretical Frameworks

To properly address the needs of adult learners in higher education, it is appropriate to examine adult learning theories. One of the most well-known terms associated with the field of adult education is "andragogy" (Knowles, 1980). This term was first introduced to North America by Malcolm Knowles, also known as, the father of adult education, during the early 1970s (Merriam, 2001). Although the term was initially discussed by Alexander Kapp, in his discussion of Plato's education theory in 1833, it became widely popular in North America and

Britain through the work of Malcom Knowles (Smith, 1999). According to Knowles (1984), andragogy is defined as the art and science of guiding adults throughout the overall learning process. This theoretical framework also promotes the establishment of learning environments which include mutual respect between learner and facilitator, collaboration and support amongst peers. It is argued, adult learners do not learn in the same manner as children, and thus, require a different type of learning environment (Knowles, 1984).

Knowles (1984) suggested adult learners are able to identify and appreciate good teaching, and thrive in learning settings guided by educators who serve as facilitators versus lecturers. In addressing this need, educators are encouraged to incorporate self-evaluation exercises, simulations and even role playing opportunities into their curriculums as a learning aid for adult learners (Knowles, 1984). Adults' generally need to understand the importance of learning new information, and typically learn best when they can immediately apply new skills or knowledge into their daily lives (Knowles, 1984). Hardin (2008) asserted, in an effort to decrease barriers for adult learners, institutions should restructure the traditional roles of its faculty, by encouraging faculty to spend less time lecturing to their class, and more efforts toward serving as a facilitator of student learning.

Knowles (1970) defined andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 37). Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998), described andragogy through six core principles: (1) the learner's need to know (2) the learner's self-concept (3) prior experience of the learner (4) the learner's readiness to learn (5) orientation to learning (6) motivation to learn. In addition to these six core principles; Knowles also asserted adult learning is influenced by other factors; to include, learner individual differences, situational differences, and purposes of learning. In satisfying the adult learner's need to know, educators are encouraged to partner with adults

throughout the learning process (Knowles et al., 1998). Knowles highlighted several dimensions of the first core principle; the learner's need to know: (1) the need to know how learning will be conducted, (2) what learning will occur, and (3) why the learning is important (Knowles et al., 1998).

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) discussed the first assumption of the andragogical model; suggesting before adults undertake learning something new, they first need to understand why they need to learn it. Tough (1971) asserted that a majority of adults find motivation to learn when confronted with an immediate problem, or task that requires specific knowledge and skills. According to Knowles (1967), adults generally engage in learning as a result of existing pressures they experience in their personal lives; thus, seeking immediate application of what they actually learn. This reason for participating in education also creates a problem-centered mindset for many adults entering learning activities (Knowles, 1967). Adults also participate in learning to adjust to changing technologies, processes, and societal values that may affect them in their personal lives, and even in their workplace (Tough, 1971). While Tough (1979) indicated adults will generally invest a significant amount of energy in examining the benefits of learning something on their own, and the possible consequences that exist as a result of not learning.

The second assumption of Knowles' theory is the self-concept of the learner; which associates with the overall autonomy and self-directedness of the learner. Self-directed learning relates to the learner's ability to lead their own learning experience (Knowles et al., 1998). Davis (2015) suggested, through self-directed learning, adult learners experience a number of positive outcomes; which include, self-discipline, motivation, perseverance, goal oriented and enhanced self-confidence. Although education generally occurs within the realms of traditional educational institutions, learning also occurs in other forms. Davis (2015) noted that amongst the

traditional settings, such as, universities and vocational institutions, self-directed learning may occur outside of these environments. Knowles (1975) defined self-directed learning as the process in which a learner takes the initiative to analyze their own learning needs, develop goals, and learning resources.

Tough (1979) argued adults are not only capable of selecting what to learn, but they are also able to plan and manage their overall learning process. Ross-Gordon (2011) described the adult learner as being independent and self-directing during the learning process. In addition to being self-directed in their learning, adults typically enter the learning setting with diverse wide-ranging experiences. Adult learners' approach learning in a more task -centered manner; seeking specific information with a high level of internal motivation to learn (Ross-Gordon, 2011). Knowles (1968) proposed that humans become more independent, and illustrate a stronger desire to direct their own learning as they mature.

The third assumption of Knowles' theory related to the learner's prior experience. Knowles (1970) argued prior experiences equip adult learners with the best resources and tools for future learning opportunities. Curriculums that encompass experiential learning techniques will aid learners in utilizing their past experiences while engaging in group discussions and activities, problem-solving exercises, and simulation activities (Knowles, 1970). Knowles (1968) suggested youths and adults view and utilize their previous experiences quite differently; youth tend to form their self-identity heavily based upon external factors, such as their family, and what school and church they attend; whereas, having lived longer, adults have more experiences to draw upon when learning. According to Knowles (1968) "an adult will define himself in terms of his experience. His self-identify is derived from what he has done" (p. 352). While children

view experiences as things that happen to them, adults view experiences as who they are (Knowles et al., 2005).

Knowles' fourth assumption examined the learner's readiness to learn. According to Knowles et al. (2005), "Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations" (p. 67). This particular assumption is associated with an individual progressing from one developmental stage to the next in their life. Another implication associated with a learner's readiness to learn is the importance of accurately timing a learning experience to match his developmental stage in life (Knowles et al., 2005). As adult educators strengthen their overall understanding of, and ability to anticipate, adult learners' readiness to learn and situations occurring in their individual lives, the more effective they can be in facilitating learning (Knowles et al., 1998).

Knowles' fifth assumption highlighted orientation to learning. This assumption asserts adults are task-centered or problem-centered in their orientation to learning, in comparison to children who are generally subject-centered in their orientation to learning (Knowles et al., 2005). Adults have the tendency to learn new knowledge, skills, and values more effectively when they believe learning will help them handle real-life issues and support them in performing daily task in their personal and professional lives (Knowles et al., 2005). It is also suggested that as an individual matures and transitions from being a child to becoming an adult, their orientation toward learning also shifts from being subject-centered, to being problem-centered (Knowles et al., 1998).

The sixth assumption of Knowles' theory focused on the learner's motivation to learn. According to Knowles (1990) adult learners are generally internally motivated by problem oriented learning that can be immediately applied to their personal lives. Knowles, Holton, and

Swanson (1998) asserted as adult learners mature, their time perspective shifts from delayed application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Merriam (2001) argued adults are motivated to engage in learning activities because of internal factors versus external influences. Knowles et al. (1998) also suggested adults typically value intrinsic rewards that lead to immediate personal payoffs.

Learning Theories

Over the years, learning has been defined in a diverse set of ways. This wide range of definitions illustrate the level of difficulty that exist in defining learning (Cronbach, 1963; Gagne, 1965; Rogers, 1969; Smith, 1982). Defining learning is complicated (Knowles et al, 2005). Boyd and Apps (1980) defined learning as the process by which knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavioral changes are accomplished. Knowles et al. (2005) asserted that learning closely relates to the individual experiencing or expected to experience change; while education emphasizes the educator presenting stimuli to induce change. Smith (1982) assumed that learning consists of (1) the mastery of what is already known, (2) the clarification of meaning of one's experience, and (3) the deliberate process of testing ideas significant to problems.

Cronbach (1963) defined learning as behavioral changes that occur as a result of experience. Similar to this definition of learning, Gagne (1965) suggested learning is defined as any change in human nature or ability that can be retained. Learning has also been referred to as a process where an activity is either developed or reformed in response to an encountered situation (Hilgard & Bower, 1966). Although multiple definitions have been offered regarding the meaning of learning; Haggard (1963) emphasized that although various definitions exist regarding learning; the commonality that exist amongst these definitions relate to a change in behavior as a result of experience.

While Knowles' theory of andragogy has been widely referenced and debated over the years, other adult learning theories have also contributed to the overall literature on learning theories. According to Hassan (2011), any effective learning setting has an appropriate balance between various approaches; for instance, there should be a balance between students' own exploration of new knowledge, and the teaching methods being utilized. Similar to Knowles' theory on adult learning, Kolb's experiential learning theory encourages educators to approach adult learners in a different manner than children (Kolb, 1984). Adult learners enter learning environments with a vast amount of life experiences, in comparison to their younger student colleagues. This level of experience naturally plays a central role in the overall learning process (Kolb, 1984); and could also influence the academic, social and environmental needs of adult learners.

Kolb (1984) defined learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Kolb's theory is represented by a learning cycle comprised of four stages which include: (1) concrete experience (2) observation and reflection of that experience (3) formation of abstract concepts (4) active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). It is also argued, individuals naturally favor different learning styles as a result of varying factors in their personal lives (Kolb, 1984). Some of these factors may include one's previous education experiences, intellectual abilities, or current social environment. According to Beard (2007), experiential learning plans could yield many positive outcomes; to include: improving potential career opportunities for students, and improve students' overall social abilities and human relation skill sets in the workplace.

In addition to experiential learning, humanistic learning theory stresses freedom, creativity, choice, and self-realization as important characteristics of meaningful learning

(Rodriquez, 2016). According to Rogers (1959), humans' sole purpose is to self-actualize; to reach one's maximum potential and accomplish his highest level of "human-beingness". Rogers (1969) encouraged educators to carry out their learning objectives as facilitator of learning; encouraging their students to become self-directed in their learning. In carrying out the role of facilitator, educators were also expected to have three attitudinal qualities: (1) realness or genuineness (2) non-possessive caring, prizing, trust and respect (3) empathic understanding and sensitive, and accurate listening (Rogers, 1969).

Rogers (1969) asserted that in order for learning to take place, competency based development must occur. He also suggested that learning included self-initiation, personal involvement and an evaluation by the actual learner. Gagne (1965) highlighted five domains that must be present for learning to take place. Those domains include: (1) verbal information (2) motor skills (3) intellectual skills (4) cognitive strategies and (5) attitude. It is also argued that all five domains are critical to the overall learning process in any educational environment (Gagne, 1965). Although Gagne (1965) highlighted the previous five domains as important learning; Knowles (1975) asserted we are more knowledgeable about how animals learn than we are about how children learn. Unfortunately, we are even less knowledgeable about how adults learn in comparison to what we have learned about the way children learn (Knowles, 1975).

Behaviorism originates from the idea that learning is accomplished through the control of one's environment; any behavioral changes are a result of reinforcement, either positive of negative, which enhances the probability of the behavior occurring again (Skinner, 1979). According to Hassan (2011) change in one's behavior is a direct result of an event, or stimuli that exist in the environment. It is also argued that an individual's personal desires and aspirations are structured by external influences (Hassan, 2011). Skinner (1968) described reinforcement as

creating circumstances that a person enjoys or eliminating conditions the he does not approve. Whereas, punishment was defined as discarding situations an individual likes, or establishing an atmosphere that one does not appreciate (Skinner, 1968).

According to Watson (1912), as humans' progress through life, they experience behavioral changes in a continuous fashion, rather than in distinct stages, as a result of their response to environmental influences. It is also argued that behavior is both measurable and observable, and one's environment is the primary determinant of one's behavior (Watson, 1912). In gaining a better understanding of development, Watson (1912) encouraged the society to observe stimuli that exist throughout the environment. Evans and Rilling (2000) argued Watson was clear in his demonstration of how behaviorism symbolized a shift in the importance of the topic in psychological research. Watson's theory represented a shift in how topics in psychology are selected for research; transitioning from sensation and perception studies, to topics related to learning and habit formation (Evans & Rilling, 2000).

Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005) asserted that although John B. Watson is often known as the father of behaviorism, the initial investigation on learning was carried out by Edward L. Thorndike. According to Thorndike, learners who were inexperienced had the tendency to respond to stimuli in a random and automatic fashion (Knowles, et al. 2005). Thorndike introduced the following three laws that he believed oversaw the learning of both humans and animals (1) the law of readiness (2) the law of exercise and (3) the law of effect (Knowles, et al., 2005): Thorndike (1913) suggested that the consequence of a response will impact whether the tendency to respond the same way will be strengthened or weakened.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory played a critical role in the development of the constructivist movement (Jaramillo, 1996). Vygotsky (1998) postulated that all cultural and

historical artifacts are integral parts of any environment; any interaction with those artifacts, which include various physical, cultural and intellectual tools, will assist one in understanding reality and their surroundings. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development described the difference between what a person can accomplish on their own, and what he can accomplish with the assistance of others. Jaramillo (1996) asserted that according to Vygotsky, through social negotiation and engagement, peers arrive at a common understanding through the use of problem-solving activities. In the classroom setting, social interaction stimulates diverse perceptions amongst peers, and assist students in developing interdependence by holding each other accountable (Jaramillo, 1996).

Tough (1979) hypothesized that adult learners prefer self-directed learning opportunities, and are willing to dedicate the necessary amount of time and energy required to learn on their own. Tough also suggested that as adults mature, they naturally become more self-directed in their pursuit of education (Knowles et al, 1998). Tough (1971) added the research on self-directed learning through his study of 66 adult students in Canada. Through his study, Tough discovered participants structured their learning around projects, and expected some form of value or incentive after successful completion of the projects (Tough, 1971). Tough proposed the following objectives of self-directed learning: (1) enhance the ability of adult learners to be independent in their learning, (2) foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning, and (3) promote emancipator learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Houle (1961) examined reasons adults' value education and seek to participate in learning opportunities. Through his publication of *The Inquiring Mind*, his investigation postulated there are three types of learners: (1) goal-oriented, (2) activity-oriented, and (3)

learning-oriented. Goal-oriented learners utilize education for accomplishing clear-cut objectives. Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) asserted that for many goal-oriented learners, their experience in continuing education did not begin until mid-twenties and after. Activity-oriented learners pursued learning opportunities for social interaction with no essential connection to the learning content; whereas, learning-oriented learners sought knowledge just to have the information; learning for the sake of learning (Houle, 1961).

Adult Learner Needs in Higher Education

Traditional colleges and universities are no longer viewed as institutions designed solely to address the needs of 18 to 24 year old students (Carlan, 2001). As increasing numbers of adults enroll in colleges and universities to strengthen basic skill sets, gain knowledge for new careers, or simply gain new information (Osgood-Treston, 2001); educators hold the responsibility for understanding adult learners' perceived needs. According to Keintz (2004) understanding these assumptions that exist amongst the adult student community may enhance awareness of key factors which influence an adult to learn. Although colleges and universities are experiencing increasing numbers of nontraditional adult learners, in both face-to-face, and online courses; only a limited number of campuses have developed specific divisions to work solely with nontraditional adult students (Hardin 2008). Boone, Safrit and Jones (2002) asserted that if learners' perceive no connection exists between their immediate needs and a program's potential outcome, they may lack motivation to participate in the educational program.

Wiltshire (1973) suggested the concept of understanding learner needs is one of the most prominent concepts in the field of adult education. Ayers (2011) hypothesized learners are less likely to voluntarily participate in any educational program, if it is perceived the program will not address an existing need. It is also argued that educational programs are also at risk of failing if they lack the ability to meet individual needs on a local scale (Ayers, 2011). The National

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Center for Education Statistics (2003) estimated that over 60 percent of college students embody characteristics of nontraditional learners; placing them at greater risk of stopping out and not completing their programs of study. In comparison to their traditional counterparts, adult learners are more likely to leave their postsecondary institutions within their first year of enrollment (Hardin, 2008).

Bull and Kimball (2000) proposed adult learners differ from 18 to 22 year old learners in terms of their perceived needs, objectives and desires. Benshoff (1991) offered a similar observation; stating the developmental needs, stressors and overall issues experienced by adult learners differ significantly from those encountered by traditional students. To properly address the adult learner population, colleges and universities are urged to re-examine all aspects of the college environment (Benshoff, 1991). Addressing key issues experienced by adult learners is critical to the planning and execution of any college programs. Higher education institutions are encouraged to consider the needs of the nontraditional students pursuing programs on their respective campuses (Benshoff, 1991; Boone, 1985; Carlan, 2001).

Hearn (1992) described the nontraditional adult learner by categorizing them into three categories: (1) students who re-enter college after being away for several years (2) as older or mature students (3) students who attend college part-time. A significant number of adult learners pursue higher education by cycling in and out semesters. While some adults may drop out of their college for an extended period, others may completely withdraw from school and eventually re-enroll at a later time (Kerka, 1998). Nelken (2009) indicated that although the adult student population is growing at a faster rate than the traditional student community; a majority of colleges and universities direct more resources toward addressing the needs of the traditional student. While other nations have witnessed significant increases in the number of adults

obtaining college degrees, the United States have remained relatively stagnant in degree attainment rates, especially amongst the adult learner population (Gast, 2013).

While recruiting students to college may be a simple task, helping them persist until they have reached program completion is the challenge for many institutions (Johnson, 2005). This trend has resulted in the development of various theoretical frameworks in an effort to better understand the variables impacting adult student persistence and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although student attrition is a critical issue for many institutions, and has been researched over the last few years; student persistence remains an unresolved problem for a significant number of colleges and universities. Tinto (2006) suggested as the landscape in higher education shifted and resources began to diminish, institutions became increasingly focused on improving student persistence and graduation rates across colleges and universities. While some universities have made improvements to available resources, and others have witnessed higher graduation rates, the national rate of student persistence has seen minimal growth over the past decade (Tinto, 2006).

According to Tinto (2006), when student retention was initially investigated in higher education, educators generally examined retention rates through the lens of psychology, and more specifically, as a direct reflection of motivational levels and personality traits that exist amongst its overall student body. For example, students who postponed completion of their academic endeavors were characterized as being less motivated, not determined, and less willing than their counterparts who could progress through their programs until completion (Tinto, 2006). Whereas, Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) asserted various external elements exist outside of the educational setting that often create barriers for adults enrolled in on campus

courses and distance learning education. These factors can include financial problems, support systems and scheduling constraints (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982).

Academic Needs

As colleges and universities seek to increase nontraditional student enrollment, and strengthen student persistence rates amongst this student demographic, it is important to examine academic, social and environmental needs as perceived by both students and faculty. Gast (2013), encouraged public research universities to assess all support services, to confirm whether the available resources are effective in addressing the needs of adult learners enrolled at their respective institutions. Adult students are generally busy during the normal business hours and may not be able to seek the necessary assistance from their institutions; thus, universities should tailor services to meet the needs of adult learners through in-person interactions, as well as, online to better retain students until graduation (Gast, 2013).

Adult learners generally approach higher education as mature students who are eager to learn; however, they often return to the classroom after an extended absence from a formal academic setting (Von Lehman, 2011). This time away from the academic environment can create a sense of uncertainty for adults regarding their ability to handle college-level coursework. Hardin (2008) asserted that students who have not utilized certain academic skills within a few years after their secondary education credential typically need additional guidance, support and practice. When compared to the traditional college student, adult learners are less likely to seek assistance from their institutions, even when they need it most; fearing they will appear unprepared and unintelligent (Von Lehman, 2011). This lack of confidence can create academic barriers for students; reducing their chances of persisting in their respective programs.

It is also argued that in helping the adult learner overcome academic issues and limitations, institutions should ensure sufficient academic advisement is available for its students (Hardin, 2008). Academic advisors should be well versed on needs and challenges specific to the adult student community. This understanding will better equip advisors in their quest to assist students in developing realistic and obtainable educational goals (Hardin, 2008). The communication between advisor and student should not be transactional in nature; occurring in the beginning and at the end of a student's program. The Council of Adult and Experiential Learning (2000) postulated that advisors should remain in continuous communication with their nontraditional students, throughout their programs, to assist in the review, discussion, and modification of their individual educational objectives.

Light (2001) suggested one principal element in developing a great college experience for adult learners directly relates to human relationships. Advisors are encouraged to develop a partnership with students that transcend basic course scheduling, and moves toward a plan that promotes personal growth and development (Bland, 2003; Light, 2001). The shift from prescriptive advising to developmental advising, is a holistic approach to properly guiding students through their programs (Bland, 2003). This type of holistic advisement is considered an institutional lifeline, granting students the opportunity to successfully plan and prepare for a rewarding career regardless of their age (Polson, 1994). In comparison to prescriptive advising techniques, developmental advising fosters a bond between the student and advisor, which yields academic success, as well as, positive retention trends and graduation rates amongst adult learners (Bland, 2003).

Tinto (1997) defined the college classroom as the nucleus of all educational activities occurring within institutions of higher learning. For nontraditional students, especially those who

commute to college, the classroom is generally the sole environment where they can engage with fellow students and faculty (Tinto, 1997). For this student population, the classroom will serve as the intersection where academic and social integration will meet. While previous research highlight the importance of the classroom (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Kasworm, 2003; Hagedorn, 2005) and may even depict how it shapes academic integration; there is still a need to explore how the classroom experience influences student persistence (Tinto, 1997).

Per Metzner and Bean (1987), academic variables include study skills, academic advising, study hours, absenteeism, academic degree programs, and availability of course offerings. Countryman (2006) noted additional academic factors include tutoring, developmental courses, faculty accessibility, remediation, and instructional delivery methods. According to Bean and Metzner (1985), academic variables have a direct impact on attrition and students' academic performance. These variables are strong indicators of how adult learners interact with the institution (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Bean and Metzner (1985) defined the nontraditional student as one who is older than 24 years of age, does not live on campus, and who is enrolled as a part-time student. The adult learner is also described as a student primarily concerned with the academic offerings of the institution, such as, courses, degree programs and certifications (Bean & Metzner, 1985). According to Metzner and Bean (1987), academic variable are indicative of the internal collegiate environment. While Ast (1999) asserted the academic needs of adult learners are different from upwardly mobile four-year graduates; therefore, addressing these needs are critical to the adult learners overall educational college experience.

Adult students tend to enroll in institutions that are readily accessible, cost-effective, relevant to their current needs, supportive of adult lifestyle commitments, and flexible in course

offerings (Kasworm, 2003). Hagedorn (2005) suggested institutions can become more receptive to the academic needs of adult students by developing courses that encompass exactly what they want and need to learn. Institutions can also become more adult-centered by offering flexible learning opportunities. This flexibility can include, offering distance learning courses, allowing students to enroll part-time and permitting students to complete their course requirements at their own pace (Hagedorn, 2005). Per Clark (2006), to address academic needs of adult learners, institutions should incorporate evening courses each semester. Offering courses at variety times during the day allows adult students the opportunity to continue enrollment, while managing their daily lives. Institutions are also encouraged to provide extended office hours on campus; allowing the nontraditional student the opportunity to access student resources and experience adequate support services (Clark, 2006).

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) suggested adult learners prefer learning environments that are guided by flexibility and collaboration between student and instructor. According to Boone (1985), adult learners enter the learning environment seeking a self-directed learning experience. Conlan, Grabowski, and Smith (2003) also argued adult learners enter the learning environment with an independent self-concept and are able to direct their own learning. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998) discussed adult learners' interest in sharing their previous life experiences in the academic environment. Whereas; Conlan, Grabowski, and Smith (2003) advised previous life experiences provide the basis for adult's learning activities.

Adult learners generally seek learning environments that allow students to move through the learning process in a self-directed fashion. Rodriquez (2016) argued, many adults equate the meaning of education with ideas of an environment that has transitioned from a teacher-centered culture, to a setting that is more student oriented. Jonassen (2000) argued to provide an effective

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student-centered environment, educators must direct their attention on three particular areas: problem context (the social framework in which the problem interacts), problem simulation (the problem must engage the learner), and problem manipulation space (the learner must be able to critically interact with and affect the problem). Watters (2003) hypothesized some of the issues that negatively impact nontraditional student retention include the time in which classes are offered (day or evening) and the student's perception of the overall quality of education provided at an institution.

Allen (1993) suggested the adult learner, when compared to the traditional student, generally places more value on course material and assignments that relate to his life; both personally and professionally. Nontraditional students appreciate learning experiences that practical in nature and can be applied to their individual lives with ease. For most adult learners, attending school is a constant act of managing academic requirements, while simultaneously maintaining their personal and professional schedules (Allen, 1993). This act of balancing various responsibilities, may be quite hectic; thus, adult learners generally expect detailed instructions and timely feedback throughout the overall learning experience (Allen, 1993).

More colleges and universities are recognizing the significant size of their adult student population, and understanding how adult learners experience unique challenges, and hold a different set of needs, in comparison to the traditional student (Klein-Collins, 2011). According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), enrollment of students age 25 and over attending degree-granting institutions are growing at a faster rate compared to the traditional 18 to 24-year-old student (NCES, 2003). Although a shift in college demographics has occurred, most colleges and universities continue to focus primarily on the traditional student population,

rather than redirecting its resources and attention toward addressing the needs of the

nontraditional adult student (Nelken, 2009)

Social needs

Wyatt (2011) hypothesized that while adult learners are less likely to participate in

extracurricular activities, when compared to their traditional colleagues, they are more prone to

engage in a student organizations and functions if they are dedicated to the adult student

community. Tinto (1993) suggested that a student's persistence at a college or university is

closely related to his overall commitment to the institution; and student commitment is heavily

impacted by the student's social integration into the campus environment. The higher a student's

level of integration, both social and academic, the stronger commitment he has with the

institution and the goal of graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). It is argued that although

research is conducted on student persistence in higher education, most research focuses on the

persistence of traditional college students, while excluding the nontraditional learner (Donaldson

& Graham, 1999).

Metzner and Bean (1987) proposed social integration variables include memberships in

campus organizations, faculty contact and school friends. Countryman (2006) indicated

additional social needs, including, social engagement, the ability to partake in community

service, and training for serving one's community. Astin's student involvement theory defined

involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the overall

academic experience (Astin, 1984). Per Astin's theory; the more involved a student becomes in

college, the higher the student's overall learning and personal development will become (Astin,

1984). This theory hypothesized that a more involved college student is more likely to persist in

their academic endeavors until graduation at a higher rate than a student who is less involved.

Students who are highly involved on the campus generally dedicates a significant amount of time toward their studies, are more probable to actively partake in various student groups and campus organizations, and regularly interacts with their classmates and faculty (Astin, 1999). In 1993, Astin examined student outcomes and how they were impacted by college environments. This longitudinal study included a national sample of over 200 four-year institutions and approximately 25,000 students who enrolled in those colleges and universities between 1985 and 1989. Astin's findings, hypothesized peer groups are the most powerful influence on undergraduate student development, both academically and personally (Astin, 1993).

Astin (1993) also postulated that social interaction amongst student peers have extensive effects on nearly all areas of student learning and development. In this study, every aspect of the student's development was impacted by the characteristics of the peer group. Astin (1993) suggested that students have the tendency to adjust their values, behaviors and even their academic plans to align with the orientation of their peer group. Interactions amongst student peers included active participation in sororities or fraternities, engaging in intramural sports, socializing with other students in various campus organizations, and working in groups for completing class projects (Astin, 1993). Through the utilization of teamwork, group projects, discussion, and cooperative learning experiences; adult learners can connect with each other and become more socially integrated in their learning environments (Burden & Byrd, 2007).

According to Wyatt (2011), nontraditional students are typically vulnerable to the collegiate setting; however, positive interactions with faculty and staff generally result in a successful transition into college life for the adult learner. Andom (2007) suggested many adult learners make the decision to leave college after perceiving their professors as holding a negative attitude toward nontraditional adult students on campus. Medved and Heisler (2002) postulated

that for colleges and universities, social interactions between faculty and student establishes the social order and the overall culture that exists within the institution. In 1993, Astin asserted that interactions between student and faculty in higher education correlated with self-reported intellectual and personal growth.

Tinto (2000) argued that while the classroom serves as the most common experience shared amongst college students, this experience is rarely included in studies related to student retention and departure in higher education. College classrooms also serve as academic and social spaces that connect faculty and students across campus; and provides a direct link to other communities external to the classroom environment (Tinto, 2000). It is argued that if students, particularly commuters, fail to engage in the classroom, they are less likely to become involved in other social communities within the college (Tinto, 2000). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) the overall interaction between faculty and student serves as a significant influence on student integration within higher education; impacting overall student persistence.

Reason, Terenzini and Domingo (2007) assumed faculty and student interactions enhanced social and personal competence amongst students, while improving cognitive skills, and the integration of knowledge throughout the learning process. McGlynn (2008) hypothesized that faculty-student engagement has positive effects on grades and persistence for students; even after controlling for pre-college variables, such as race or ethnicity. Hagedorn, Perrakis and Maxwell (2002) characterized successful college students as those who obtained individualized attention from their faculty. Because of this experience, students expressed greater levels of satisfaction with their overall college experience (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2007). According to Kinzie and Kuh (2004), student engagement was a key component to academic success and influenced who persisted in college and who departed.

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Astin (1984) assumed students who interact regularly with faculty are more probable to express satisfaction with all facets of their collegiate experience than other students. These facets include friendships with fellow students, variety of course offerings, administration at the institution, as well as, the overall intellectual environment (Astin, 1984). Wyatt (2011) recommended to facilitate student engagement amongst adult learners, institutions should embrace a diverse set of approaches, including (1) staff members who are understanding and willing to treat nontraditional students with respect, (2) faculty that is experienced in teaching nontraditional students, (3) communication that is appropriate for nontraditional learners, (4) offering programs and services that are appealing to the adult learner on campus.

Tinto (1989) proposed that research in higher education has remained constant in demonstrating how faculty interactions with students have influenced student persistence toward degree completion. Whereas; Graham and Donaldson (1999) proposed that interactions between faculty and student significantly correlated with self-reported increases in the areas of personal and intellectual growth. It is argued that students who frequently engages with faculty tend to report high levels of satisfaction with their college experience (Donaldson, Graham, Kasworm, & Dirkx, 1999). As adult learners become more socially integrated at their institution they simultaneously improve their chances of persisting in the respective programs. In addition, Astin (1999) believed frequent social interactions with faculty and other students at the institution, is more closely linked to student satisfaction levels than any other form of involvement on campus. Nontraditional students who engage in frequent interactions with their faculty and peers generally express greater satisfaction with their overall education experience (Astin, 1999).

Astin (1996) discussed recommendations that involved (1) greater use of learning communities, (2) utilization of learning technologies supporting student-faculty interaction, (3)

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greater use of active teaching methods, (4) and improved academic counseling. Astin (1996) also argued that although universities are social institutions, dedicated to addressing the needs of society, and most college mission statements highlight outcomes such as social responsibility and citizenship, academics typically limit their conception of student outcomes to cognitive results such as knowledge and critical thinking. While there is extensive evidence of the benefits of involvement and the value of student-student and faculty-student interactions for traditional-age students, it is often challenging to involve the adult student in the campus environment because of their conflicting life roles (Donaldson, 1999).

Because adult learners generally manage multiple roles, while pursuing their academic endeavors, many find it rather difficult to become involved at their institutions, and forming connections with faculty and peers. Although student success in higher education is closely connected to the opportunities shared with peers; many adult learners are easily isolated from various academic communities at their institution (Nordstrom, 1997). To combat this trend of adult student isolation; college administrators are encouraged to help nontraditional students successfully integrate into their institutions. Vella (2002) hypothesized that effective adult learning environments should include some the following characteristics: (1) sense of security, (2) respect for students as decision-makers, (3) culture of teamwork, (4) relationship building, as well as, (5) learner engagement. Assisting students in becoming socially integrated in the higher education environment, prepares these students to overcoming the feeling of isolation; thus, allowing them to be successful throughout their academic experience (Hardin, 2008).

Previous studies have offered evidence that adult learners are less engaged in extracurricular activities on campus, due to work obligations, lack of time, family responsibilities and money (Cupp, 1991; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kuh, 1993; Quinnan, 1997). Donaldson,

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Graham, Kasworm, and Dirkx (1999) characterized adult learners as commuters, evening or weekend attendees, and part-time enrollees who have limited to no involvement in on-campus activities. Therefore, adult students are less likely to become involved on campus or spend a significant amount of time outside of the academic classroom while on campus (Donaldson, et al., 1999).

Environmental Needs

While adult learners may spend a considerable amount of time in the college environment during the pursuit of academic endeavors; they devote a significant amount of time in their external environment (Metzner & Bean, 1987). Since the external environment contains multiple factors that could pose as barriers to learning, it is important to explore the environmental needs of the nontraditional student. Clark (2006) articulated that nontraditional commuter students at both residential and nonresidential institutions possess a diverse set of nonacademic needs that shape their educational experience at a greater extent than other students. Most research on student persistence focused on the traditional student demographic and the academic and social interaction that occurs within the campus setting. As adult student enrollment continues to increase while traditional student enrollment declines across colleges and universities; it is imperative that research directs its attention on the characteristics of nontraditional students and the external variables that prevent integration (Rosier, 2016).

Although student engagement varies across institutions, adult learners generally experience lower levels of social integrations regardless of the type of institution they attend. Chapman and Pascarella (1983) assumed this lack of social integrations occurs in response to the lack of time adult learners can dedicate toward social activities on campus, coupled with the

presence of external commitments; including career requirements, family commitments, as well as, financial obligations.

Bean and Metzner (1985) suggested environmental variables are more important to nontraditional students than academic variables. Although nontraditional students interact with their institution, they also spend a substantial amount of time in the external environment (Bean & Metzner, 1987). According to Countryman (2006), the external environment is comprised of unique factors that can be challenging for many adult learners. In addressing these challenges, it is critical to define the environmental needs of this student group (Countryman, 2006). Metzner and Bean (1987) proposed environmental variables include finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunity to transfer. Countryman (2006) suggested additional environmental factors that are important to adult students include library services, location of the college, career services, student health services, and transportation.

For many adult students, participation in higher education is only one of many activities in which they are involved (Fairchild, 2003). For instance, while adult learners pursue their academic goals, they often carry out responsibilities of being full-time employees, parents, caregivers, leaders in their community, and volunteers (Fairchild, 2003). According to Fairchild (2003), once adults enter higher education, they face various threats to their academic success due to multiple role demands and institutional barriers. Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) assumed increased roles, demands, and time conflicts are linked to elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. However, greater emotional support and instrumental support may decrease the negative psychological impact of increased roles, demands and time restraints (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002).

Finances play an important role in the ability of adults to complete their educational goals (Fairchild, 2003). Some leaders in higher education have suggested adult learners are limited in their need for financial assistance to attend college; however, a significant number of adults find that securing financial resources to attend college is a constant barrier to participation (Kasworm, 2003). Presently, there is federal student financial aid program designed explicitly for adult learners seeking a baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate program (Hatfield, 2003). Adult learners often agree that financial aid is confusing and is a major obstacle to the application and enrollment process (Ritt, 2008). Klein-Collins (2011) assumed one of the most substantial barriers for adult learners in postsecondary education is the financial cost associated with higher education. To aid students in overcoming this financial barrier, colleges and universities should strive to consistently inform adult learners of financial aid options or available payment plans. Institutions should clearly differentiate financial aid resources that are reserved for full-time students, and which options are available for students enrolled part-time (Klein-Collins, 2011).

In addition to carrying out work-related responsibilities, adult learners are also challenged with caring for their dependents, parents, and managing household tasks. It is critical colleges and universities understand such challenges, and develop systems to support the adult learner in being successful despite the many challenges they face while enrolling in educational programs. Adult learners may develop feelings of alienation within their learning environment, and resources related to financial advising, orientation, and advising may be necessary in helping the student navigate toward their academic goals (Klein-Collins, 2011). Wlodkowski, Mauldin and Campbell (2002) postulated that work conflicts, responsibilities at home, and difficulties in paying tuition costs are amongst most common reasons adult students fail to persist in post-secondary education.

Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) claimed adult students' persistence in higher education is influenced by the student's household income, number of dependents in the household, and the financial aid received by the student. Fairchild (2003) argued that although some variables can be negotiated, one's income level cannot; stating the basic needs of the family take precedence over academic expenditures. Along with tuition rates and institutional fees, parents of young children may inquire childcare expenses while in class and at work (Fairchild, 2003). Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) advised adult students with older children have a stronger chance to persist to graduation; whereas, those with younger children are more likely to interrupt their education.

According to Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998) the classroom setting is essential in assisting adult learners in their pursuit of academic success. Adults often learn best in environments that are informal, flexible, comfortable and non-threatening (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Ross-Gordon (2003) asserted adult students are often immersed in multiple external cultures and have restricted time to engage in student activities on campus. As a result of this characteristic, the classroom typically serves as the center of an adult learner's academic experience. Faculty is urged to maximize any opportunity to strengthen relationships with their students through instructional activities that occur during the student's time on campus (Ross-Gordon, 2003).

Chapter Summary

As more adult learners enroll in colleges and universities, understanding the perceived academic, social and environmental needs of nontraditional students assumes greater importance for post-secondary institutions. While adult learners enter higher education at a significant rate, many of these students do no reach program completion and leave the collegiate setting within

the first year of enrollment. Despite existing research in the areas of college student retention, and the needs of nontraditional adult students, Tinto (2006) argued these areas are yet to be fully explored. Hardin (2008) suggested an inadequate number of universities have developed specific divisions that are solely devoted to working with adult students. In response to this hypothesis, post-secondary institutions are encouraged to embrace a proactive approach to better understanding the needs of adult learners on their respective campuses. Literature suggest greater knowledge of academic, social and environmental factors impacting adult learners may lead to policies and resources which support better learning environments for nontraditional students.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Introduction

While significant changes have occurred across higher education, where increasing numbers of adult learners are pursuing post-secondary education; institutions have struggled to effectively serve a more diverse student population that includes adult learners (Flint, 2000). If colleges and universities recognize the special characteristics of adult learners, they will be better equipped to properly respond to the special needs of this growing population (Benshoff, 1991; Flint, 2000). While colleges and universities may serve a larger number of nontraditional adult learners, there remains a gap between the needs of adult learners, and the ability to provide adequate resources and support services (Hardin, 2008). An institution's ability to adapt programs and services to meet the needs of non-traditional students will directly influence its success in attracting, and retaining adult students (Benshoff, 1991; Schuetze, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, in order to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. Observing these specific needs, through the perceptions of both adult learners and faculty, is essential to providing better support services, and an overall more conductive learning experience for nontraditional students. This study explored the relationships between the perceptions of part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members at four-year universities.

This study had three primary objectives: (1) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting; (2) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting; (3) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used in this study:

1. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting?

2. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting?

3. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it determined whether a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting. This study is

also significant because it confirmed if a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting. In addition, the study is significant because it established whether a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting. Currently, there is a lack of investigation into the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners attending four-year institutions.

This study focused on the relationship of the stated academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners to the perceptions of those needs by faculty members. Few studies were found that addressed specific needs of adult learners at a traditional four-year university. By addressing the relationship of adult learners and faculty perceptions, universities can better serve this specific population. The information obtained from this study can assist universities in better understanding the needs of adult learners. University faculty and administrators will find this information useful in developing appropriate learning environments for adult learners at their respective institutions. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding the perceived needs of adult learners on university campuses, as perceived by, adult learners and faculty at four-year institutions.

<div align="center">**Design of the Study**</div>

This study used quantitative measures in its design by using the survey method. The survey, with a convenience sample of adult learners and faculty members was used to measure responses for each of the research questions. The academic, social and environmental variables were obtained from the Adult Learner Needs Survey which was primarily based on

Countryman's (2006) Adult Learner Needs Survey. A 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA was utilized to answer each research question related to the relationships of adult learners' stated academic, social, and environmental needs to faculty perceptions of those needs. The SPSS statistical analysis program was used to analyze participant data gathered through this research study.

Protection of Human Participants

The purpose and procedures for this research study were thoroughly detailed through written directives and responses (see Appendix A). The research protocol, information letter, and survey instrument were carefully reviewed and approved by the researcher's dissertation committee, Auburn University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB), and Troy University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendices B and C). Research study participants were provided an information letter (see Appendix A) which served as the Waiver of Documentation of Consent. The information letters invited participation in the study, highlighted results would be anonymous, and confirmed the purpose of participating in the study.

Sample Selection

An informational letter was sent to the assistant dean of instruction of Troy University, Phenix City campus that described the study's purpose and to gain permission to conduct the study during Spring 2015 semester. The assistant dean of instruction reviewed all letters and instruments prior to granting permission to conduct the study. The investigator obtained the approval from the dean of instruction and confirmed approval through email correspondence (see Appendix B). The sample in this research study included a convenience sample of part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members at Troy University, Phenix City campus during Spring 2015 semester.

Troy University was established by an Act of the Alabama Legislature on February 26, 1887 as Troy State Normal School as an institution to train teachers for Alabama's schools. This university is located in Troy, Alabama, and is a member of the Alabama State University System. Troy University has multiple campuses throughout the State of Alabama. Its main campus enrollment is approximately 7,900 students, and the total student enrollment across all campuses of over 18,000. Troy University is regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award associate, baccalaureate, masters, education specialist, and doctoral degrees.

Troy University's Phenix City campus located in Phenix City, Alabama was established to address the higher education needs of nontraditional students who reside within the Chattahoochee Valley region; to include counties located in Alabama and Georgia. The Chattahoochee Valley area is comprised of Phenix City, Alabama, Fort Benning, Georgia and Columbus, Georgia. Troy University's Phenix City campus offers a total of 12 undergraduate degree programs and 11 graduate degree programs; enrolling approximately 2,000 students a semester and employs approximately 42 full-time faculty and approximately 60 part-time faculty. A total of 100 faculty members and 200 adult learners were invited to participate in the study.

The sample for this study consisted of 136 adult learners that were 19 years old and over enrolled in an undergraduate degree program and 74 faculty members. The participant sample was selected from Troy University's Phenix City campus, located in Phenix City, Alabama. The sample for this study consisted of two groups: adult learners and faculty members. From these two groups, sub-groups existed. The adult learner participants consisted of 119 full-time and 17 part-time adult learners. The faculty participants consisted of 39 full-time and 35 part-time

faculty members at the Troy University Phenix City campus. To increase heterogeneity within the sample, participants were recruited from a variety of undergraduate courses, taught within various colleges/divisions on campus. The response rate amongst participants were: 74% percent amongst faculty and 68 % amongst adult learners.

These courses were based on availability during Spring 2015 semester. Students enrolled in the following classes were invited to participate in the study:

- ACT 3394 (Governmental Accounting)

- ART 3361 (Integrating Art into the Curriculum)

- BUS 3382 (Business Communications)

- CJ 3302 (Criminal Justice Administration)

- CJ 3352 (Constitutional Law in Criminal Justice)

- EDU 3310 (The Professional Educator)

- HS 2240 (Ethics)

- HS 3370 (Professional Communication Skills)

- IS 4447 (System Analysis & Design)

- MUS 3361 (Integrating Music into the Curriculum)

- PSY 3310 (Sensation & Perception)

- PSY 3332 (Family Violence)

- RHB 2281 (Rehabilitation Research II)

- ELE 3360 (Teaching Natural Science K-6)

- SWK 2281 (Social Work Research II)

- SWK 3302 (Social Services Resources)

- TROY 1101 (University Orientation)

The above courses were located within the following colleges at Troy University:

- College of Arts and Science

- College of Business

- College of Education

- College of Health and Human Services

Data Collection Procedures

Upon receiving approval from Auburn University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB), and Troy University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendices B and C), a meeting was scheduled with the dean of instruction at Troy University's Phenix City campus to discuss the purpose of the study, and procedures for distributing and collecting data. At this meeting, the researcher reviewed expectations of the dean of instruction regarding the study. The researcher provided the dean of instruction with the instructional letters, scripts, surveys and explained the proper procedures for distributing and collecting surveys (see Appendices D, E, and F). The dean of instruction was provided a short script that detailed the procedures for recruiting adult learners and faculty members (see Appendix E). The researcher provided the dean of instruction with information letters for part-time and full-time faculty members and information letters for adult learners (see Appendix A) regarding the study. The information letters provided to the dean of instruction extended an invitation to participate in the study, and explained the procedures for distributing and collecting the *Adult Learner Needs Survey.*

In addition, an instructional letter, and script, regarding proper procedures for distributing and collecting surveys were provided for all selected faculty members to ensure proper distribution and collection of student surveys. These letters were distributed to each selected

faculty member by the dean of instruction (see Appendices D and E). To ensure consistency, scripts (see Appendix E) were provided for the dean of instruction detailing the proper procedures to the adult learners and faculty.

The dean of instruction was asked to distribute a survey to all part-time and full-time faculty members at Troy University's Phenix City campus. Faculty members were instructed to complete and return the survey, to the dean of instruction's office, in the sealed envelope provided by the researcher, within two weeks of receipt. To ensure consistency, a script (see Appendix E) was provided to the dean of instruction regarding faculty surveys.

Additionally, the dean of instruction met with the chairs of each college on campus, to provide information letters, scripts and surveys to be distributed to faculty members teaching the selected courses during the Spring 2015 semester. The selected faculty members were provided an instructional letter regarding the proper procedure for distribution and collection of surveys (see Appendix D). Selected faculty members were asked to distribute the information letters (see Appendix A) and surveys (see Appendix F) to each student enrolled in the designated class taught by the faculty member. To ensure consistency, a script (see Appendix E) was provided for each selected faculty member. Students were asked to complete the surveys during class and return them to their instructor upon completion. Each instructor was instructed to return all student surveys in a sealed envelope, provided by the researcher, to the dean of instruction's office. The researcher obtained all sealed envelopes from the dean of instruction at the end of the two weeks.

Instrument Development

The survey instrument used in this study was the *Adult Learner Needs Survey*, based primarily on Countryman's (2006) *Adult Learner Needs Survey*. This instrument served to assess

academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners in the collegiate setting. The Adult Learner Needs Survey (see Appendix F) is a five-part questionnaire.

When responding to items on the survey concerning academic, social, and environmental needs, adult learners and faculty members used a four-point Likert-type scale. Each item was scored on an ordinal scale using the following: (4) Very Important, (3) Important, (2) Somewhat Important, (1) Not Important. In addition, to the Likert-type scale, adult learners and faculty members could provide open responses to questions related to additional needs and services.

The instrument consisted of a two-page survey comprised of five sections titled: Academic/Learning Needs, Social Needs, Environmental Needs, Additional Needs/Services, and Background Information.

The first section, labeled Academic/Learning Needs, included information concerning academic and learning needs of adult learners. It included 18 items that related to learning styles, campus resources, class availability, remediation, tutorial labs, course offering and faculty availability.

The second section, titled Social Needs, contained information regarding the social aspects of the collegiate environment. It encompassed 13 items regarding social engagement, organizational and community involvement, peer and faculty interactions, counseling services, and job placement opportunities.

The third section, categorized as Environmental Needs, encompassed information related to environmental needs. It included 12 items that included topics such as campus safety and security, health services, accommodations, childcare services, parking, financial aid, classroom environment, family support, and future employment opportunities.

The fourth section of the survey, titled Additional Needs/Services, included two questions that inquired about the need for additional services. These questions included: improvement of services and the usefulness of services.

The final section, categorized as Background Information, concerned information related to the participants' backgrounds. It included questions such as age, gender, student status, and degree program being pursued.

Data Collection and Coding

The researcher provided the survey, along with instructions to the dean of instruction regarding proper procedures for distributing and collecting surveys amongst selected faculty members, as well as, students enrolled in the identified courses. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no personal identifiers were tied to the participant survey responses. No participants were associated with their responses. In addition, no incentives were provided for participation in the study; participants were reminded participation was voluntary, and they could discontinue participation at any time during the study.

The dean of instruction distributed all faculty surveys to each departmental chair. Faculty members were provided an information letter, asked to complete the surveys and return the surveys in the provided sealed envelope to their department chair. The information letter served as the Waiver of Documentation of Consent. Department chairs collected all surveys from part-time and full-time faculty members and returned them to the dean of instruction at their institution. The researcher collected all faculty members' surveys from the deans of instruction.

In addition, the dean of instruction met with selected faculty members to provide surveys, along with an information letter and script concerning the distribution and collection of surveys (see Appendix E). Student information letters and surveys were distributed and collected by the

faculty member instructing the selected classes. The information letter served as the Waiver of Documentation of Consent. Student participants completed and returned the surveys to their instructor during class. Selected faculty members collected all surveys from part-time and full-time students and returned them to the dean of instruction. The researcher collected all students' surveys from the dean of instruction's office.

After the data collection was complete, all survey responses were compiled and securely stored for computation in the SPSS statistical analysis program. All student surveys were collected and sorted based on the students' age. Only students age 19 years or older were used in this study. All faculty and students age 19 years or older data were coded and entered into the SPSS database by the researcher.

To analyze the research data, three 2 x 2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were used to compare means between adult learners and faculty perceptions to academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners in a four-year setting. Three 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA tests and Cronbach's Alphas were appropriate statistical methods for this study. Per Green and Salkind (2005) the use of Factorial ANOVA allows for determining the effects of each independent variable separately as the main effects. Factorial ANOVA allows for examination of any potential interaction effect on the independent variable (Shannon & Davenport, 2001).

The dependent variables of this study were academic, social and environmental needs; whereas, the independent variables included adult learners and faculty members. These tests compared adult learners (part-time or full-time) and faculty members (part-time and full-time) status. Furthermore, it compared the amount of variance between the categories.

To analyze responses to the two open-ended questions in the survey concerning additional services for adult learners, qualitative research techniques were also utilized. Denzin

and Lincoln (2003) asserted qualitative analysis included the arranging of data into manageable components, identifying patterns and developing a framework for sharing what the data suggest. In 1998, Rossman and Rallis defined coding as the process of organizing material into categories prior to developing meaning to those groups.

Chapter Summary

Chapter III consisted of the introduction, design of study, protection of human participants, sample selection, data collection procedures, instrument development, and data collection and coding. The methods used in this study focused on gathering data from part-time and full-time adult learners 19 years and older and part-time and full-time faculty members from Troy University's Phenix City campus. The chapter provided a description of the instrument used in the study, and the methods used to analyze the data. Chapter IV presents the results of the statistical analyses conducted in this study. The results include the description of the sample.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

Gaining an understanding of the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty members, will assist colleges and universities in understanding how to adequately assist and support this diverse student population. The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners attending four-year institutions, in an effort to enhance the overall collegiate experience of nontraditional students within the university setting. This study identified the stated academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by the adult learner, as well as, faculty in the four-year university environment. There was need for this research as academic, social, and environmental needs of the adult learner populations had yet to be fully explored, especially in the four-year university setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, in order to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. Observing these specific needs, through the perceptions of both adult learners and faculty, is essential to providing better support services, and an overall more conductive learning experience for nontraditional students. This study explored the relationships between the perceptions of part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members at four-year universities.

This study had three primary objectives: (1) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting; (2) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting; (3) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used in this study:

1. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting?

2. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting?

3. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it determined whether a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting. This study is

also significant because it confirmed if a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting. In addition, the study is significant because it established whether a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting. At the present time, there is a lack of investigation into the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners attending four-year institutions.

This study focused on the relationship of the stated academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners to the perceptions of those needs by faculty members. Few studies were found that addressed specific needs of adult learners at a traditional four-year university. By addressing the relationship of adult learners and faculty perceptions, universities can better serve this specific population. The information obtained from this study can assist universities in better understanding the needs of adult learners. University faculty and administrators will find this information useful in developing appropriate learning environments for adult learners at their respective institutions. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding the perceived needs of adult learners on university campuses, as perceived by, adult learners and faculty at four-year institutions.

Chapter IV explores the results of the research data analysis. The chapter begins with the internal consistency reliability and validity information for the survey instrument used to collect participant data. The second section presents a description of the sample. In the third section, exploratory quantitative data results are presented. The fourth section highlights the

qualitative findings of the study. The last section of Chapter IV will provide a summary of the research study's findings.

Instrumentation of Reliability and Validity

The survey instrument used for this study was Countryman's (2006) *Adult Learner Needs Survey*. This instrument served to assess academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners in the collegiate setting, as perceived by adult learners and faculty members. The validity of Countryman's *Adult Learner Needs Survey* was established through both a validation panel, as well as, a pilot test. The *Adult Learner Needs Survey* instrument "was pilot-tested with a sample of fifteen faculty members and thirty students at Chattahoochee Valley Community College" (Countryman, 2006, p. 68). The instrument was also pilot tested on the researcher's dissertation committee. Further, the content reliability of the survey was established using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alphas for the factors were as follows: Academic (.86), Social (.92), and Environmental (.86), which indicated a satisfactory reliability coefficient for the three factors.

Description of the Sample

The sample in this research study included a convenience sample of adult learners and faculty members at Troy University's Phenix City campus. The survey was administered to all participants during the Spring 2015 semester. A total of 100 faculty members and 200 adult learners were invited to participate in the study. A total of 136 adult learners and 74 faculty members participated in this study. The response rate amongst participants were: 74% percent amongst faculty and 68 % amongst adult learners. The sample for this study consisted of two independent variables: adult learners and faculty members. From these two groups, sub-groups existed: part-time and full-time. The adult learner participants consisted of 119 full-time and 17

part-time adult learners. The faculty participants consisted of 39 full-time and 35 part-time faculty members at Troy University's Phenix City campus. To increase heterogeneity within the sample, participants were recruited from actively enrolled students during the Spring 2015 Semester, and selected from a variety of undergraduate courses extending across multiple academic divisions on campus. The sample for this study included dependent variables: academic, social and environmental needs.

Faculty Participants

Seventy-four faculty members participated in the study from Troy University's Phenix City campus. The faculty participants consisted of 39 full-time faculty and 35 part-time faculty members. Of the 74 faculty participants; 30 participants were males and 44 participants were females. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate employment status and gender of the part-time and full-time faculty members' respondents. Table 3 illustrates the age range for faculty participants.

Table 1

Participating Faculty Members' Employment Status

Status	n	Male	Female
Full-time	39	16	23
Part-time	35	14	21
Total	74	30	44

$N = 74$

Table 2

Participating Faculty Members' Gender

Gender	n	Full-Time	Part-Time
Male	30	16	14
Female	44	23	21
Total	74	39	35

N = 74

Table 3

Participating Faculty Members' Age Ranges

Age Ranges	n	Full-Time	Part-Time
19 – 24	0	0	0
25 – 34	7	2	5
35 – 44	31	14	17
45 – 54	22	13	9
55 – 64	12	8	4
65 – 74	2	2	0
Total	74	39	35

N = 74

Student Participants

One hundred and thirty-six part-time and full-time adult learners, age 19 years or older,

enrolled in an undergraduate program at Troy University, participated in the study. The adult

learner participants consisted of 119 full-time and 17 part-time adult learners. Of the 136 adult

learners, 50 participants were males and 86 participants were females. Tables 4 and 5 illustrate

enrollment status and gender of the part-time and full-time adult learner participants. Table 6

illustrates the age range for adult learner participants.

Table 4

Participating Adult Learners' Enrollment Status

Status	n		
Full-time	119		
Part-time	17		
Total	136		

$N = 136$

Table 5

Participating Adult Learners' Gender

Status	n	Full-Time	Part-Time
Male	50	40	10
Female	86	79	7
Total	136	119	17

$N = 136$

Table 6

Participating Adult Learners' Age Range

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Age Range	*n*	Full-Time	Part-Time
19 – 24	42	41	1
25 – 34	48	43	5
35 – 44	29	24	5
45 – 54	15	10	5
55 – 64	2	1	1
65 – 74	0	0	0
Total	136	119	17

_____

$N = 136$

Quantitative Data Findings

In this section, the research study results of the quantitative data regarding the previously discussed research questions are presented. Three 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA tests were conducted to determine the relationship of adult learners' stated needs (academic, social, and environmental) to the two independent variables, full-time and part-time adult learners and full-time and part-time faculty members. In this section, the results of the participant data analyses in relation to the research questions are presented.

Academic Needs

Research Question One: What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting?

A 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA test was conducted to evaluate the potential relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting. The 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA was tested at the .05 level. The 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA indicated no significant relationship existed between adult learners and faculty members, $F(1, 206) = .16$, $p = .69$, observed power = .07. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status, $F(1, 206) = 4.76$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, observed power = .58. The results indicated no significant interaction effect between part-time and full-time status and adult learners and faculty members regarding academic needs, $F(1, 206) = 3.62$, $p = .06$, observed power = .47 (see Table 7). Means and standard deviations for academic needs are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA (Between-Subjects) for Academic Needs

Source	df	F	*p	η^2	Observed Power
Adult Learners/Faculty Members	1	.16	.69		.07
Part-Time and Full-Time Status	1	4.76	.03	.02	.58
Part-Time and Full-Time Status/ Adult Learners and Faculty Members	1	3.62	.06		.47

*p < .05

Social Needs

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting?

A 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA test was conducted to evaluate the potential relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty members' perception of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting. The 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA was tested at the .05 level. The 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA indicated no significant difference between adult learners' stated social needs, and faculty perception of those needs, F (1, 206) = .08, p = .77, observed power = .06. The results indicated no significant difference between part-time and full-time status, F (1, 206) = .45, p = .50, observed power = .10. The results indicated no significant interaction between part-time and full-time status and adult learners and faculty members regarding social needs, F (1, 206) = .41, p = .52, observed power = .10 (see Table 8).

Table 8

2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA (Between-Subjects) for Social Needs

Source	df	F	*p	η²	Observed Power
Adult Learners/Faculty Members	1	.08	.77		.05
Part-Time and Full-Time Status	1	.45	.50		.10
Part-Time and Full-Time Status/ Adult Learners and Faculty Members	1	.41	.52		.10

*p < .05

Environmental Needs

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting?

A 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA test was conducted to evaluate the potential relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty members' perception of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting. The 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA was tested at the .05 level. The 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA indicated no significant difference between adult learners' stated environmental needs, and faculty perception of those needs, $F(1, 206) = .21$, $p = .65$, observed power = .07. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status, $F(1, 206) = 4.66$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, observed power = .57. The results indicated no significant interaction between part-time and full-time status and adult learners and faculty members regarding social needs, $F(1, 206) = .01$, $p = .93$, observed power = .05 (see Table 9).

Table 9

2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA (Between-Subjects) for Environmental Needs

Source	df	F	*p	η^2	Observed Power
Adult Learners/Faculty Members	1	.21	.65		.07
Part-Time and Full-Time Status	1	4.66	.03	.02	.57
Part-Time and Full-Time Status/ Adult Learners and Faculty Members	1	.01	.93		.05

*p < .05

Qualitative Data Findings

Responses from the two open-ended questions tended to support quantitative results.

Participants were presented the following questions:

1. In what way(s) can this university improve services for adult learners?

2. What specific services would be useful to you as an adult learner?

To analyze participant responses to the open-ended questions, responses were coded and themes were reviewed. Five themes emerged from the open-ended questions to include: Tutorial Resources/Labs, Course Offerings, Academic Advisement, Childcare Services, and Campus Safety/Parking. These themes were categorized per adult learners' needs (academic, social, and environmental). The following responses relate to academic and environmental needs; social needs were not represented in the responses.

Academic Factors

Theme 1 – Tutorial Resources/Labs

Qualitative data gathered through the open-ended questions suggested adult students seek additional tutoring resources. Student comments suggested additional tutoring opportunities will assist students in meeting course requirements, and enhance their overall academic abilities. The following responses were provided on the surveys:

"Faculty should be readily available to assist students with disabilities"

"The school should provide more opportunities for face to face tutoring."

"Have more tutors available to help in different subject areas."

"Campus should provide 24-hour access to computer labs."

"Campus should offer have more tutors for math courses."

"Extra tutoring should be provided for all students in all programs."

"Computer labs should be available in multiple building on campus."

"Have more opportunities for in person tutoring."

"Library resources and guidance available at our campus."

Theme 2 –Course Offerings

Qualitative data derived during the open-ended questions indicated adult students preferred a diverse range of course offerings. Participants indicated a need for additional courses to be offered in the following formats: day, evening/night, online, hybrid, and weekend options. The following responses were provided on the surveys:

"Offer hybrid classes that allow students more flexibility with on campus courses."

"Offer additional online courses for students unable to commute to campus and attend in-class courses."

"Offer more night and weekend courses for students who work full-time and go to school full-time."

"On campus courses, should end prior to 10:00 pm to accommodate students with fulltime jobs and family."

"Flexible classes that are offered multiple time of day."

"Offer more accelerated courses in the mini term format."

"Provide more day-time courses on campus."

"Provide courses multiple times during the year."

"Offer some of the courses currently only offered online on campus face-to-face."

"Offer more evening courses."

"More weekend courses should be offered."

Theme 3 – Academic Advisement

Qualitative data gathered through the open-ended questions indicated adult learners seek additional academic advisement support. Student comments suggested additional advisement efforts will assist students in meeting program requirements, and enhance their overall academic experience. The following responses were provided on the surveys:

"Access to my academic advisor on the campus that I attend; my advisor is in Troy, Alabama; no face-to-face advising."

"Academic advisor should be more in line with students by helping them to ensure the correct courses are being completed for degree."

"Counselors should be more involved throughout the student's progress."

"Advisors should help students understand which courses will be available at least two terms/semesters out, so we can better plan our schedules in advance."

"The ability to maintain the same advisor until I complete my degree program."

Environmental Factors

Theme 4 – Childcare Services

Qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions indicated adult students were interested in their institution providing childcare services. Childcare services would assist adult learners in attending class throughout the semester. The following comments were made on the surveys:

"Childcare services on campus would be convenient for students with young children."

"Daycare services on campus during day and evening classes."

"Childcare services for students taking classes during the evening hours."

"Some type of daycare/childcare services."

"Onsite childcare service; many students taking classes at night have children."

"Free childcare resource since many students do not have family to keep their children and cannot afford extended daycare rates."

Theme 5 – Campus Safety/Parking

Qualitative data received from the open-ended questions indicated adult learners' interest in having increased campus security present in all campus buildings. Student comments also noted the need for enhanced student parking that are in closer proximity to campus buildings where their classes are held. Participants also suggested the need for increased lighting on campus, with particular interest in the student parking areas across campus. The following comments were made on the surveys:

 "Increased student parking closer to the buildings."

"Brighter lighting throughout all parking areas on campus."

"On campus security in all buildings, during late evening/night classes at night."

"More accessible parking on campus for students with disabilities."

"More parking for classes offered during the week and on the weekends."

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the results of the statistical analyses from the collection of participant data. Three 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the potential relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members' perceptions of adult learners' academic, social, and environmental needs. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status for academic needs. The results also indicated a statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status for environmental needs   No other relationships were found through the analyses of

participant data. Chapter V discusses the findings of this study, as well as, implications for four-year universities. This chapter will also highlight areas for further research, while providing an overview of the research study.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, in order to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. Observing these specific needs, through the perceptions of both adult learners and faculty, is essential to providing better support services, and an overall more conductive learning experience for nontraditional students. This study explored the relationships between the perceptions of part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members at four-year universities.

This study had three primary objectives: (1) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting; (2) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting; (3) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used in this study:

1. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting?

2. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting?

3. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting?

The sample in this research study included a convenience sample of adult learners and faculty members at Troy University's Phenix City campus. The survey was administered to all participants during the Spring 2015 semester. A total of 136 adult learners and 74 faculty members participated in this study. The sample for this study consisted of two independent variables: adult learners and faculty members. From these two groups, sub-groups existed: part-time and full-time. The adult learner participants consisted of 119 full-time and 17 part-time adult learners. The faculty participants consisted of 39 full-time and 35 part-time faculty members at Troy University's Phenix City campus. To increase heterogeneity within the sample, participants were recruited from actively enrolled students during the Spring 2015 Semester, and selected from a variety of undergraduate courses extending across multiple academic divisions on campus. The sample for this study included dependent variables: academic, social and environmental needs.

Seventy-four faculty members participated in the study from Troy University's Phenix City campus. The faculty participants consisted of 39 full-time faculty and 35 part-time faculty

members. Of the 74 faculty participants; 30 participants were males and 44 participants were females. One hundred and thirty-six part-time and full-time adult learners, age 19 years or older, enrolled in an undergraduate program at Troy University, participated in the study. The adult learner participants consisted of 119 full-time and 17 part-time adult learners. Of the 136 adult learners, 50 participants were males and 86 participants were females.

The survey instrument used in this study was the *Adult Learner Needs Survey*, based primarily on Countryman's (2006) *Adult Learner Needs Survey*. This instrument served to assess academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners in the collegiate setting. The Adult Learner Needs Survey (see Appendix E) is a five-part questionnaire.

When responding to items on the survey concerning academic, social, and environmental needs, adult learners and faculty members used a four-point Likert-type scale. Each item was scored on an ordinal scale using the following: (4) Very Important, (3) Important, (2) Somewhat Important, (1) Not Important. In addition, to the Likert-type scale, adult learners and faculty members could provide open responses to questions related to additional needs and services.

The instrument consisted of a two-page survey comprised of five sections titled: Academic/Learning Needs, Social Needs, Environmental Needs, Additional Needs/Services, and Background Information. The first section, labeled Academic/Learning Needs, included information concerning academic and learning needs of adult learners. It included 18 items that related to learning styles, campus resources, class availability, remediation, tutorial labs, course offering and faculty availability.

The second section, titled Social Needs, contained information regarding the social aspects of the collegiate environment. It encompassed 13 items regarding social engagement,

organizational and community involvement, peer and faculty interactions, counseling services, and job placement opportunities.

The third section, categorized as Environmental Needs, encompassed information related to environmental needs. It included 12 items that included topics such as campus safety and security, health services, accommodations, childcare services, parking, financial aid, classroom environment, family support, and future employment opportunities.

The fourth section of the survey, titled Additional Needs/Services, included two questions that inquired about the need for additional services. These questions included: improvement of services and the usefulness of services. The final section, categorized as Background Information, concerned information related to the participants' backgrounds. It included questions such as age, gender, student status, and degree program being pursued.

Discussion of Findings

The results gathered from the quantitative research data indicated the following for the three research questions. For Research Question One, "What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting?" The results of the 2X2 Factorial ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status. However, the results indicated no statistically significant relationship between adult learners and faculty members. The results indicated no statistically significant interaction effect between part-time and full-time status and adult learners and faculty members regarding academic needs. In comparing results indicated in this study with previous research efforts regarding academic needs of adult learners; the following results are presented. Countryman (2006) also indicated no statistically significant difference between adult learners stated

academic needs and faculty perception of those needs; however, the results of Countryman's study did not indicate a statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status regarding perceived academic needs of adult learners. Whereas, the results of this study indicated a statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status regarding academic needs.

For Research Question Two, "What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting?" The 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA indicated no statistically significant difference between adult learners' stated social needs, and faculty perception of those needs. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status. The results indicated no statistically significant interaction effect between part-time and full-time status and adult learners and faculty members regarding social needs. In comparison, Countryman (2006) indicated a significant difference between adult learners stated social needs and faculty perception of those needs; faculty scored higher than adult learners in their response to perceived social needs of adult learners. Countryman (2006) results also indicated an interaction effect between part-time and full-time status and adult learners and faculty members regarding social needs.

For Research Question Three, "What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting?" The 2X2 Factorial ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference between part-time and full-time status. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between adult learners' stated environmental needs, and faculty perception of those needs. The results indicated no statistically significant

interaction effect between part-time and full-time status and adult learners and faculty members regarding environmental needs. In comparison, Countryman (2006) indicated no statistically significant relationship between part-time and full-time status. However, Countryman's results indicated a significant difference between adult learners stated environmental needs and faculty perception of those needs; faculty scored higher in their response to perceived environmental needs of adult learners. Countryman (2006) also indicated an interaction effect occurred between part-time and full-time status and adult learners and faculty members regarding environmental needs.

In addition to the quantitative data derived from the three 2X2 Factorial ANOVAs, responses to the open-ended questions also served to highlight perceived needs of adult learners, per adult learners and faculty. Participants were presented the following open-ended questions in the survey:

1. In what way(s) can this university improve services for adult learners?

2. What specific services would be useful to you as an adult learner?

The data gathered from the qualitative portion of the study provided additional information regarding themes that emerged relating to adult learners' needs. Two themes (academic and environmental) emerged in participant responses, and are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Qualitative: Academic Factors

Theme 1 – Tutorial Resources/Labs: Participants indicated a need for additional tutoring services and student computer labs on campus. Participants specified that additional tutorial resources and lab services would help them better understand course materials; yielding greater academic performance in the overall course. Adult learner comments indicated the need for face

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to face tutoring opportunities, as well as, having specific tutors assigned to specific subject areas in their programs. Participants also suggested their campus provide all students with unlimited access to student computer labs. Students also indicated the need for additional computer labs in all buildings on campus. In addition to tutoring services, and computer resources, adult learners also indicated the need for on campus library resources for students attending Troy University's Phenix City campus.

Theme 2 – Course Offerings: Participants indicated a need for preferred a diverse range of course offerings. Participants indicated a need for additional courses to be offered in the following formats: day, evening/night, online, hybrid and weekend options. Adult learners indicated the need for additional courses to be offered at various times of the day; providing students with increased options in developing a schedule that comments their individual needs. Participants also indicated the need for more daytime courses, and courses to be offered during the weekend for those who cannot commute to campus during the evening hours. Other comments indicated the need for additional evening courses, along with more courses offered in an accelerated mini term. Participants also indicated the need of more hybrid courses offered throughout the academic year to accommodate students who work full-time while attending school.

Theme 3 – Academic Advisement: Adult learner comments indicated the need for on campus academic advisement to either replace or supplement the virtual advising format that is provided from the university's Troy, Alabama campus. Participant comments also suggested that academic advisors should work closely with their students to ensure they understand the overall requirements for their degree programs, and only the correct courses are being completed in satisfying the program requirements. Student comments also encouraged academic advisors to be

more involved with their students throughout the entire matriculation of their programs. Participants also suggested the interest in maintaining the same academic advisor throughout their program, versus experiencing multiple changes in advising staff while pursuing the academic program.

Qualitative: Environmental Factors

Theme 4 – Childcare Services: Participants indicated a need for on campus childcare services each semester for students currently enrolled in courses. Adult learners indicated that childcare services would assist them in attending class on a regular basis throughout the semester; reducing barriers to attending on campus, face-to-face courses. Responses also suggested adult learners typically have younger children, who require supervision, and are unable to afford the cost of childcare services that extend beyond normal hours.

Theme 5 – Safety/Parking: Adult learners suggested the need for increased campus security on campus at all buildings on campus, with primary focus on courses offered during the late evening/night hours, as well as, courses offered during the weekends. Participants also noted their interest in seeing more lighting on campus, with primary attention on student parking areas. Student comments also suggested the need for additional student parking zones that are in closer proximity to campus buildings; especially for students with disabilities, as well as, for all students enrolled in courses held during the late evening/night hours.

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Implications

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For the past three decades, more adult learners have enrolled in colleges and universities throughout the country than in previous decades; drastically changing the landscape of higher education (Hardin, 2008). Adult students are motivated to either enter higher education for the first time, or return to post-secondary education for many reasons; in some cases, the influence to

pursue post-secondary studies may be positive or negative. Per Hardin (2008) regardless of the motivation for enrolling into a college or university, a common theme generally exists amongst the adult student population. For instance, many adult learners opt to return to the educational environment when faced with one or more transitions in their personal or professional lives. For instance, an adult may decide to return to the educational forefront in preparing for a new career, advance in their current career field or wish to gain new skills that will prepare them for retirement. Watters (2003) also argued adult learners enroll in universities for a diverse set of reasons, and have vastly different educational needs and expectations than their traditional counterparts in terms of academic support and guidance.

Watters (2003) described adult learners as older students pursuing their first academic program at the college level, or one returning to the collegiate setting after being away for an extended amount of time. Adult learners generally return to the college setting to enhance their lives; either personally or professionally (Watters, 2003). Hardin (2008) postulated that adult learners often experience various challenges while pursuing their educational endeavors; this hypothesis encourages institutions to assume adult students need the same level of support as traditional students. In some cases, adult learners may need more attention and support in comparison to their traditional counterparts (Hardin, 2008). Pennington and Harris (1980) hypothesized that adult learners have needs that differ from the traditional collegiate population. These differences can cause higher education institutions to experience many challenges while addressing the expectations of nontraditional learners (Pennington & Harris, 1980).

While more adult learners are enrolling in colleges and universities throughout the country, institutions are witnessing lower retention rates amongst the nontraditional students in comparison to the traditional student body. Rendon (1995) suggested that most nontraditional

learners drop-out and leave their institutions after their first semester; failing to complete their programs of study. In responding to this trend, universities are encouraged to dedicate more attention and resources in aiding adult learners in successfully transitioning into the college environment Rendon (1995).

The results from this study indicated no statistically significant difference between adult learners and faculty overall perception of adult learner academic needs. However, the results did find a statistically significant relationship between part-time and full-time status regarding the academic needs of adult learners. Participants whom self-identified as having a full-time status at the university scored higher in their response to academic needs of adult learners, than participants whom self-identified as having a part-time status at the university. The results found no statistically significant difference existed between adult learners' stated social needs and faculty perception of their social needs.

The results indicated no statistically significant difference between adult learners' and faculty overall perception of adult learner environmental needs. However, the results found a statistically significant relationship existed between part-time and full-time status regarding environmental needs of adult learners. Participants whom self-identified as having a full-time status at the university scored higher in their response to environmental needs of adult learners, in comparison to participants whom self-identified as having a part-time status at the university.

Several implications may be concluded from this study which may assist colleges and universities in implementing programs and services to adequately address the needs of adult learners enrolled at their respective institutions.

Implications for Faculty and Administration

As universities seek to enhance student persistence rates, the results from this research study, as well as, the literature review seek to aid institutions in gaining greater insight into academic, social and environmental needs of the adult learner population. Although adult learners typically enter the collegiate environment with a wealth of experience, this student population often face multiple obstacles while pursuing their educational endeavors (Wyatt, 2011). Per Gast (2013) as more adult learners enter the collegiate setting, colleges and universities are encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services geared toward meeting the needs of nontraditional students at their respective institutions. By addressing the needs of the adult student population, institutions are better equipped to retain their students until graduation (Gast, 2013).

The results from this study encourage university administrators and faculty to provide support resources in a manner that adult learners may easily access such resources. In addressing academic needs of adult learners, institutions are encouraged to establish face-to-face tutoring services for all academic subjects. Tutoring opportunities will aid adult learners in gaining a better understanding of course materials, as well as, assist nontraditional students in further connecting with faculty and fellow students beyond the classroom environment. Institutions are also encouraged to provide unlimited access to student computer labs and library resources. Faculty are also encouraged to diversify course schedules each semester, as well as, create a variety of course design methods in which courses will be delivered. Through offering a wide variety of courses, as well as, a diverse range of learning formats to choose, adult learners will be afforded the opportunity to create a learning environment conducive to their needs and expectations.

Faculty and administrators should create a campus environment that offers courses in the following formats: day, evening/night, online, hybrid and weekend options. Adult learners often need courses to be delivered in a variety of formats; to include: traditional in-class options, hybrid course designs, as well as, courses offered solely online for those unable to commute to campus. Results from this study indicate while some adult learners seek in-class courses solely during the evening/night hours; other adult learners are only able to attend in-class courses during earlier times of the day; either early morning or min-afternoon hours. In meeting the needs of all adult learners, faculty are encouraged to develop schedules that includes courses offered at multiple times of the day, as well as, on weekends, and not solely during the evening/night hours.

Institutions are encouraged to offer support services and student resources that extend beyond standard hours of operation. It is common for many adult learners are employed while enrolled in school and may not be able to seek assistance or access critical resources on campus during specific hours of the day. Support services should be offered at various times of the day, with a primary focus on courses offered at night and on the weekends. This type of strategy will allow the administration and faculty to target the times in which more adult learners are attending class. By extending the times in which a student may receive advisement, tutoring, or access support labs, an institution better equips the adult learner with the necessary tools needed to achieve academic success. By extended the hours for specific offices, nontraditional students will have access to student resources critical to their overall academic performance (Clark, 2006).

College and university administrators should also examine means of providing on campus childcare services each semester for students currently enrolled in courses. Providing

campus childcare services while students attend their courses, further removes an external barrier preventing many adult learners from attending class meetings on a regular basis. Results from this study indicate adult learners may have younger children, requiring supervision during the times in which classes are offered. Providing such services on campus not only extend convenience factors for parents, but may also remove or eliminate financial barriers generally associated with the cost of after-hour childcare services.

In addressing the academic needs of adult learners, Chen (2014) argued that as institutions continue experiencing rapid increases in the enrollment of adult learners, educators will need to move beyond the youth-centered academic models which often exist within most institutions, and incorporate educational structures that better address the needs of the nontraditional adult learner. As more adult learners decide to participate in post-secondary education, it is imperative for college faculty and administrators to understand the needs of students aged 25 and over (Chen, 2014). According to Kasworm (2010) many universities are youth-centric and gain their reputations based primarily on their support and overall success in meeting the needs of this specific student demographic. Unfortunately, solely focusing on the needs of the traditional student, generally leads to limited support efforts and resources that are geared primarily toward the adult learning community (Kasworm, 2010).

It is imperative that institutions understand the academic needs of adult learners enrolled at their college or university. Adult learners often experience negative feelings of academic isolation while participating in higher education (Chen, 2014). In many circumstances, the overall learning environment is designed to meet the academic needs of the traditional student; thus, causing most adult learners to feel as if they do not belong at their college or university (Reay, 2002). Knowles (1980) suggested that if the academic structure at any institution is based

primarily on the principles of pedagogy, the academic needs of adult learners may not match this educational model. As colleges and universities strived to attract and retain adult learners, it is important to understand that traditional approaches may not be well received by adult learners and may be ineffective in helping them learn (Knowles, 1980).

Adult learners are characterized as motivated students who manage multiple responsibilities while pursuing post-secondary education. For adult learners to properly manage the various obligations in their lives, they typically prefer to an institution that embraces flexible course schedules that also includes a diverse set of course format options. For instance, faculty and administration should create course schedules that encompasses daytime, evening, weekend and online offerings. This type of academic schedule allows more adult learners the opportunity to participate in postsecondary education, while meeting responsibilities associated with their work schedule and family obligations (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992; Cross, 1980). Institutions can also become more adult-centered by offering flexible learning opportunities which may include allowing students to complete their course requirements at their own pace (Hagedorn, 2005).

Faculty members are also encouraged to structure their curriculum with consideration to the individual needs of adult learners and their characteristics. Knowles (1980) asserted that adult learners prefer learning experiences that are carried out through facilitation, open dialogue, and self-directed learning opportunities. Rodriquez (2016) suggested that many adults equate education with ideas of a transitioned academic culture that has transformed from a teacher-centered environment, to a student-centered culture; focusing on the needs of the student. Faculty should strive to develop course objectives while keeping the adult learners needs in the forefront of all planning efforts and carry out class meeting with open two-way discussions and open dialogue. Allen (1993) asserted that adult learners appreciate learning experiences that are

practical in nature and can be applied to their individual lives; placing a higher value on course assignments and materials that closely relate to their personal and professional life. Knowles (1980) proposed four key assumptions which characterized the adult learner as one who (1) seeks to direct his own learning (2) has a significant amount of experiences that provide a sound resource for learning (3) has learning needs that closely relate to changing social roles and 4) interested in immediate application of knowledge.

Adult learners also appreciate the opportunity to connect their prior experiences with their academic programs at their institution (Benshoff, 1991). This expectation should motivate administrators to create evaluation policies that acknowledge prior academic coursework, but also includes a process for evaluating life experiences and learning that occurred outside of an academic setting. As universities extend their transfer credit evaluation process to include life experiences, satisfies the assumptions that adult learners have extensive life experience that serves as a sound resource for continued learning (Knowles, 1980). Conlan, Grabowski, and Smith (2003) suggested that adult learners enter the learning environment with an independent self-concept and the ability to direct their own learning. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998) hypothesized that adult learners seek opportunities to share previous life experiences in the academic environment.

Hagedorn (2005) suggested institutions can become more receptive to the academic needs of adult students by developing courses that encompass exactly what they want and need to learn. Institutions can also become more adult-centered by offering flexible learning opportunities throughout all disciplines. Per Clark (2006), to address academic needs of adult learners, institutions should incorporate evening courses each semester to allow those who may work or carry out family responsibilities during the day to attend class. Offering courses at

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variety times during the day allows adult students the opportunity to continue enrollment, while managing their daily lives. Institutions are also encouraged to provide extended office hours on campus; allowing the nontraditional student the opportunity to access student resources and experience adequate support services (Clark, 2006).

Adult learners may experience feelings of isolation while enrolled in their institution. These feelings of not belonging could negatively impact the nontraditional students' persistence in higher education. Faculty and administration should create academic and social spaces that connect faculty and students across campus. Learning environments should provide a direct link to other social communities external to the classroom environment (Tinto, 2000). It is argued that if students, specifically those who are nonresidential, fail to engage in the classroom, they are less likely to become involved in other social communities within the college (Tinto, 2000). The higher a student's level of social and academic integration into their institution, the stronger commitment he has with the institution and to the goal of graduating from his academic program (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983).

Institutions should be mindful of external factors that often serve as barriers to adult participation. Willging and Johnson (2004) argued that external factors related to family obligations and lack of environmental support impact the nontraditional adult students' decision to either remain enrolled or drop-out of their coursework. By offering nontraditional resources, such as childcare services on campus, will allow adult learners to persist in the academic programs, while effectively maintaining their responsibilities as parents. Participants in this study indicated that if childcare services were available on campus, they would be able to spend more time in the campus environment.

The findings presented from this research study serves to assist colleges and universities in better understanding and addressing academic, social and environmental needs of adult learners attending a four-year institution. College and university faculty and administrators may find this information in creating a learning environment that meets the academic, social and environmental needs of nontraditional adult learners enrolled in their institution. Findings from this study can also assist colleges and universities in planning programs and establishing resources that focus on the needs of the adult learner population.

Areas for Further Research

The researcher recommends that this research study be replicated at a four-year university not located within the Southeastern region of the United States. Replicating this study at a traditional four-year institution located in a different geographical region of the United States may yield different results than those found in this study. It is also recommended this study be replicated by including university administrators as an independent variable, along with faculty and students.

This study included participants from the same university. It is recommended that future studies include participants from more than one four-year institution. The researcher suggests further studies focus on academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners; however, participants should be recruited from a minimum of two institutions located in different geographical regions of the United States.

This study included a convenience sample of 136 adult learners and 74 members from the same four-year institution. The researcher recommends future studies include a larger number of faculty and student participants. A larger number of participants may alter the results of future studies.

The researcher also recommends that future research studies include additional open ended questions; allowing participants to include more individual comments regarding academic, social, and environmental needs. Additional qualitative methods should also be considered in examining responses from adult learner and faculty participants. Further exploration into the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners should also include interviewing adult learners and faculty members. Conducting interviews will allow further examination into whether relationships exists between adult learner and faculty perception of adult learner academic, social, and environmental needs in a four-year university setting.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, in order to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. Observing these specific needs, through the perceptions of both adult learners and faculty, is essential to providing better support services, and an overall more conductive learning experience for nontraditional students. This study explored the relationships between the perceptions of part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members at four-year universities.

This study is significant because it determined whether a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting. This study is also significant because it confirmed if a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting. In addition, the study is significant because it established whether a relationship existed in part-time and full-time adult learners' stated

environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting. Currently, there is a lack of investigation into the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners attending four-year institutions.

The information obtained from this study can assist universities in better understanding the needs of adult learners. University faculty and administrators will find this information useful in developing appropriate learning environments for adult learners at their respective institutions. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding the perceived needs of adult learners on university campuses, as perceived by, adult learners and faculty at four-year institutions. The study examined the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting?

2. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting?

3. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perception of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting?

This study had three primary objectives: (1) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the four-year university setting; (2) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated social needs and part-time and full-time faculty

perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the four-year university setting; (3) to identify the relationship of part-time and full-time adult learners' stated environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the four-year university setting.

This study included a convenience sample of 136 adult learners that were 19 years old and over enrolled in an undergraduate degree program and 74 faculty members. The participant sample was selected from Troy University's Phenix City campus, located in Phenix City, Alabama. The sample consisted of two groups: adult learners and faculty members. From these two groups, sub-groups existed. The adult learner participants consisted of 119 full-time and 17 part-time adult learners. The faculty participants consisted of 39 full-time and 35 part-time faculty members at the Troy University Phenix City campus. The survey instrument used in this study was the *Adult Learner Needs Survey*, based primarily on Countryman's (2006) *Adult Learner Needs Survey*. This instrument served to assess academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners in the collegiate setting. Three 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA tests, along with qualitative themes, were utilized to determine the relationships between adult learners and faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic, social, and environmental needs. The SPSS statistical analysis program was used to analyze participant data gathered through this research study.

The quantitative findings of the study indicated a statistically significant interaction occurred between part-time and full-time status in relation to academic needs. The results also indicated a statistically significant interaction occurred between part-time and full-time status regarding adult learner environmental needs   No other relationships were found through the analyses of participant data. Qualitative explanations indicated significant relationships existed

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between adult learners' and faculty perceptions regarding adult learners' academic and

environmental needs.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION LETTERS

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

*(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH
CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)*

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled

*"Adult learners in higher education: An examination of academic, social, and environmental
needs as perceived by adult learners and faculty at a four-year institution."*

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine academic, social and
environmental needs as perceived by adult learners and faculty at a four-year institution. This
study is being conducted by Reginald Roberson, staff member at Troy University, and doctoral
student, under the direction of Dr. Maria Witte, Professor, in the Auburn University Department
of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology. You are invited to participate because
you are a student at Troy University and are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary. If you
decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a brief survey. Your
total time commitment will be approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are
minimal. To minimize these risks, we will maintain confidentiality of all responses. There is no
identifying information connecting the data to you. Any data collected from this study will
remain anonymous.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect to
be asked questions about adult learners' academic, social, and environmental needs at a four-
year institution. I hope the results of this study yield greater understanding of adult learners'
needs within four-year institutions, and enhance the manner in which four-year institutions
address the needs of its adult learner population. However, I cannot promise you that you will
receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? There is no compensation offered for
your ten to fifteen minutes of time.

4036 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 3684-5221; Telephone: 334-844-4460: Fax: 334-844-3072

www.auburn.edu

Are there any costs? There are no costs with the exception of your ten to fifteen minutes of time.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology or Troy University.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by using a number identifier. Information collected through your participation will be used in a dissertation for partial fulfillment of a doctoral degree in Adult Education

If you have questions about this study, please contact the doctoral student, Reginald Roberson at roberre@auburn.edu or the chair of the doctoral committee, Dr. Maria Witte at mmwitte@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu. You may also contact Troy University Institutional Review Board by phone at (334)-808-6294 or email at IRB@troy.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

_____   _____
Investigator's signature   **Date**

Reginald K. Roberson
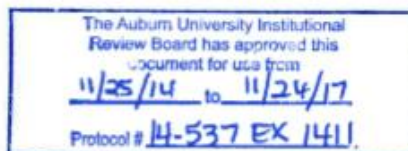_____
Print Name

_____   _____
Co- Investigator's signature   **Date**

Dr. Maria Witte
_____
Print Name

The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from
11/25/14 to 11/24/17
Protocol # 14-537 EX 1411

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AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled

"Adult learners in higher education: An examination of academic, social, and environmental needs as perceived by adult learners and faculty at a four-year institution."

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine academic, social and environmental needs as perceived by adult learners and faculty at a four-year institution. This study is being conducted by Reginald Roberson, staff member at Troy University, and doctoral student, under the direction of Dr. Maria Witte, Professor, in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology. You are invited to participate because you are a faculty member at Troy University and are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a brief survey. Your total time commitment will be approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. To minimize these risks, we will maintain confidentiality of all responses. There is no identifying information connecting the data to you. Any data collected from this study will remain anonymous.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect to be asked questions about adult learners' academic, social, and environmental needs at a four-year institution. I hope the results of this study yield greater understanding of adult learners' needs within four-year institutions, and enhance the manner in which four-year institutions address the needs of its adult learner population. However, I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? There is no compensation offered for your ten to fifteen minutes of time.

4036 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 3684-5221; Telephone: 334-844-4460: Fax: 334-844-3072

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Are there any costs? There are no costs with the exception of your ten to fifteen minutes of time.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology or Troy University.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by using a number identifier. Information collected through your participation will be used in a dissertation for partial fulfillment of a doctoral degree in Adult Education

If you have questions about this study, please contact the doctoral student, Reginald Roberson at roberre@auburn.edu or the chair of the doctoral committee, Dr. Maria Witte at mmwitte@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu. You may also contact Troy University Institutional Review Board by phone at (334)-808-6294 or email at IRB@troy.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

_____   _____
Investigator's signature   **Date**

Reginald K. Roberson
_____
Print Name

_____   _____
Co- Investigator's signature   **Date**

Dr. Maria Witte
_____
Print Name

APPENDIX B

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR EXEMPT CATEGORY RESEARCH

For Information or help completing this form, contact: **THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE**, 115 Ramsay Hall
Phone: 334-844-5966   e-mail: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu **Web Address:** http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm

Revised 2/1/2014 **Submit completed form to** IRBsubmit@auburn.edu **or 115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University 36849.**

Form must be populated using Adobe Acrobat / Pro 9 or greater standalone program (do not fill out in browser). Hand written forms will not be accepted

Project activities may not begin until you have received approval from the Auburn University IRB.

1. **PROJECT PERSONNEL & TRAINING**

    PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI):

    Name **Reginald K. Roberson**   Title **Doctoral Student**   Dept./School **Education - EFLT**

    Address **2001 Lee Road 249, Smiths, AL 36877**   AU Email **roberre@auburn.edu**

    Phone **706-332-1476**   Dept. Head **Dr. Sherida Downer**

    FACULTY ADVISOR (if applicable):

    Name **Dr. Maria Witte**   Title **Professor**   Dept./School **Education - EFLT**

    Address **4036 Haley Center, Auburn University, Alabama 36849**

    Phone **334-844-3078**   AU Email **wittemm@auburn.edu**

    KEY PERSONNEL: List Key Personnel (other than PI and FA). Additional personnel may be listed in an attachment.

Name	Title	Institution	Responsibilities
			The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 11/25/14 to 11/24/17 Protocol # 14-537 EX 1411

    KEY PERSONNEL TRAINING: Have all Key Personnel completed CITI Human Research Training (including elective modules related to this research) within the last 3 years?   ☑ YES   ☐ NO
    TRAINING CERTIFICATES: Please attach CITI completion certificates for all Key Personnel.

2. **PROJECT INFORMATION**

    Title: Adult learners in higher education: An examination of academic, social and environmental needs as perceived by adult learners and faculty at a four-year institution.

    Source of Funding: ☑ Investigator   ☐ Internal   ☐ External

    List External Agency & Grant Number: _____

    List any contractors, sub-contractors, or other entities associate with this project.

    _____

    List any other IRBs associated with this project (including those involved with reviewing, deferring, or determinations).

    _____

FOR ORC OFFICE USE ONLY			
DATE RECEIVED IN ORC: 11/20/14 by BK		APPROVAL # 14-537	
DATE OF IRB REVIEW: _____ by _____		APPROVAL CATEGORY: _____	
DATE OF ORC REVIEW: _____ by _____		INTERVAL FOR CONTINUING REVIEW: _____	
DATE OF APPROVAL: _____ by _____			
COMMENTS:			

1 of 3

3. **PROJECT SUMMARY**
   a. Does the research involve any special populations?

☐ YES	☑ NO		Minors (under age 19)
☐ YES	☑ NO		Pregnant women, fetuses, or any products of conception
☐ YES	☑ NO		Prisoners or Wards
☐ YES	☑ NO		Individuals with compromised autonomy and/or decisional capacity

   b. Does the research pose more than minimal risk to participants?   ☐ YES   ☑ NO
   Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. 42 CFR 46.102(i)

   c. Does the study involve any of the following?

☐ YES	☑ NO	Procedures subject to FDA Regulation Ex. Drugs, biological products, medical devices, etc.
☐ YES	☑ NO	Use of school records of identifiable students or information from instructors about specific students
☐ YES	☑ NO	Protected health or medical information when there is a direct or indirect link that could identify the participant
☐ YES	☑ NO	Collection of sensitive aspects of the participant's own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior or use of alcohol
☐ YES	☑ NO	Deception of participants

   If you checked "YES" to any response in Question #3 STOP. It is likely that your study does not meet the "EXEMPT" requirements. Please complete a PROTOCOL FORM for Expedited or Full Board Review. You may contact IRB Administration for more information. (Phone: 334-844-5966 or Email: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu)

4. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**
   a. Subject Population (Describe, include age, special population characteristics, etc.)

   The convenience sample for this study will consist of part-time and full-time adult learners, and part-time and full-time faculty members at a four-year institution in Southeastern United States. This study will only include adult learners and faculty age 19 years or older, enrolled or employed, at Troy University. There is minimal risks associated with participation in this study. To minimize these risks, confidentiality will be maintained for all responses and any data obtained through this study will remain anonymous.

   b. Describe, step by step, all procedures and methods that will be used to consent participants.
      ☐ N/A (Existing data will be used)

   The principal investigator will provide information letters to departmental chairs at Troy University. Each departmental chair will distribute and collect information letters for faculty within their departments. The principal investigator will collect faculty surveys from each departmental chair. The principal researcher will also provide information letters to each faculty member for distribution and collection for students enrolled in their courses. The principal investigator will collect student surveys from each faculty member.

c. **Brief summary of project.** (Include the research question(s) and a brief description of the methodology, including recruitment and how data will be collected and protected.)

The purpose of this study is to examine the academic, social and environmental needs of adult learners in an effort to enhance the manner in which four-year institutions address the needs of this student group. This study will explore whether relationships exist between the perceptions of part-time and full-time adult learners and part-time and full-time faculty members at a four-year institution.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' academic needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' academic needs in the university setting?
2. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' social needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' social needs in the university setting?
3. What is the relationship between part-time and full-time adult learners' environmental needs and part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of adult learners' environmental needs in the university setting?

Methodology

This study is non-experimental and a cross-sectional survey methodology will be used for data collection. A survey questionnaire will be administered to all participants in accessing academic, social and environmental needs of adult learners at four-year institutions. Confidentiality will be maintained for all responses. Data collected will remain anonymous, information will be recorded in a way that participants cannot be identified. The principal investigator will oversee data collection and protection throughout this study.

d. **Waivers.** Check any waivers that apply and describe how the project meets the criteria for the waiver.

- ☐ Waiver of Consent (Including existing de-identified data)
- ☑ Waiver of Documentation of Consent (Use of Information Letter)
- ☑ Waiver of Parental Permission (for college students)

I am seeking a waiver of documentation of consent in order to utilize an information letter.

I am seeking a waiver of parental permission for all participants in this study are 19 years of age or older.

e. **Attachments.** Please attach Informed Consents, Information Letters, data collection instrument(s), advertisements/recruiting materials, or permission letters/site authorizations as appropriate.

Signature of Investigator _Reginald K. Roberson_   Date _11/17/2014_

Signature of Faculty Advisor _Maria M. Witte_   Date _11/17/2014_

Signature of Department Head _Sherida Downer_   Date _11/20/2014_

APPENDIX C

TROY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Institutional Review
Board

Adams Administration
LL Rm 11 A
Troy, AL 36082

334-808-6294 Office
334-670-3912 Fax

http://www.troy.edu/insti
tutionalreview

March 10, 2015

Reginald K. Roberson
Doctoral Student

Recruitment and Enrollment
Troy University: Phenix City

Dear Mr. Roberson,

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your project Adult learners in higher education: An examination of academic, social, and environmental needs as perceived by adult learners and faculty at a four-year institution and has determined it falls into the exempt category, meaning your research does not require IRB approval. However, if there are changes with your protocol placing participants at risk, you are responsible for immediately informing the IRB of these changes.

Please let me know if you have questions or if I can be of additional assistance.

Sincerely,

Xiaoli Su

Xiaoli Su, Ph.D., Chair

APPENDIX D

FACULTY INSTRUCTIONAL LETTER

Dear Selected Faculty:

This envelope contains:

_____   Letter of Information to students

_____   Script for Faculty Administrator

_____   Surveys

Please distribute the Information Letters to all students. Students are to keep the Information Letter.

Read the Script to the class.

Distribute the Surveys to the class. Ask students to return survey to the faculty administrator once completed.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the doctoral student, Reginald Roberson at roberre@auburn.edu or the chair of the doctoral committee, Dr. Maria Witte at mmwitte@auburn.edu.

Sincerely,

Reginald K. Roberson
Doctoral Student-Auburn University

APPENDIX E

SCRIPTS

Script for Recruiting Students

Listed below are the procedures to follow when recruiting students.

1. Ask all students in the selected class if they would be willing to participate in a study regarding adult learner needs.

2. Say "The purpose of this study is to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. The study will compare the perceptions about adult learners' academic, social and environmental needs to faculty perceptions regarding the needs of adult learners in the four-year university setting. Specific comparisons will be made between the perceptions of full-time and part-time adult learners and full-time and part-time faculty. In addition, this study will determine if there is a relationship between the stated academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners and their needs as perceived by selected faculty members at one four-year public university in Alabama."

3. Say "You will be asked to complete the *Adult Learner Needs Survey* based on your perceptions of adult learner needs in the university environment. Your responses will be anonymous and reflect your personal knowledge and understanding of the adult learner. After the research is completed, all findings will be reported to your institution.

Script for distributing Information Letter and Adult Learner Needs Survey to Students

<u>Faculty</u>

Listed below are the procedures to follow when distributing the information letters and *Adult Learner Needs Survey* to students enrolled in your course, and willing to participate in this study.

Procedures for Distribution of Information Letters

1. Distribute the information letter to each student in the class and give them time to read over the letter.

2. Say: "You have been asked to participate in a survey. Keep in mind that this survey is anonymous and your participation is confidential. That means your answers will not be traced back to you. However, you must be completely honest. Your answers will affect the results of the study. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary."

Procedures for Distribution of *Adult Learner Needs Survey*

1. Distribute the survey to each student in the class.

2. Say: "Please answer all questions based on your perceptions regarding each statement. When you have completed the survey, you will return it to your instructor by placing your survey in the envelope.

Script for Recruiting Faculty Members

Listed below are the procedures to follow when recruiting faculty members.

1. Ask all full time and part time faculty members if they would be willing to participate in a study regarding adult learner needs.

2. Say "The purpose of this study is to examine the academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners, as perceived by adult learners and faculty, to enhance the way four-year universities address the needs of this student population. The study will compare the perceptions about adult learners' academic, social and environmental needs to faculty perceptions regarding the needs of adult learners in the four-year university setting. Specific comparisons will be made between the perceptions of full-time and part-time adult learners and full-time and part-time faculty. In addition, this study will determine if there is a relationship between the stated academic, social, and environmental needs of adult learners and their needs as perceived by selected faculty members at one four-year public university in Alabama."

3. Say "You will be asked to complete the *Adult Learner Needs Survey* based on your perceptions of adult learner needs in the university environment. Your responses will be anonymous and reflect your personal knowledge and understanding of the adult learner. After the research is completed, all findings will be reported to your institution.

Script for distributing Information Letter and Adult Learner Needs Survey to Faculty

<u>Dean of Instruction</u>

Listed below are the procedures to follow when distributing the information letters and *Adult Learner Needs Survey* to faculty willing to participate in this study.

Procedures for Distribution of Information Letters

1. Pass out the information letter to each full-time and part-time faculty member at your institution.

2. Say: "You have been asked to participate in a survey. Keep in mind that this survey is anonymous. That means that no one will be able to trace your answers back to you. However, you must be completely honest. Your answers will affect the results of the study."

Procedures for Distribution of *Adult Learner Needs Survey*

1. Distribute the survey to each full-time and part-time faculty member at your institution.

2. Say: "You are asked to complete the survey as if you are an adult learner. Use your perceptions of how you believe an adult learner would respond to each question. When you have completed the survey, please return it in the provided sealed envelope to the dean of instruction's office.

APPENDIX F

INSTRUMENT

Adult Learner Needs Survey

This is a study to compare adult learner needs, as perceived by adult learners, to faculty perception of adult learner needs within a university setting. By participating in this study, you will assist area universities in identifying better efforts to support you as an adult learner and faculty member. Adult learners at your university will be given a survey dealing with their academic, social, and environmental needs. You are asked to complete this survey on adult learner needs.

General Directions: This survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Try to rate yourself according to how important the statements are to you as an adult learner (Very Important, Important, Somewhat Important, and Not Important). Keep in mind that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. All responses are strictly confidential.

PART I: ACADEMIC/LEARNING NEEDS

#	Statement	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
1	Learning at my own pace	○	○	○	○
2	Creating confidence about learning	○	○	○	○
3	Resources on campus are readily accessible at different times of the day	○	○	○	○
4	Availability of on-line resources (admissions, business, etc.)	○	○	○	○
5	Able to adjust to classes with traditional age students	○	○	○	○
6	Class availability/course offerings	○	○	○	○
7	Faculty capable of meeting my learning style	○	○	○	○
8	Faculty enthusiasm for teaching	○	○	○	○
9	Faculty concern for student progress	○	○	○	○
10	Faculty availability during office hours for extra help	○	○	○	○
11	Faculty willingness to listen to student questions/opinions	○	○	○	○
12	Academic advisor concern for you as an individual	○	○	○	○
13	College offerings of developmental education	○	○	○	○
14	Accessibility to remediation/tutorial labs	○	○	○	○
15	Courses staffed by full-time rather than part-time faculty	○	○	○	○
16	On-line course offerings	○	○	○	○
17	Weekend course offerings	○	○	○	○
18	Completing your college degree	○	○	○	○

PART II: SOCIAL NEEDS

#	Statement	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
1	Involvement in social clubs/organizations	○	○	○	○
2	Attending campus performances/activities/engagements	○	○	○	○
3	Involvement in honor clubs	○	○	○	○

#	Statement	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
4	Involvement in recreational activities (intramural sports)	O	O	O	O
5	Social activities on campus	O	O	O	O
6	Peer interactions	O	O	O	O
7	Making new friends	O	O	O	O
8	Participating in community work	O	O	O	O
9	Availability of job placement programs	O	O	O	O
10	Counseling services readily available	O	O	O	O
11	Opportunities to meet and interact socially with faculty members	O	O	O	O
12	Creating personal relationships with faculty members	O	O	O	O
13	Faculty interested in assisting students grow in more than just academic areas	O	O	O	O

PART III: ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS

#	Statement	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
1	Parking easily accessible	O	O	O	O
2	Accommodations	O	O	O	O
3	Elevator accessibility	O	O	O	O
4	Student health services	O	O	O	O
5	Daycare / Childcare services	O	O	O	O
6	Certainty of financial aid availability	O	O	O	O
7	Classroom environment conducive to learning	O	O	O	O
8	Tables in classrooms instead of desk	O	O	O	O
9	Campus security availability	O	O	O	O
10	Campus safety issues (lighting, security, etc.)	O	O	O	O
11	Encouragement/support from family and friends	O	O	O	O
12	Gaining future employment opportunities	O	O	O	O

PART IV: ADDITIONAL NEEDS/SERVICES (For additional space, use back of survey.)

1. In what way(s) can this university improve services for adult learners?

_____
_____
_____
_____

2. What specific services would be most useful to you as an adult learner?

_____
_____
_____
_____

PART V: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Age: _____

2. Sex (Male / Female)

3. Student status (Full-time / Part-time)

4. Faculty status (Full-time / Part-time)

5. Type of degree program you are pursuing

Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Educational Specialists	Other
○	○	○	○	○

Thank you for completing this survey. If you would have any questions or concerns, please contact Reginald K. Roberson by e-mail at roberre@auburn.edu or by phone at 706-660-2331.