

POSTSECONDARY EXPERIENCES OF CAREER ACADEMY STUDENTS: A
NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

A Dissertation by

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Chris, and my children, Jenna and Jared,
for their support during this journey.

“Doing the difficult things that you’ve never done awakens the talents you never knew you had.”— Robin S. Sharma

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ABSTRACT

Using the framework of Schlossberg's Theory of Transition, this research is designed to investigate the lived experiences of university students who graduated from a high school career academy model. Junior and senior university students were interviewed using a narrative inquiry methodology to learn if the career academy impacted them as they moved in, moved through, and moved out of their university experience. Much of the research centered around career academy students at the university level has been quantitative in nature. This research study used a qualitative approach to understand the transitional experiences of the student and to make implications to the university regarding programming to support a student who transitioned from a career academy model as well as to help the high school reflect on best practices to prepare students for the moving in transitional stage.

The four participants contributed to the findings through their reflections of their lived experiences on the college campus. Each student provided data through interview meetings. Their unique experiences provided insight on transitional stages. The conclusions and implications shared from this data can assist those who are interested in transitional stages experienced by a career academy student as they progress through higher education.

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CHAPTER 1

Since the 1950's, the progression of education in the United States has commonly involved movement through a series of levels of attainment, with entry into postsecondary training, college, or university as an ideal goal (Jacob & Wilder, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Reasons for this movement include protection from economic difficulties, success in the labor market, and increased employability (Parker et al., 2016). The success of students after leaving school has always been regarded as a cumulative product of the learning attained through their schooling, and over the years, schools have been consistently criticized for falling short in ensuring students have all the knowledge and skills necessary to become productive and successful citizens (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Employers of students entering the workforce directly from high school have expressed need for their new hires to have specific skills and dispositions and colleges and universities have expressed need for their incoming freshmen students to have better attainment in reading and math skills (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006; Olson, 2007; Stewart et al., 2016). In response to ongoing criticism leveled at the quality of education at all levels by the public and private sectors and by the government, schools across the United States continue to look to ways to improve teaching and learning. Initiatives continue to be designed and implemented to create an educational environment that will accomplish all the goals expected by stakeholders of education. One such initiative to prepare students for their next phase has been an increased emphasis on vocational education.

Research Problem

With high drop-out rates and a national emphasis on vocational education, the career academy model was designed in Philadelphia in 1969 (Stern et al., 2010). This model was in direct response to the district's student drop-out rates and vocational preparation in the local

economy. Created by the Philadelphia Electric Company and Charles Bowser, the city's deputy mayor, the two brought an idea to the school board to offer students classes that could lead to jobs repairing electric meters. The idea was implemented at Thomas Edison High School, the district school with the highest drop-out rate, and then spread throughout the city to 16 schools by 1991 (Blondeau, 2001). In addition to drop-out prevention the first academy focused on "increasing preparation for work among students who began high school at high risk of school failure" (Kemple & Snipes, 2000, p. 13). The first academies followed a vocational education curriculum with the exception of the health careers academy which was the first to integrate college preparatory courses into the curriculum (Stern, 1992). For more than a decade this model was simply called the "Philadelphia academy model" until the phrase "career academy" was invented by David Stern, Marilyn Raby and Charles Dayton (1992) to describe the educational model that originated in Edison High School. One of the implications of this shift was that academies became conduits to higher education rather than an alternative for students not planning to pursue postsecondary academics.

Shifting to Career Academies

From the increased emphasis on vocational education and to combat the criticisms of the educational system, the career academy continued to evolve to meet the transitional stages that students encounter as they move through school settings and into the next stages of life (Maxwell, 2001). This evolution produced a model that contained the primary components of a quality career academy model which features small learning communities, college-prep curriculum with a career theme, partnerships with employers, community and higher education that prepare students for both college and careers that includes a work-based professional learning experience (Dayton et al., 2011; National Career Academy Coalition, 2019). As of

2019, there were “an estimated 7,000 career academies in operation, enrolling about one million students” (National Career Academy Coalition, 2019). The modern career academy model features a small learning community housed within the larger school, academic instruction taught through the lens of a career theme, and partnerships with local employers, community, and post-secondary institutions (Brand et al., 2009; Stern et al., 2010). A cohort of students begin in either the 9th or 10th grade taking three or four academic courses coupled with a career and technical education (CTE) class. Districts can elect to implement wall-to-wall academies where the entire school is organized around multiple career academies with every student participating in an academy. Or they can create a pocket academy, which is one academy housed within the traditional school setting. Students choose to join the pocket academy if they have that career interest.

Research conducted on the results of career academy participation on high school student achievement indicated former career academy students were more likely than their counterparts to do postsecondary education preparation (Maxwell & Rubin, 2001; Orr et al., 2003; Stern et al., 2010). One challenge ahead for high schools may be to determine what foundational career academy elements best support postsecondary preparation and decisions such as degree selection, campus involvement, and academic success to foster a university experience that promotes degree completion (Kemple, 2012). A challenge for colleges and universities may be to find ways to build on their student’s high school career academy experiences to enhance post-high school recruitment, retention, and graduation. With the numbers of career academy graduates moving through postsecondary institutions it is important to investigate the graduates’ perspective of their career academy experience and explore the extent to which a high school

career academy experience influences decisions over time regarding selection of major and career preparation in a post-high school setting (Maxwell, 2001).

Career academies were created in a response to calls for school reform (Castellano et al., 2003; Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Reform efforts continue to the present time with many schools focusing on integration of career and technical education and core academics with a developed post-high school path for graduates. Research studies of career academy graduates have primarily been quantitative, and designed to generate numerical data regarding college acceptance rates, needs for academic remediation at the university level, and measuring and comparing university graduation rates between career academy and non-career academy student populations (Maxwell, 2001; Orr et al., 2007; Stern et al., 2010; Stern et al., 2007). This information is then used by higher education to impact programming. For example, Hoyt (1999) found that student persistence and retention improved when students had experience with career-decision making. Students were more likely to persist when universities fostered a connection between the student's declared major and the programming experiences offered to them. These programs included student needs inventories, freshmen first-year seminars, gateway courses to prepare students for challenging coursework, and study skills programs (Hoyt, 1999). There is little qualitative research describing the lived experience of the career academy student as they transition through the university. Understanding the meaning career academy graduates ascribe to their participation in the academy as pertaining to the transitions of moving in, moving through, and moving out of college as identified in Schlossberg's Theory of Transition will provide insight for institutions of higher education in providing authentic support and programming for career academy graduates.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory will provide the theoretical framework for this research, exploring how a career academy influences the university student over time. As students transition from high school into a college setting there are many factors that could impact their college persistence. This transition can be difficult for some and these "vicissitudes," as Schlossberg (2008) describes them, can disrupt a student's life, and create changes in how they embrace their existence in the world. For example, one student might be excited to move to a new location and start college, while another student might find it terrifying to move away from home and embark on a new journey (Barclay, 2017).

Schlossberg's early writing provides a foundation for understanding the individual's process as they experience transition. Schlossberg (1981) described her work as a "model for analyzing human adaptation to transition" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5) and provided a 3-part framework for how that adaptation is affected by the individual's perception of the transition, characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environment, and the characteristics of the individual. These three factors produce the consequence of either adjusting to the situation or failing to adapt (Schlossberg, 1981). Transition, defined as both obvious and subtle life changes, is impacted by the stage of life a student is in and the assumptions they have about their environment and themselves. Transitions can also be defined as positive, negative, and neutral depending on the individual and his/her ability to deal with the transition (Evans et al., 2010).

This framework helps to set the stage for the discussion of university retention impact of a career academy model. As students from a high school career academy transition into college, considering the student's evolution through the lens of Schlossberg's theory can provide an even stronger basis for understanding how students adapt to the college setting and persist to

completion. In 1989 Schlossberg released modifications to her theory which included three components to the transition process: approaching change, taking stock, and taking charge (Schlossberg, 1989). Within the “taking stock” section, Schlossberg introduced the 4 S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies as a way for an individual to cope with transition. A brief definition of each step is as follows:

Situation: The situation at the time of the transition

Support: The people and assets that strengthen and encourage the student

Self: Who the student is, his or her optimism level, and dealing with ambiguity

Strategies: Ways and functions of coping (Schlossberg, 2011)

In relation to the career academy model this 4 S framework could function in the following manner for the purposes of this research:

Situation: The situation encompasses two transition periods. The first is the student’s initial transition to college where they leave the instructional approach and environment of a career academy model and move into a college setting. The second transition is when the student moves through their college experience, have arrived in their third or fourth year of college, and are beginning the third transition out to the workforce.

Support: Support comes from the environment and teachers, counselors, and other school personnel with whom the student worked in the career academy model. They would support the student in their postsecondary planning and transition into college. Support in the second transition would include collegiate contacts such as an advisor, professors, campus services and peers.

Self: Deals with the individual student and the career choices they have made. These career choices could have been impacted by the partnerships in the career academy, the career-themed

academic instruction or influence of academy stakeholders. In the context of this study, it deals with the confidence of the student to make course selections and degree decisions.

Strategies: A career academy environment will often provide more individual conversations between student and teacher to support students in their high school journey as the model is intended to be centered on a small learning community. Strategies during the career academy could include help with financial aid, organizational skills, and study habits to help students find ways of coping with college life.

Transition Stages

An important feature of building efficacy allowing them to take charge of their transitions involves the student's process of "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" (Schlossberg, 2007). Moving in, as it related to this study, requires an understanding of what a quality career academy model is and how participation in the model aided or detracted from the transition to higher education. It involved comparing what a student experienced in the high school setting to what was experienced in the first year of higher education. This understanding set the foundation for investigating how a student might "move through" the university experience and then "move out" into their chosen career field through the process of completing a "smooth, solid transition to the next part of... life" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Each phase of the transition allowed for a way to view and navigate the transition (Schlossberg, 2007). In her work to study people in each of these transitional stages, Schlossberg often included an interview setting to listen to participant experiences, identify patterns, and understand their story (Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg & Goodman, 2005). Grounding this study in Schlossberg's work and drawing interview data through a narrative inquiry lens will add depth and rich detail to the existing knowledge base.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of former career academy students regarding if, or how, their participation in a high school career academy influenced their university experiences as they progress through their higher education institution. The study recorded experiences from individual academy graduates in their junior or senior year of college as they looked back at their academy foundational teaching in high school and applied it to their current university experience. The significance of the study is that it may provide secondary schools with information from career academy graduates about how the program informed their post-high school decisions. The study suggests ways that colleges and universities can capitalize on the career academy elements as they seek to recruit and retain students in their first two years of higher education. Through investigating areas of interest to higher education institutions including retention, degree selection, campus involvement and on-track graduation progress, the research will add to the literature on the impact of a career academy model.

Research Questions

These questions guided the study:

1. How do participants describe the influence of their participation in a high school career academy relating to their transition decisions regarding major selection and career preparation in the university setting?
2. Based on their career academy experience, how do participants describe ways the university influenced their transitions of moving in, moving through, and moving out?

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

A primary purpose of this literature review is to provide a foundational understanding of the career academy model to help understand the environment the university student participants in this research have transitioned from, as well as their current experiences. The foundation laid by high schools is an integral step in supporting university students as they move from the secondary institution through their university program and out into the workforce. The research provides an understanding of the career academy model and the components necessary for a quality academy. These components of the quality academy learning environment are a small learning community, career-themed instruction and business and college connections with a work-based learning experience. It also outlines quantitative postsecondary results of career academy students and student success moving into college.

The literature review also provides further discussion of research exploring the transition stages college students encounter in the university experience. Topics in this section relate to transitions moving from high school to higher education, moving through the college experience, and moving beyond into career and workforce settings.

Career Academies Spread Nationally

As the career academy model evolved, it spread to California, New York and eventually to other states nationwide. In 1981 California started two academies near Silicon Valley – a “Computer Academy” at Menlo-Atherton High School and an “Electronics Academy” at Sequoia High School (Stern et al., 2010). These academies were evaluated by Reller (1987) where she described findings of improved student performance.

In addition to the growth in California, New York was also creating career academies. During the 1980s the first New York academy was named an Academy of Finance and was sponsored by the American Express Company (Blondeau, 2001). Additional companies joined American Express and formed the National Academy Foundation (NAF) which supported college preparation from its beginning. NAF added career academies in travel and tourism in 1987, public service in 1990 and information technology in 1999. As of 2004, NAF supported about 400 academies in 30 states. NAF in 2019 had additional academies in the areas of engineering and health science and boasted over 100,000 students in 617 academies in 35 states (National Academy Foundation, 2019).

While the initial career academy model in 1969 was focused primarily on improving student attendance coupled with a vocational-training skillset, the model has evolved to integrate academics with technical training. Vocational education was known as the non-college option, but by combining academic courses that meet college entrance requirements with technical classes the face of vocational education has evolved to a model that prepares students for both college and career. Since the inception of the Philadelphia academy the establishment of career education programs have been fueled by national legislative efforts and state-funded grants to support their expansion (Dayton et al., 2011).

Legislative Involvement in Reform Efforts

One school reform initiative receiving legislative attention that had similarities to the career academy model was Tech Prep (Dornsife & Bragg, 1992). Tech Prep was birthed by educators and policy makers when they considered what the appropriate role and function of job training and vocational education had as part of the nation's education system. The idea behind Tech Prep was to ensure technical skills along with academic competencies. These efforts set the

stage for more response to Tech Prep in the Education Amendments of 1972. This federal law required states to include comprehensive statewide planning that included articulation with postsecondary education in order to gain federal assistance.

In 1983, during this growing discussion of Tech Prep, the release of *A Nation at Risk*, a report by the National Commission on Excellent in Education, created additional momentum for educational change. The report was prompted by a perception that the U.S. educational system was failing to keep American students better educated than students in the rest of the world (Gardner et al., 1983). Findings were reported on five areas including rigor, standards, time, teaching, and leadership/fiscal support. The primary messages of the report emphasized the perception that the nation was at risk because “competitors throughout the world are overtaking our once unchallenged lead in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation;” and, “mediocrity, not excellence, is the norm in American education” (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983, p. 15). The report noted problems in education but did not provide practical solutions for fixing them. Other influencers proposed adding tech preparation into the educational setting to fix the problems not addressed by *A Nation at Risk*.

Advancement of Career Education

Reform strategies abounded based on the *A Nation at Risk* report; however, a notable missing element was a strategy focused on vocational education. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education produced *The Unfinished Agenda* in 1984 to oppose reforms based solely on academic competencies as suggested in *A Nation at Risk* (Dornsife & Bragg, 1992). The report called for curriculum changes that integrated vocational education including a balanced curriculum that includes both academic and vocational preparation for every high school student (Lotto, 1985).

Legislation continued to fuel the discussion and growth of career education when career academies were one of several school-to-work models specifically authorized in the School-to-Work Act of 1994. During this time a growing number of states began to invest in career academies. Organizations such as the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation helped evaluate how the academy should be implemented and sustained (Kemple & Rock, 1996).

Since the 1980's, the federal government has continued to focus attention on career and technical education for high school students. This focused attention can be found in the Carl D. Perkins Act of 1984 where the intent was to provide access to all students including special populations while addressing the needs of the economy (Threeton, 2007). The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 amended the Vocational Education Act of 1963 to allow funds to be spent on high school and postsecondary students, construction of area vocational schools, vocational guidance and more (Threeton, 2007). The most recent legislative authorization regarding career and technical education was in 2018 when President Trump signed the "Strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE) for the 21st Century Act" that reauthorized Perkins IV legislation and aligned CTE programs with in-demand career fields and encouraged closer ties to employers (Office of Career / Technical and Adult Education, 2018). This act reforms a segment of the educational system to focus on improving student employability skills, adding work-based learning, and encouraging students to earn industry credentials.

Evolution of Career Academies

With greater funding accountability requirements of federal dollars, CTE programs are measured on both career-related competencies and on academic achievement tests which opens the door to new conversations about how CTE and core academics must work together in

preparing students to be college and career ready. To foster this integration of CTE and core academics, several CTE models have emerged, including Tech Prep, School to Work, career academies, career magnets, High Schools that Work, and Talent Development High Schools (Castellano et al., 2003; Keltner, 1998). These models seek to support goals to “reduce dropouts, increase student achievement, develop work-related skills in high school, and to prepare all students for lifelong learning (Castellano et al., 2003, p. 243). The overarching goal for each of these emerging models was to prepare the nation’s youth for the future.

From these models, the career academy approach has continued to gain momentum and evolve from a Philadelphia-based drop-out prevention effort in 1969 to an accepted educational model in 2020 that is designed to prepare students with career and college aspirations. The new expanded definition of a career academy has strong ties to postsecondary education and high schools work to make connections for students to further their education seamlessly.

Influence of High School Preparation

High schools across the nation have implemented a variety of strategies to increase college preparedness and thus improve retention and graduation rates of university students (Edmunds et al., 2010; Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Swanson, 2008). Examples of these strategies include the development of new schools focused on small learning communities (SLC), growth of outreach programs, and the addition of dual credit courses and advanced placement opportunities. North Carolina districts implemented Early College High Schools located on university campuses that focused on a SLC approach with a goal to prepare students for postsecondary education (Edmunds et al., 2010). The SLC approach is supported by literature that shows school size is associated with a host of positive student outcomes (Cotton, 2001). Long-term outcomes from this strategy included increased university retention and graduation

rates. High school preparation efforts using this model focused on a rigorous course of study and a personalized learning environment fostered by the small learning community.

A second way high schools influence college retention and recruitment is through outreach programs such as Upward Bound, Career Beginnings, and Sponsor a Scholar. One Baltimore district reported improved college enrollment and retention in postsecondary education when they implemented their college bound outreach program (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Outreach program efforts coupled with frequent communication with the student and the family and regular mentoring showed significant improvement in high school grade point averages, first year college attendance and college retention (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). Studies from Upward Bound programs show that students in the program when compared with non-participants were 12% more likely to attend a four-year institution and earned approximately seven more credits in four-year colleges (Gullatt & Jan, 2003).

Another strategy used by high schools is articulation agreements that provide dual college credit enrollment and Advanced Placement (AP) opportunities. In these courses, students receive high school credit along with college credit that can be transferred to the university upon graduation. Studies have shown that students who obtained college credits through dual course enrollment were more likely to enter college immediately after high school and persist to the second year of postsecondary education (Swanson, 2008). In addition to pursuing immediate college enrollment post-high school, students from a study of Missouri-based schools who entered college with both AP and dual credit coursework had a 90% return rate moving from their freshman to sophomore year of college (Eimers & Mullen, 2003). Both studies indicate a positive correlation with the likelihood that students with dual credit and AP credit will return for

their second year of their postsecondary education thus emphasizing the importance of high school efforts to influence university retention and graduation rates.

Career academies are another high school preparation effort to support college retention, recruitment, and career understanding. For over 50 years the career academy instructional model has been in place in secondary education. The foundational elements of a career academy are small learning communities, college-preparatory curriculum with a career theme, and partnerships with employers and postsecondary education that includes a work-based experience (Stern, Dayton, and Raby, 2010). A typical academy model is a cohort of students who take three academic and one career and technical education (CTE) class together with instruction in all classes taught through the lens of a career theme (Stern et al., 2010). For example, if the CTE class were health-related, then the core academic classes would teach their content area by relating it to the health career field while teaching their core academic standards. Part of the promise of a career academy is to support students with career exploration to make postsecondary decisions.

Research of Postsecondary Results

Three areas are often studied when looking at the progress in higher education of a student who graduated from a career academy. A 2002 study investigated the potential for a career academy to increase postsecondary success by comparing “outcomes for students from career academy programs with those of students from academic and traditional vocational programs” (Maxwell & Rubin, 2002, p. 137). This research along with others focus on three primary outcomes for comparison including the number of students who choose college and are accepted, the amount of remedial coursework needed and university graduation rates (Elliott et

al., 2002; Maxwell & Rubin, 2001; Orr et al., 2007; Reller, 1987; Stern et al., 2010; Stern et al., 2007).

College Attendance

Results from research on career academies show that students from career academies are more likely to continue their education than students from general and vocational programs. Orr et al. (2007) noted in a study of graduates from 10 academies that by May of their senior year, 87% of academy seniors had applied to and planned to attend some postsecondary institution by graduation. Maxwell (2001) suggests that career academies foster an environment that encourages a wide range of students to apply for college entrance, especially those with a lower socio-economic status. The acceptance rate of career academy students was increased due to what Maxwell notes as an increased academic achievement rate. “The career academy’s positive influence on academic achievement in high school indirectly increases acceptance to this university” (Maxwell, 2001, p. 633). In a study by Reller (1987) career academy students were surveyed 15 months after graduation. She found 62 percent of academy graduates were enrolled in postsecondary education, compared with 47 percent of the comparison group of non-academy students.

Remedial Instruction

The role of remedial instruction for career academy freshman in higher education generally focuses on math and English proficiencies. In 2007 Orr studied graduates from 10 academies that were organized as National Academy Foundation (NAF) academies. NAF was established in 1989 and is one of the largest career academy networks in the country. NAF academies focus specifically on finance, travel and tourism and information technology. Instructors in NAF receive curricular support, professional development and technical assistance

(National Academy Foundation, 2019). Orr's study found that only four percent of academy students reported a need for remedial coursework. The national average for first-time college freshmen needing remedial coursework is 20% (Orr et al., 2007).

Maxwell's 2001 study focused on career academy graduates in California. The career academies in this study had all the elements of a quality career academy, as did the NAF study, with the only difference being that no career-theme was identified as in Orr's study. Maxwell's findings noted that academy graduates were less likely to need remedial coursework, particularly in English, at the university compared to other graduates from the same district and more likely to complete a bachelor's degree.

Graduation Rates

University graduation rates of career academy students were also researched. Maxwell (2001) noted that findings from her study showed a modest four percent increase in graduation rates than students who are not from academies. Kemple (2012) also noted little impact on graduation rates. In his 2012 study, Kemple noted that "career academies had no impact (positive or negative) on postsecondary education.... attainment rates" (p. 20). Only 50% of academy students had earned a postsecondary credential by the end of the study's follow-up period. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds showed the most positive impact of graduation from college (Maxwell, 2001). Overall, studies researching postsecondary outcomes show some areas of positive impact due to the career academy approach while others note minimal results.

This analysis suggests that career academies lower the need for remediation in English at the university and modestly increase the probability of graduating from the university by about four percentage points. However, despite this success,

students from this district face high rates of remediation before college-level coursework can begin and low rates of graduation, suggesting that the marginal impact of the academy program may not be strong enough to ensure postsecondary educational success (Maxwell, 2001, p. 620).

Studies suggest more research needs to be conducted to expand the areas studied and the influence of a career academy on university students.

Transitional Stages

To fully understand the impact of a career academy on the university student, it is important to understand the environment they are moving from in their high school setting. The literature review includes a focus on research regarding the outcomes of a career academy including teacher collaboration, academic performance, and postsecondary accomplishments. These outcomes are important to understanding the level of teacher support a career academy student had, and how that support impacted their academics and postsecondary success. As academy students move into the university setting, they bring with them a background formed by the components of their career academy. These components may influence transitional stages, especially the first, moving in.

Moving into the University Experience

To build an understanding of the experience of what the student transitioned from, it is important to recognize the foundational elements of a quality career academy. Goodman et al. (2006) noted that one component of understanding the meaning that a transition has for an individual is to understand the context in which the individual moved from. This section of the literature review will provide a description of those elements to frame the context of a career academy model thus setting the stage to understand the current and future transition of moving

through and moving out. The literature review will discuss the components of a career academy by looking specifically at the student learning environment, the importance of real-world instruction, and the impact of business and college partnerships.

Learning Environment Structure. The format of a career academy model varies by school in terms of academic classes included as well as the year the student begins. One study of a Talent Development High School with career academies showed that the school is organized with a freshman success academy and “career-themed academies for sophomores, juniors and seniors” (Castellano et al., 2003, p. 260). While some academy formats begin at the 10th grade, some schools have students choose their academy before entering 9th grade. Students move as a cohort group through their career-themed classes and select independent electives of their choice throughout their next three or four years. The structure of the career academy touches on many facets: small learning communities, teacher effectiveness, real-world experiences, academic outcomes, and postsecondary success. These will be examined in the next section.

Small Learning Community. This consistent grouping of students over three years creates what Lanford and Maruco (2017) call the “single greatest benefit to participation in a career academy” (p. 619). This benefit is the opportunity to “develop multiyear relationships with students” (Lanford & Maruco, 2017) which results in a family atmosphere within the academy. Teachers note that the connectiveness of this family allows them to set high standards, rely on established trust for motivation and support and better meet their students’ academic, technical, and career expectations. Teachers in the academy also support students by sharing information with the other academy teachers when a student is struggling or having some type of difficulty either academically or personally (Lanford & Maruco, 2017).

Not only do teachers rely on the sense of community built into the academy, the students do as well. In an evaluation study by Orr (2005), career academy seniors noted that they had better teaching and student-teacher relationships than students in the traditional setting. These same students “attributed their greater incentive to attend school regularly and apply themselves academically to the sense of community and support they received” from the academy teachers and students (Orr, 2005, p. 455). Academy students stated they liked their academy teachers, and rated them higher in teaching effectiveness, making real-life connections, and helping them better understand the content.

With smaller class sizes and a shared career interest, students demonstrate higher levels of engagement and participation. This participation in a small learning community was researched by Tinto (1997) as he studied student persistence. As students participated in group discussions and could share their own personal experiences and perspectives, a sense of commitment to the learning was fostered that created accountability for attendance and participation as well as friendships outside the classroom.

This same sentiment was also found in Early College High School (ECHS), an initiative founded by Bill and Melinda Gates. The ECHS concept requires students to complete core, high school academic coursework in two years and then spend the junior and senior years enrolled as college students. While this model is not based on a career theme, it does share the common element of a small cohort of students that progressed through coursework together over multiple years. In interviews with students, Ongaga (2010) asked why they would attend this school. Students responded that the relationships formed helped in “holding each other to high expectations, encouraging each other to come to school every day, staying in school, completing

assignments and assigned projects, participating in class, and persisting on the face of academic challenges” (Ongaga, 2010, p. 380).

Once a relationship is built with students, rigor will follow, and personalized instruction based on student interest will develop. Ongaga (2010) observed that the benefits of this rigor will come when students know that they are cared about, their learning is relevant, and that their experience in school builds in them the skills and potential needed to meet future challenges.

Teacher Effectiveness. In addition to the course structure of the academy, there are also suggested methods for the structure of staff. One of the key elements of this structure is a shared planning time for teachers to collaborate about curriculum alignment, student needs, and best practices. Just as students form a small learning community, this teacher group forms their own professional learning community. Teacher collaboration with each other had benefits both directly and indirectly benefitting student learning (Orr, 2005). One such benefit was an increased sense of teacher collegiality that influenced teacher commitment to learning. A second benefit was noted by Kemple (1997) who noted that teachers in the academy setting were more likely to view themselves as being a part of a strong professional community. When compared to other non-academy teachers in the same school buildings, academy teachers reported greater levels of job satisfaction. This job satisfaction stemmed from opportunities to collaborate, the ability to influence decisions in key areas of their work, and an emphasis on personalized attention to students (Orr, 2005).

Academic Outcomes. At the onset of career academies, the focus was on dropout prevention and increasing preparation for work for those at high-risk of failure. This was demonstrated by a program that was designed to reduce high school dropout rates in ten California high schools. To study its effectiveness, academy and comparison groups were created

in the ten high schools in terms of gender, ethnicity and test scores as well as high-risk factors such as poor attendance, low grades and insufficient course credits (Stern et al., 1988). After the two-year study, evidence indicated that academy students generally had compiled better grades and more course credits than students in comparison groups at the same high schools. The conclusion of the study was that the academy model appeared to present real potential for helping some likely dropouts to succeed in high school (Stern et al., 1988, p. 168).

Kemple (2008) and Maxwell (2001) suggested that career academy students are more likely to have higher academic achievement, graduate from high school, and continue on to a postsecondary institution than non-academy peers. In a twelve-year study conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (Kemple, 2004; Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Kemple & Willner, 2008) that followed 1700 students for four years of high school and eight years afterwards, researchers found that while in high school students had improved attendance rates, acquired more credentials needed to prepare for postsecondary education, and increased participation in career awareness, and work-based learning. When the key components of a small learning community, professional teacher community and collaboration, and work-based opportunities are in place, career academies were found to positively influence academic outcomes including high school and college attendance, grade point averages, high school graduation rates, and college completion rates (Dayton et al., 2011, p. 5).

Another study by Elliott et al. (2002) examined student outcomes for 18 cohorts of students in eight different urban school settings. The focus of the study was on student attendance, grades, and graduation rates. When students enrolled in a career academy were compared to normal expectations of students in the traditional school setting of the same schools, the study found that career academy students had higher 1st-year grade point averages, higher

1st-year attendance, and higher rates of 4-year graduation in a majority of the implementation schools.

While many studies have reported improvements in academic outcomes, Kemple and Snipes (2000) found that out of 490 students in a study sample who completed standardized achievement tests, the career academies did not produce any significant improvement in math and reading test scores. This data was obtained from standardized math computation and reading comprehension tests given at the end of the 12th grade for both academy and non-academy students. In the same study researchers noted that the greatest significant improvements were for students who were most at risk of dropping out, and those in the medium-risk subgroup experience little or no change in outcomes. Data also showed that when averaged across the diverse student groups and sites in the study, the career academy produced only moderate improvements in student engagement and performance.

While lowering the dropout rate was the initial focus of the first academy, that focus has shifted to a model that prepares a diverse population of students who may *not* be at-risk (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). One example of this shift was reported in the Academy of Information Technology and Robotics (AIRT) at Spruce Creek High School in Port Orange, FL, where 97% of AIRT students scored in the mid to above-range of the end-of-the-year 9th grade biology test and 55% on the end-of-the-year Algebra I exam as compared to 69% and 35% districtwide respectively. Additionally, “100% of AIRT students graduate as compared to 78% districtwide” (Kantrov, 2015, p. 31).

Another example of student outcomes connected to participation in a career academy was outlined by Hanser and Stasz (1999) in their research of the Transportation Career Academy Program (TCAP) in Los Angeles, CA. Rather than focusing on employment outcomes, this study

examined attendance, grade point average, credits earned and credit pace as it compared with three student groups in the school population. These three groups were students in the general population, students enrolled in a magnet program and students in the TCAP program. When looking at average standardized test scores, students in the TCAP program had significantly higher scores than students in the general population, but not higher than magnet students. Table 1 shows unadjusted averages for GPA, credits earned, credit page and attendance (Hanser & Stasz, 1999).

Table 1

Unadjusted Averages for TCAP vs. Other Student Groups

| Outcome variable | TCAP | Magnet | No Program |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| GPA | 2.40 | 2.55 | 1.97 |
| Credits earned | 52.18% | 53.59% | 45.14% |
| Ontime (credit pace) | 44.2% | 48.6% | 29.6% |
| Attendance | 91.4% | 93.5% | 85.1% |

Based on their research, Hanser and Stasz (1999) found that students in the TCAP program performed substantially better than non-program students and equally as well as magnet students who are highly screened and selected for inclusion. Attendance percentages show that students in the TCAP program are in school between one and two weeks more than non-program students. This additional in-class time translates into significant increases in GPA and credits earned (Hanser & Stasz, 1999).

Postsecondary Success. The final impact of the learning environment structure is the influence on a student’s postsecondary choice. Career academies help students develop 21st

century employability skills beyond academic achievements that are important to postsecondary success. Through hands-on instruction and relevant course work, students are given opportunities to work in teams on real projects that are tied to industry-related scenarios. Students begin to understand the importance of “professionalism, reliability, teamwork, and clear oral communication skills” as they connect their education to a career field” (Brand et al., 2009, p. 4). Studies by Brand, reinforced in later studies by Barber (2012) and King (2007), support the idea that higher education can capitalize on the career academy learning environment by considering ways to intentionally create new opportunities both in and out of the classroom that will promote integration of various skills and knowledge learned in a career-themed context. As noted earlier this integrated learning approach is a significant characteristic of career academies. By systematically investigating and documenting how students on higher education campuses are “integrating learning will not only illuminate areas where student learning is exceptional but also guide curricular design to promote integration further” (Barber, 2012, p. 23). This integrated form of learning is becoming a widely recognized educational outcome for U.S. college and university students in the 21st century (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2004; King et al., 2007). Brand et al. (2009) noted in their work that after being exposed to the realities of the workplace and careers during internships, students will often set higher goals for college and their career preparation.

Maxwell’s (2001) study compared students who attended a career academy and had applied to a state university in California to those of peers who had graduated from a public high school in the same district and had applied at the same state university. Not only did students from the career academy have academic gains in English, it was also found that this group graduated at a four percent higher rate than students from traditional high schools.

Real-world Instruction. Career and Technical Education has remained popular among students likely due to the opportunities it provides for students to engage in work activities with real outcomes, and to develop relationships with adults outside the school or family setting (Hall & Raffo, 2004). In addition, CTE programs can help students see a purpose for learning academic subjects. In her work to research career-themed programs of study, Castellano (2017) noted that “contextualized teaching and learning may be the key component that translates to participation and...improved achievement outcomes” (Castellano et al., 2017, p. 52). Modern educational delivery does not align with students’ tendencies in attention and motivation. Learning in context is a more relevant approach to meeting those tendencies as opposed to traditional academic structures (Richardson et al., 2016). This involves integrating CTE with core academic content such as math, science, and English.

A learning in context integration is how the career academy meets the vision of graduating students who possess academic, technical, and employability skills. A key component of this vision is the integration of industry-related experiences and work-based learning. Examples include guest speakers, field trips, one-day career shadows, or internships.

Work-based Learning. Four main student benefits surface throughout research regarding work-based learning including improvement in academic learning, enhancement in work-related skills and understanding of careers, growth in social and emotional development toward adulthood, and engagement in soft skills of critical thinking and problem solving (Bailey et al., 2003; Kazis, 2005). In studies of work-based learning programs, findings from a study of students at four Philadelphia high schools who partnered with a local businesses showed increases in GPA (Kazis, 2005) as did research on students in Volusia County, FL, who had a “3.31 grade point average compared with a districtwide GPA of 2.87” (Kantrov, 2015, p. 30). In

addition to GPA, academic benefits come when students see a connection between what they are learning and what they one day might choose as a career. This connection answers the question, “Why do I need to learn this?” and students see direct application of the instruction in their career-themed classes. Students who see this connection and can answer this question, have a lower drop-out rate (Rogers-Chapman & Darling-Hammond, 2013) because of the relevance they make to their personal lives and individual career goals.

The work-based learning experience provides opportunity for students to observe and ask questions of mentors regarding career components to get an accurate view of what the job truly entails. Once they understand the skills needed, students can create an individual plan of study with coursework tied to their career goals (Kazis, 2005). In addition to the technical skills of the career, soft or employability skills are also observed and workforce members can stress the importance of critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork during the student experience (Rogers-Chapman & Darling-Hammond, 2013). These employability skills come from an exposure to career-related problems that need defined and solved, work done in teams, and a developed understanding of appropriate social interactions with adults.

Business and College Connections. A fundamental component of career academies are the connections between the classroom instruction and business and higher education partners. Business connections provide students with a wide range of career awareness, an increased exposure to individual employers and information about the types of career opportunities in a particular field (Kemple & Willner, 2008). The increase in the wage premium for employees with postsecondary education relative to high school graduates is the most significant signal that the economy is demanding more postsecondary-level workers (Carnevale et al., 2009). Because

of this economic demand, postsecondary connections are a critical component to the overall impact of the academy structure.

Business Connections. Business partnerships are an indispensable part of the program, but also one of the greatest challenges for a thriving academy (Lanford & Maruco, 2017). While barriers exist in the establishment of business partners, the business community supports and sees value in the skills and knowledge students gain from being in the career academy (Brand et al., 2009). Page (1987) notes motivators that would encourage business partners to engage with the career academy. These motivators include exercising social responsibility, contributing to a reliable source of educated and trained employees and decreasing costs for training and recruitment. Students also benefit from these partnerships by gaining an increased self-confidence and job seeking skills, increased employment options, and improved motivation to prepare for the world of work.

College Connections. In addition to business partners, programs also need to be connected to postsecondary education, which requires high school teachers and college faculty to work together (Brand et al., 2009). Dual enrollment and articulation agreements between career academies and postsecondary institutions help students develop an awareness of the need for college and often allow students to earn dual credit while they are in high school. By allowing students to enroll in high school courses that receive college credit, they are beginning to transition to the expectations and demands of college coursework and paving the way for postsecondary success.

Postsecondary paths can lead in many directions following the completion of a high school diploma. For some this path is a toward a college or university degree while others it may be toward entering the workforce. For those headed to continuing education, the influence of the

career academy can help students determine their career interests before incurring financial burdens from student loans or lost time from pursuing a undesirable degree path (Lanford & Maruco, 2017). A study that followed academy graduates found that 15 months after graduation, the postsecondary enrollment rate was 62% for academy graduates and only 47% for the comparison group (Reller, 1987). The other benefit for those college-bound is the academic preparation for college coursework. In a study with a school district and a local university partner, students from a career academy showed an increase in the probability of graduating from the university by about four percentage points (Maxwell, 2001). A large percentage of this study group enrolled in the local university partner possibly because of the established pathways to postsecondary education that are customary in a career academy model. Articulated postsecondary agreements and curriculum provide smooth transitions from the secondary setting into degree programs that lead toward degree completion. These articulated agreements also “provide labor market skills that have been validated by national boards” (Maxwell, 2001, p. 622) and prepare students for continued education or employment opportunities.

Others disagree regarding the postsecondary benefits. Kemple and Willner (2008) found that the career academy served a viable pathway to postsecondary opportunities but did not appear to have been more effective than options available to the non-Academy group. Regardless of academy enrollment, more than 90 percent of all students in the study graduated from high school or received a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, and half completed a postsecondary credential. Beyond academics the reviews for postsecondary employment is mixed. Reller (1987) and Maxwell and Rubin (2000) found little difference in employment status, wages, or hours worked.

Moving Through the University Experience

Considering student experiences that have been overlooked in previous research will increase understanding of students' transitional experiences through higher education. O'Neill and Wyness (2005) found, "Examining students' own words can reveal the meaning of learning experiences and clarify social conditions and processes that contribute to the success of their education" (p. 433). By hearing what students say we can better understand their experiences with the "moving through" transition stage.

Maunder et al. (2013) looked at the transitional experience of university students in their first and second year. Her research identified three themes including "internalized images about the university, expectations versus reality, and the developmental changes to self" (Maunder et al., 2013, p. 143). One of the internalized images that participants noted was the development of active social relationships that matched the university they had imagined. Students expressed a fear of being isolated in this new environment and they experienced anxiety regarding making friends. One student shared that she "latched" on to anyone in a form of desperation to avoid being lonely. This choice of friendship moved from convenience to selective and evolved as students shifted in their transition and became more comfortable with the university setting. These social changes in times of transitions have been reported to be ongoing and develop throughout the university experience.

Another key finding in Maunder et al.'s (2013) research was how students reported their "sense of self" had changed due to these transitions. Students grew in their independence and identified changes they made to support this independence such as seeking help from others, identifying learning needs, and taking responsibility for themselves. Students also became more aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, skills, and abilities. In addition to this personal

growth, students grew in their confidence regarding their future direction after graduation. They became more positive about how they have grown personally and the impact this growth had on who they would become.

In addition to Maunder's study, Hussey and Smith (2010) also identified transitions that impact students in higher education and looked at how the institution can support those phases. To assist students in their moving through transition, they found it important to recognize the need to base the design and delivery of higher education on the major changes or transitions which students encounter. Hussey and Smith's findings indicated that rather than focusing on terms or semesters, higher educational institutions should explore the possibility of allowing the needs and interests of the students, as they pass through important educational changes, to play a more central role in the organization of curriculum and teaching. This type of institutional change would support student retention, improve student self-esteem, and compliment transitions by allowing for flexibility.

Moving Out of the University Experience

The final stage of Schlossberg's Transition Theory is "moving out" which is when the change has ended and a period of a stable, new life and new identity begins (Schlossberg, 1981). Establishing this new life can be trying as the student is experiencing one of the most challenging transitions from college to career. Research identifies multiple reasons that impact this college to work transition including a change in culture, lack of experience and skills, and unrealistic expectations (Hettich, 2000; Hettich & Landrum, 2014; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

Change in Culture. Upon entering the workplace college graduates experience a considerable change from the college classroom (Chao, 2005). Students will find that co-workers are typically older and are likely immersed in their own workspaces and routines and focused on

their own work tasks (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). The workplace culture often provides less structure as compared to the college classroom with no course outlines and little concrete feedback. A typical employee works independently with the company objectives and goals of the team at the forefront of the work were as, with the exception of some group tasks, most college students work autonomously and focus on individual goals of course completion and personal growth (Hettich & Landrum, 2014). Other cultural differences depend on the organization of the business such as a service industry and a sales industry where one is focused on the drive to exceed client expectations and the other on performance measurements (Chao, 2005).

A recent study from Slep and Reed (2006) found that 79% of graduates felt they had little to no awareness of work culture prior to entry. Additional research shows that some students experienced a positive experience into work entry while others found it to be difficult, stressful and less successful than they imagined it to be (Holton, 1995). Understanding workplace culture proved to be a significant impact on college to work transitions.

Lack of Experience and Skills. According to Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) college graduates are unprepared for today's workforce. In their study of 400 employers across the United States, employers articulated the 21st century skills needed by college graduates to succeed in the workplace included professionalism, work ethic, oral and written communication, teamwork, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Stevens, 2005; Stewart et al., 2016). The National Association for Colleges and Employers noted a large skills gap in today's workforce that is stunting business growth, as 45% of small businesses were unable to find qualified workers. Jobs that previously went to high school graduates are now requiring a college degree and this skills gap is being blamed on higher education (Koc, 2018). Employers are looking for new college graduates with "go-to-work"

skills which include the ability to work with others, drive, motivation, and a strong work ethic, to name a few (Eisner, 2010). The skills noted include primarily personal and interactive skills; however, research indicates that graduates are also lacking in business skills. Sleaf and Reed (2006) surveyed 57 physical education and sport science graduates found that over 70% of students felt their business skills of networking, entrepreneurship, finance, and work culture were underdeveloped. Workplace business skills of basic math and advanced use of computers were also lacking (Eisner, 2010).

Without prior full or part-time employment, graduates do not know how to apply their skills to workplace settings and tasks. Research found that the transition to employment following graduation is difficult because of the diversity of classroom versus workplace skills and because many graduates lack formal work experience where they would have opportunity to develop workplace knowledge (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Employers want employees who have the skills that are easily transferrable from the classroom to the workplace (Stewart et al., 2016).

Unrealistic Expectations. Because of their lack of prior work experience, graduates may enter the workplace with unrealistic expectations, uncertainty of what to expect and lack of workplace decorum (Hettich & Landrum, 2014; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). When these expectations are not met it can lead to frustration and disappointment thus causing stress and a more difficult transition into the workplace. Marcia (2010) noted that students who enter the job with high expectations of salary, job challenges, or advancement will likely experience “reality or role shock” and are at risk of lower job satisfaction and commitment to the organization.

One of the perceptions listed by graduates that differ between college and the workplace include lack of feedback (Holton, 1998). In the college setting students are accustomed to frequent comments from professors on work performance. This expectation carried into the workplace where feedback came only in annual or bi-annual reviews thus proving to be a major adjustment for graduates (Gardner & Lambert, 1993). Lack of feedback among other perception differences lead to dissatisfaction with the job and can cause quick turnover.

Summary of Literature Review

The foundation behind a career academy model is to “move beyond memorization and recall to instruction that focuses on higher-order thinking, critical thinking and problem solving” (Rice, 2011, p. 1). This is achieved by combining core academic instruction with a career and technical education curriculum, adding a work-based learning component, and providing students with a personalized support system created in small learning community. While the initial response may be to consider the primary benefit of career academies is related to career exploration and exposure, studies show that the strong academic outcomes and real benefits of the academy model are due to the “personalized support that enables students to build confidence, develop their academic skills, clarify their personal and potential job-related interests and enjoy a multiyear relationship with committed teachers” (Lanford & Maruco, 2017, p. 619).

When a career academy is implemented with fidelity it can provide the structural supports to transition a student from the high school and into the university setting. By understanding the career academy model, the secondary student is transitioning from, the university can support these students with the same type of learning structures to propel them to college-degree attainment and into the workforce. This understanding will help the university create programming that builds on the career academy structure to help the student move through

the university setting and eventually move out into a career. It will also help the university student develop a stronger sense of the workplace experience they will move to following their college graduation.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

This study sought to understand the perceptions of university students who participated in a high school career academy model and how their transition through their university program was influenced by this model. Upon consideration of the research problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions, I conducted an in-depth qualitative exploration of the experiences of a selected group of university students as they transitioned from a career academy model of instruction, through their university program, and into preparation for entering the workforce. This chapter includes a description of the research design, research setting, participants, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, and my positionality.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research method was selected for the research. Clark and Creswell (2015) described qualitative research as a design in which the researcher explores a single concept by using broad questioning to gain the viewpoints of the participants. Qualitative research is focused on how the experience of a few individuals contributes new knowledge about the meaning of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When considering the participants' experience, it is important to understand that qualitative research begins with a view on how the world is seen or experienced and the narrative of complex personal journeys (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The data collected provided the context for understanding the topic of the study and conveyed the participants' perspective of the impact of the research topic on their lives. The methodology section details the process I utilized to collect information and examine students' perspectives important to the topic.

A qualitative narrative inquiry was selected for this research. Qualitative research with a narrative inquiry design is an appropriate approach to this topic as it provided the foundation for rich, data-collection of individual experiences. Narrative inquiry is a genre of qualitative research that allowed the study participant to take part in telling their own story (Clark & Creswell, 2015; Lapan et al., 2012). In this research I desired to share in-depth stories of individuals who attended a career academy in high school and learn their perceptions of how it impacted their transition from high school, through their university program experiences, and as they prepared to move out to a career. Study participants told their own story, and I helped to facilitate that conversation. By using individual one-on-one interviews, I was able to provide rich descriptions of my topic within its real-life context.

Using the story-telling structure and the depth of experience narrative inquiry brings to the interview process complemented the work done by Schlossberg in her study of transition. When working with adults in transition, Schlossberg discussed the importance of listening to their ideas and learning of supports that were beneficial to them. In this same body of work, participant quotes from interviews are included which allow the reader to hear the stories of those in transition (Schlossberg & Goodman, 2005). Schlossberg also talked about the use of interviews in her work on marginality. Interviews provide a way to investigate students' experience based on how they talked about their experiences of transitions. In her work on students in transition, Maunder et al. (2013) recommended that research on this topic suggests using a methodology focused on student voice as it helps to identify patterns of transition in student experiences. The use of narrative inquiry provided a solid foundation to do so as these researchers suggest in listening to the voice of the student to best understand their experience.

Narrative Inquiry

A narrative tells a story about an important or significant event that gives credibility to the personal and practical knowledge of the participant (Butler-Kisber, 2018). Narrative inquiry is a relational approach to research that seeks to understand and represent experiences through the stories that individuals tell (Clandinin, 2013; Lapan et al., 2012). This research methodology allowed me to focus on the participants' experiences and gain understanding of their educational influences as they transition from a high school setting, through college, and into the workforce. Narrative inquiry established the framework of how participants interact, engage, and experience the world (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Huber, 2002).

This research method is designed to use in-depth interviews to focus on the experience of an individual (Clark & Creswell, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These in-depth interviews with a small participant sample allowed me to gain exclusive insight to the individual's perspective. During the inquiry, a sense of openness and trust between the participant and myself was established (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Once developed, the narrative inquiry allowed me to examine the student perceptions of the career academy model and its influence as they transitioned through stages of their lives.

Context of the Study

This research was conducted at Central College, a 4-year private college in Kansas and at Mid-Regional University (MRU), a 4-year public university in Kansas. The major factor influencing the site locations is the student body population and make-up and the desire to increase the rigor and diversity of the study. The population percentage of out-of-state students at Central College is historically 59%. Since few high schools in Kansas have career academies, this population provided a larger, geographic reach for participants.

In the fall of 2019 MRU reported a total undergraduate headcount of 11,206. This number represents students from a wide geographic origin broken down by area within Kansas as well as students from surrounding states. The high student population as well as the diversity of regions provided a pool of applicants who potentially graduated from a high school career academy model. By selecting students from two types of institutions, it allowed me to determine if school size and setting was a factor and created a wider geographic range.

Participants and Sampling Procedures

This study used purposeful sampling as the method for selecting appropriate participants who provided valuable perspectives to the research study (Clark & Creswell, 2015). Yin (2016) defined the goal of purposeful sampling as selecting individuals who provide relevant and abundant data that is rich in information related to the topic. A purposeful sample for my study was selected from university junior or senior students who graduated from a high school career academy model. These students had transitioned through the first two years of their university experience and were beginning the transition into the workforce. By using purposeful sampling coupled with a narrative inquiry approach I was able to identify specific participants that have first-hand experience with a career academy model and use those experiences to build ownership in the research. Once the sample was selected, it was important to establish rapport with the participants so they trusted me to interpret their stories (Butler-Kisber, 2018; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Three junior and one senior university students were asked to participate in the study. These students were selected based on the high school they attended. This high school employed the components of a quality career academy model and the student must have been actively involved in the program. The components of a career academy included small learning

communities, partnerships with employers, and higher education that prepare students for both college and careers, and a work-based professional learning experience. I conducted in-person, one-on-one interviews with two participants and virtual one-on-one interviews with the other two. Following the interviews, I provided follow-up as well as member checking to ensure accuracy in my understanding of their story, to build participant trust in me and to help participants have ownership in the research. A Virtual Protection Plan (VPP) was in place to protect both the interviewee and me for the two in-person interviews. This VPP addressed physical distancing, PPS, and disinfecting protocols. For the two virtual interviews I used Zoom electronic communication methods as provided by Mid-Regional University.

I did contact and interview a fifth participant who attended a high school career academy. During the interview he shared that due to family circumstances, he left the academy during his junior year and transitioned back into the traditional high school setting. He shared many experiences that the academy offered including work-based learning, student organizations, and college credit; however, he did not personally participate in those opportunities. Because he was not actively involved and left the academy early in his high school career, I chose not to include this participant. During his short time in his high school healthcare academy, he did learn skills that he puts into practice in his current job as an athletic trainer.

To find the participants that met these requirements, I contacted each university's personnel. At Central College I personally met with the registrar to discuss my participant criteria and gain a list of participants. The list included the names of the students, grade level, high school attended and city and state of the high school. At the large, urban university I met with the Director of the Office of Planning and Assessment via Zoom and through multiple

emails to gain student names. At the large university, the process to gain student names included the following steps:

1. Provided the director with my criteria which was junior or senior level students who started college in either 2017 or 2018.
2. Director emailed me a list of high schools that these students attended. I narrowed the list by highlighting schools that had a career academy and sent the list back to the director.
3. The director then sent me a list of 44 student names who graduated from the selected high schools.
4. Emails were sent to individual students to invite them to serve as a participant.

Participants were contacted through their university email. Informed consents (see Appendix letter) were given to students prior to the interview with an explanation of their involvement in the research.

Data Collection

Data was collected through one-on-one interviews using a semi-structured interview process. The data collected aimed to inform the study's research questions (Clark & Creswell, 2015). I recorded and transcribed all conversations to produce written documentation. Transcriptions were made available for member checking which is the process of sharing the findings with the research participants to ensure the credibility of the findings during the interview process. Member checking ruled out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants said and to identify my own bias and misunderstanding of what I heard or observed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process continued to build trust and relationship,

which is essential in the narrative inquiry approach. The initial interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was conducted on the Central College campus and virtually with MRU students.

My initial conversations with each student began through an exchange of email starting with an invitation to participate in research. In my email invitation I explained my research intentions and clarified that they had been an active participant in the career academy and not just in attendance at a high school that had one. Students who had been active in the academy were invited to reply. After establishing that each student would voluntarily participate, I sent a second email to set a date and time for the initial interview.

Participants were asked to bring any artifacts and/or documents or work they produced during their career academy experience. Including examples of projects they completed in their academy sets the stage for conversation about the participants setting, how they observed the activity of the career academy and interactions related to the focus of the study (Butler-Kisber, 2018). No participant had any documents to show; however, they talked about specific assignments and projects in the interviews.

For interviews occurring at the small, private college, I met with each participant in person and followed the college's public health precautions criteria to maintain a safe interview setting. At the large, urban university all interviews were done via Zoom calls. During each of the initial interviews I worked to establish a connection with the participants by learning about them, where they were from, why they selected the university they attend, and any other personal information they felt comfortable sharing. Over the space of six weeks, I met with each student for two interviews with breaks in between the meetings allowing for reflection and editing of transcripts.

A follow-up interview was scheduled with each participant to allow time for them to reflect and process the questions, the research topic, and their story of transition, and provide time to gather any documents or artifacts they felt were relevant. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were held on the Central College campus or virtually. This additional interview ensured that the participants' had completely shared their stories and we had reached a point of saturation where no new conversation sparked insight to the research topic (Lapan et al., 2012). The second interview was used to clarify questions and make sure I accurately understood their story. Protocol questions were revisited, and students were asked to explain some of their initial responses and share any other information they thought of between the two interviews. This too allowed me to establish rapport by expressing my gratitude for their participation, using examples from the first interview to demonstrate my desire to listen and understand, and demonstrating an understanding of the influence of the career academy experience may still have on their current situation.

Data collection began in the fall semester of the 2020-21 school year and lasted for approximately six weeks. The participants' names are confidential and identifying information was removed during the transcription process and replaced with pseudonyms. All recordings and transcripts will remain in a secure, password protected location for a minimum of five years.

Data Analysis

After completing the individual interviews, I began analyzing data by transcribing the audio recordings. Using these transcriptions, I brought together all the data and created an organized method of data retrieval (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once transcripts were accurately created, I then began the process of analysis.

Finding meaning within the data is the ultimate goal of the data analysis process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested three methodological approaches to analyzing stories in the narrative inquiry framework. These approaches are biographical, psychological, and linguistic. Each have components that would support strong data analysis; however, the psychological approach provides the strongest context to the research topic and questions. The psychological approach to data analysis is mostly concerned with the personal thoughts and motivations of the individual. This approach is “holistic in that it acknowledges the cognitive, affective, and motivational dimensions of meaning making” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 35) and takes into account biological and environmental influences. Individual stories were presented in a chronological order as participants shared their experiences of moving in, moving through, and moving out of their university experience (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). This approach demonstrated how the story “unfolded over time” during each transitional stage (Clark & Creswell, 2015).

In addition to the psychological approach of analysis, an analysis tool was used to aid in this interpretation. This tool, developed by Labov and Waletzky (1997), focuses on each event in a narrative by creating a condensed re-story using a six-step process. These six steps include summary (abstract), orientation, complicating actions, coda, evaluation, and result or resolution (Boyno et al., 2013; Johnstone, 2016; Labov & Waletzky, 1997). In his work using Labov’s tool, Boyno et al. (2013) noted that this six-step framework is “useful for a great amount of narrative situations and types ranging from oral memories” to many other types of storytelling (p. 114). Labov’s work was instrumental in helping to organize and manage the data and present it back into a story.

Using Labov's tool and Schlossberg's Theory of Transition and the 4 S's model, I designed a tool to analyze the stories from each participant. This tool filtered the narratives through funnels of each of Labov's six steps (summary, orientation, complicating actions, evaluation, resolution, and coda) and of the three transitional stages and compared it to each part of the S model (situation, support, self, and strategies). This filtering was done separately for the three transitional stages in Schlossberg's Theory of Transition which are moving in, moving through, and moving out. From that analysis process, themes arose and I was able to identify categories based on the broader chunks of data leading to larger themes that guided the interpretation of the narrative (Butler-Kisber, 2018). These themes were based on Schlossberg's 4 S model and participants' stories were then categorized within transition by either situation, support, self or strategy.

These thoughts, motivations, and influences were analyzed using the thematic content analysis as described by Lapan et al. (2012). This analysis approach requires the researcher to use a continual process of "critical thinking, questioning and categorizing" (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 129) and provides a way to analyze verbal communication to make inferences about the participants' individual experiences. The words and experiences gathered in the interviews provided an analysis of the phenomenon. Themes were assigned to the broad topics identified and patterns were identified to highlight the different individual experiences (Clark & Creswell, 2015). The themes are discussed in the findings section of the study and reflect my inferences developed through systematic thinking and reasoning about the meaning of the narrative data as it relates to the study's purpose, research questions and theoretical framework (Lapan et al., 2012).

Research Quality

In good qualitative research, researchers work to ensure that observations and procedures are valid, truthful and done in an ethical manner (Clark & Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure these tenants are observed I used authorized methods to collect, analyze and interpret data to inform the readers that this study is trustworthy and reliable.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness I used established qualitative research methods and actively involved participants in the data collection and collection analysis phases of the research. I constantly compared my interpretation of data collected in transcripts to the participants own words throughout the study. The concept of trustworthiness supports the validity of the study by ensuring that the study is researching its intended purpose. Validity implies that the study is investigating what it is intended to study and to ensure that the researcher is drawing good interpretations (Clark & Creswell, 2015).

In addition to these methods, a peer debriefer was used to assist in maintaining the trustworthiness of the research. A peer debriefer holds an impartial view of the study and provided feedback to ensure validity. The impartial peer debriefer examined transcripts, final reporting, and general methodology.

Transferability

With the intent of informing other schools about the implications of a career academy model, transferability was an important consideration. Transferability is the ability for the study's findings to be applied to another setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). If after reading this study, the reader sees how the findings are applicable to their situation, the findings from this study will therefore be transferable. Transferability to another setting, also known as external

validity, may be problematic to some degree. To offset this challenge, readers can refer to the theoretical framework to show how data collection and analysis were framed by the parameters of that model (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Another way to consider transferability is to look at how findings can transcend to another situation. Even repeating the same study in the same location would not ensure the same results, but by gathering detailed, descriptive data, it makes it possible for others to determine the level of transferability to another setting. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) write that we learn in one situation can be transferred or “generalized” to other similar situations we encounter. This is how individuals deal with daily life events. When put into a similar situation, though in a different location, readers can determine the applicability of the findings to their environment.

Ethics

The following steps were taken to ensure ethical procedures were conducted during data collection:

1. Participant names were obtained through official personnel at Central College and Mid-Regional University.
2. Informed Consent forms were collected from individuals in the study. Each participant read and sign an informed consent letter which is included in Appendix B.
3. The study was conducted on the Central College campus and virtually with MRU students.

All persons in the study were assured of confidentiality and all attempts were made ensure that no identification of participants was divulged. Before conducting the study, an internal review of the proposal was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Central College and Mid-Regional University to assure no harm was done to the subjects in the research.

Researcher Positionality

One of the eight key principles of quality in qualitative research as outlined by Tracy (2010) is “sincerity.” Sincerity in qualitative research refers to the transparency a researcher uses to identify his/her biases and goals and how these played a role in the overall research itself. In qualitative research it is important to examine the unique relationship between the researcher and the participants (Lapan et al., 2012) as this examination will highlight the researcher’s positionality to the data. Once this positionality is determined it is important to understand how it can impact the overall study including the collection and interpretation of the data and be transparent with the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

My positionality in this research is reflected in two ways. The first is that I am an assistant professor at Central College and that positionality expedited the identification of available participants at the institution. In my role as an assistant professor I had no prior knowledge of these students and no prior contact with them; the students were completely unknown to me. The students were and will not be taking coursework in my classes or my content area. The second area of positionality brought to this research is that I have served in public education for 27 years – 22 as a high school business teacher and five years as a Director of Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Assistant Principal. I was also involved in the implementation of a pocket career academy during my tenure as the CTE Director. This bias is recognized, and efforts were made to address this bias including member checking during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation phase to ensure that I authentically and faithfully retold their story, copies of both interview transcripts were sent to participants and participants were asked for feedback, and through regular review of all written work with my dissertation chair to discuss areas where my positionality could be influenced. The major driving factor in this research was my motivation to

seek accurate reporting of the shared experiences of the participants to demonstrate the behavioral impact that may or may not be attributed to a career academy model. The findings of this research may support secondary schools who are reforming their instructional approach to help make informed decisions on their use of this model and to universities who work with students transitioning from a career academy experience as they work toward degree completion.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter you will meet Kim, Truck, Andrea, and Penny, four junior or senior students in college at the time of this study. Two participants represented a small, private college and two represented a large, urban university. The students were from three different states and each participated in a different kind of career academy pathway in their high school. Table 2 summarizes the participants' status in higher education and their high school career academy information. During our interviews, each student was asked to reflect on their academy experiences and what if any influence those experiences continued to have on the transition moving in, moving through, and moving out of their respective colleges. These findings are a result of data collected from multiple interviews with the four participants.

Table 2

Participant Current Student Status and High School Academy Information

| Participant | Student University Status | High School Career Pathway | Career Choice Identified as an Academy Student |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Kim | Senior | Business, Education, Arts (Fine), Culinary, and Human Services (BEACH) | Education |
| Truck | Junior | Information Technology Academy (ITA) | Information Technology |
| Andrea | Junior | Health & Human Service | Health Science |
| Penny | Junior | Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET) | Health Science |

Each of the four participants experienced a different academy pathway in their high school years and identified a career choice that was consistent with the academy focus. To protect their identity and for the purpose of building a connection to me as the interviewer and to their story, each participant was asked to choose their own alias. We had fun with this, and it was

one way I was able to build rapport with my study participants. Because these students were sharing their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives about personal experiences, establishing mutual rapport was a key requirement for me to ensure the quality of this narrative inquiry. In the stories presented in the next section the students share their experiences of moving in and moving through higher education and talk about their hopes and goals as they move on into their chosen careers.

I will introduce each of the following four narratives with some introductory information to help the reader get to know each of the four university students. The student narratives are indented from regular body text and are in italics. The summary of this chapter includes two tables that provide an overview of the participants' experiences. Table 2 includes which of the career academy components each participant experienced, and Table 3 highlights the transitional stages of moving in, moving through, and moving out linked to the experience of each participant in those stages.

Kim

Kim is a female student who identifies as multi-racial, grew up in a small town, and attended a high school with a population of about 550 students. She is an out-of-state student who chose to come to a small, private college in an adjoining state. When asked about her family, Kim shared that she has a twin sister who took a very different path in life and graduated from high school in 3 ½ years, got married, and started a family. Kim was a star track and field athlete in high school and came to college on an athletic scholarship where she set multiple records in her throwing events. Kim left the academy with the intent to become a teacher, and her plans had not changed from then to the time of our interview.

The academy Kim was involved in had multiple career pathways including Business, Education, Arts (Fine), Culinary, and Human Services (BEACH). The school website describes BEACH students as those that enjoy “learning through serving,” and are interested in careers that involve different levels of service. BEACH Academy students were described as both auditory and visual learners. Kim’s high school is listed on the National Career Academy Coalition website as a model academy.

The Interview Process

The interview process consisted of two meetings. Kim replied to my initial email almost immediately and was willing to serve as a participant in my study. We scheduled an in-person interview on her college campus within a few days. When she walked into the office for our first meeting, I saw a female athlete. She was dressed in sweats and a sweatshirt with her hair pulled back and she looked like she was ready for track practice. Kim smiled, appeared very confident, and was ready to jump right in. To start our meeting, I wanted to set a tone that encouraged her to share openly. We talked about her home, family, and track successes. I shared about my research and the expectations of our meeting and the follow-up meeting we would have in the future. We talked about her career academy experience and her college experiences. I used a set of protocol questions to guide the conversation but was careful to let Kim’s story go in the direction she wanted to express it. During our first meeting Kim made a statement that highlighted the impact the career academy had on her transitional stages. Through the programming of the career academy, Kim identified that teaching was her career choice.

The plan was, if we do this now, then potentially in college then they [students] would potentially change their majors less in college. Which for a lot of us, all of us who we

said, like my friends, we've stuck to our majors in college, which is interesting to see. I chose my degree and my major in high school.

At our second meeting we spent time revisiting some previous discussions to be sure I clearly understood her story. I had done some more research on her school and learned about a student organization that was provided for education students. When I mentioned that organization, she lit up as she realized she had completely forgotten that part of her story. I asked some clarifying questions and we talked about her upcoming student teaching placement. Using the narratives from these two interviews, I was able to identify the career academy impact on her transitional stages.

Moving In: The Career Academy Situation, Support Systems, Individual Self, and Strategic Components

The moving in transitional stage is the time when the student is leaving their high school career academy setting and entering their first year of college. Kim shared about how her high school academy situation impacted the first transitional stage by describing the career academy environment she experienced before moving into college. She explained the physical layout of the academy and some of the processes:

You picked [the academy you wanted] and they [counselors and academy leaders] would come in like once a year towards the end of the year and would help you, like, choose your electives and go through the academic catalog essentially of our high school. You would go through and kind of have a plan already as something like the advisor. It was basically advisors would come in -- kind of how we do it here [at the college]. You have a degree and so you kind of had an idea your freshman year what you wanted to do. They kind of made you choose your potential career and so then the curriculum and the list of

classes changed after they implemented the academies. So, like, if you were an education degree, then they had a list of choices that were more towards that degree versus so you didn't have to take all the science classes. They changed the requirements, and you would have to take less science and you'd have to take more [education-related classes]. They started offering different classes and they completely changed the layout. Like not the layout [of the school], but the teacher's layout. They swapped a bunch of classes. And so like, our science classes were all together and they had connecting rooms. They like split them [the teachers] up so the BEACH team would have a science teacher in there, an English teacher and a math teacher. It's a lot to set up and they changed a lot in our school, but I think it was really useful.

Support Systems

Kim felt as though there were many support systems built into her academy. From small learning communities to dedicated academy teachers, she knew there were people always there to help her. She shared experiences of these connections:

You knew who you could go to or be like, "Okay, Blake's in this class." So that would be useful. And since we were at a small school anyways, everyone knew everyone. So knowing that, knowing that you could go to each other that were in the same classes or they're in the same field or something that like getting their input or using them for research or something was good to see.

We had - it was more like a set of teachers. Like I remember in mine [academy] it was one of our Spanish teachers was in charge of BEACH and then like our theatre teacher. It was just like a group of teachers that were assigned to [BEACH]. We would have a day a month or something that we'd have like a special event where like BEACH

team is doing blank blank or the BEACH teachers would be doing something. We would do things as a school or like as an Academy versus like a grade or a subject.

We had homeroom every day. In our homeroom we do team bonding sometimes in our homerooms with our teacher. They would be BEACH themed activities. He [the homeroom teacher] would have something for us to do like every couple of weeks. We could go to him if we had a question about the academies.

So I think it [academy support] helped that you knew your role and you knew what you were supposed to be doing and what, like what the main goal was. And I feel in high school, you kind of just go through the motions, like finding this so I can play or do a sport and I'm doing this so I can like the blank. And so I think it was beneficial to know that this is going towards a goal, like this is helping me in the future versus like playing school. I decided like, okay, this could have its benefits that I could help potentially in the future that you're not just going into college without an idea. There are plenty of people going into college with an undecided major and then they waste [time and money].

Individual Self

The academy impacted Kim personally. She decided to be a teacher in high school and the academy experience solidified her decision. Kim described this personal change in the following text:

From that class of all, most of the people that took the Intro [to Education] class are all ed majors still. [School administrators said] the students that are in schools that are doing it [academies], if they go into these academies then they would potentially change their majors less in college. I chose my degree and my major in high school. I feel like that's how a lot of education is anymore that you play school so that you can get your

degree. So you can go get another degree versus like, this is beneficial because this is going to help me in the future. This is what the world is like, or, or potentially it could be. So yeah, I think it is good.

Strategic Components

The career academy had components designed to support students to become college and career ready. Kim found that BEACH offered her those advantages including college credit, internships in the form of teacher and classroom observations, and a student organization. She explained those components in our discussion:

Once we were in BEACH they started offering some more dual credits and stuff. We kind of actually sat down and looked more towards the future versus like what we were just taking now. I was enrolled in an Intro to Ed class, which is a dual credit from [a local college]. That [class] then transferred to [college]. Even though they [introductory class] were the same class essentially, they were different [in terms of content]. It was useful. We did like a mock student teaching almost. You were getting credit for it, like a college credit. And so it was like this is kind of what college is going to be like. You're like, okay, maybe it, could I see myself doing this? It got you prepared. It prepared us because the first semester we were basically learning lesson plans and curriculum. And then the second semester we were in the classroom where I was student teaching with the middle schoolers. We hit on a lot of things that I, even some of the stuff we hit on then, I haven't hit on here [in college], which is interesting to see that maybe that was more useful or relevant than what, some of the stuff we're learning here [in college]. I think that was part of the Academy that helped us, that we were already put into the observation aspect and I already had 135 hours or something from high school. I was

more prepared than other people. I knew what to expect. I knew like the rules and FERPA (Federal Education Right to Privacy Act) and like all of those things already.

I was also in Educators Rising. We met a couple of times. I don't really remember anything specific that we did, but we did go on a trip to Lincoln for an Educators Rising event that they put on and there were some speakers. I think it was the Educator of the Year or something like that. They spoke to us and there were a lot of stations. We basically sat through lectures of like education and what you can look forward to. And basically, yeah, I was involved.

Moving Through: The College Situation, Support Systems, and Knowing Herself

Kim is now transitioning through college. She is in her senior year and is actively involved in the college track team and serves on the Mental Health committee on campus. She shared how many of the experiences she had in the academy mirror her small, private college experience making the transition through college a successful one.

College Situation

Because Kim's academy allowed her to do nearly 135 hours of observation and take a college Intro to Education class, she felt very prepared to begin her education classes in college. Her college would not accept the three college credit hours she earned in the academy, but they did exempt her from some of the required observation hours. She explained how she felt prepared for her college classes:

You don't enter the classroom until interterm of our freshman year. That was the first time that we had observed. And so that's kind of a lot to, that's a long time to not be in the classroom. So already having been in the classroom for 130+ hours that was a lot to already have done or, and being under my belt. I was already used to observing and

doing those things so that it wasn't [difficult]. When we did it my freshman year in Intro to Ed, it wasn't, it was like no big deal to me. Like, it doesn't bother me to get in the classroom and observe another teacher. Cause I've already done it. I was more prepared than other people. So it wasn't a big deal to me.

College Support Systems

Kim found there were many supports built into her college experience that were like her high school experience. Small learning communities were one of those systems as she transitioned from a small, 550-student population high school to a college setting with less than 600 students on campus. She knew the students in her academy classes and found multiple small communities on her college campus. She also felt her academic advisors were great support. Kim shared how her college support system was beneficial to her:

Our education department is pretty small. Like the seniors, there's like six of us. And so we've literally gone class to class. We go to class to class and that's kind of towards the end of our senior year. That's how it was since last semester. We were more grouped just [like] how we were in our Academy.

I was on the mental health committee and so it was just a small group of us. I think last year it was, six or seven last year, then this year, it was just three of us. We've had a budget change of hands and leadership. The mental health committee is a small committee that we try to hold events for, like mental health. Like last year we had some mental health breaks and days, and we had an event that was a weeklong during mental health week.

[With the mental health committee or the track team] those personal relationships, you don't just know someone on the surface level. You say hi to a lot of

people here. Like that's how [my college] is. You say hi and like, you know each other, but you don't necessarily know them on that personal level. So when you're in a smaller group, you get to know like them and not just like personal, like you could start a friendship or like lasting relationships that you could use throughout your lifetime. So just relying on your little bubble that you created, that is a safety net and a safe zone that you can rely on them and they have your back through everything, no matter what, or just someone to lean on.

My [first] advisor, was with Mary. I would always just go to Mary and now it's Dr. Stein. Dr. Stein is like all of us ed majors; he's who we go to immediately. And we kind of had some backlash with just like jumping to him, like initially versus like going to our professors, but we know if we need something done, we're going to go to Dr. Stein. So yeah, he's our definitely our person that we go to.

Knowing Herself

Kim came to college with a plan and she maintained that plan throughout school. The academy was a critical element in helping her solidify her decision to go into education. When she got to college, she was confident in her career choice which made course selection an easy process because her degree plan was already laid out for her. She shared about her dedication to her degree plan by stating:

So, I knew like there was no looking, no looking back or looking for something else. So, you already kind of had a sense of identity and that you weren't lost when you came to [college]. And then kind of just like, okay, this is the plan, and this is what I have decided. And that's the goal is to have a plan into like less major changes, less unknown in general. Cause the world is full of that enough as it is. It was like, you already knew

the goal was set. And so, you were less likely to change or be lost in college and waste time and money and other people's efforts and all of the above. [Because of the academy experiences], there's less anxiety. Less stress.

Moving Out: The College Situation, Support Systems, Individual Self, and Strategic Components

Kim envisions her career to be within her grasp and talks about her future with efficacy and confidence. When I asked Kim if she was ready for student teaching and a future career as a teacher, she was quick to respond. She was self-assured and ready to “move out” to her next transitional stage:

I am, I think at this point I'm ready for it. It was just like, okay, this is just another part. Like, this is how it's going to be already. I already had this done. It was, it was less of a learning curve for me because I already did it. So other people I'm sure would have a harder time. Of course, that always comes with like education. People don't know how to act or interact with children or with teachers or like overstepping boundaries or things like that. What you can and can't do in the classroom.

Support Systems

Kim will be student teaching at a school close to her college. Because of her relationship and support systems at her college, Kim feels like she can easily come back to campus for help and support if needed. She described her advisor and the person “*who we [education majors] go to immediately.*” Her conversation conveyed that this was a relationship that would not end when student teaching began, but it was a resource available to her now and in the future as she transitioned into her moving out stage.

Individual Self

Kim said her experiences have prepared her to work with children, teachers, and other stakeholders. Her coursework and observations in high school and college have taught her what a teacher does, how they interact professionally with others, and lessened the anxiety of moving into this next stage of her life.

Part of me is always like, I don't feel prepared, but then you sit in classes or you do something and you're like, "Oh, that's like a blank-a-blank and things just pop off."

You're always more prepared than what you think you are. And so, yeah, I do feel like I am prepared and have a foundation of education at this point and I know what I'm doing.

It's just like actually applying it in the right context, in the right situation. It's nerve wracking. But I think I am prepared.

Strategic Components

The strategic components of Kim's college setting that propelled her to the moving out stage were seen from the first year she entered college. In her moving in stage, she connected with her athletic team, was introduced to an advisor within her major, and began her degree program. As she moved through college, those connections continued to evolve as she joined other campus groups, developed a strong bond with her advisor and dived deeper into her degree with observation hours and focused coursework. These components from the first two stages of transition set the foundation for the moving out stage. When asked if she was ready for this stage, Kim replied, *"I know the first year will be a learning curve, but I know that I can do it."*

Improving the College Experience

Kim described herself as fortunate to have over 130 hours of classroom observation due to her career academy experience.

I think that was part of the Academy that helped us, that we were already put into the observation aspect and we already had [observation hours]. I already had 135 hours or something from high school. And so like, I was already used to observing and doing those things so that it wasn't [so stressful].

Since I had some observations done and then it allowed me to do my 50-hour, 60-hour observation early in my sophomore year instead of my junior year.

She felt that other students who declared education as their major but did not have that same observation experience were at a disadvantage. Students at her college could not take any educational classes until their junior year which she saw as a detriment. Kim expressed that observing in the classroom earlier would help students connect with their degree, help them make clearer career choices, and be better prepared for their college coursework.

It was less of a learning curve for me because I already did it. So other people I'm sure would have a harder time. Of course, that always comes with like education. People don't know how to act or, um, interact with children or with teachers or like overstepping boundaries or things like that. What you can and can't do in the classroom. Like you, you decided to be a teacher, but you, sometimes you don't, you don't enter the classroom. ...that's a long time to not be in the classroom.

Summary of Kim's Story

Kim is a confident student who came into college with a plan for her life. Her career academy experience provided her with opportunities to learn about her career field and supported her with both academic and social supports throughout school that have continued to influence her experiences in higher education. She described her transition through college as having been positive and she attributed that to having encountered a college setting that was like what she

experienced in high school. As in high school, she is actively involved in athletics and student organizations and is ready to embark on the next stage of her educational journey.

Truck

Truck is an African American male student who came to a small, private college in the Midwest from out-of-state to play football and major in Psychology and because his mother wanted him to go to a Christian college. Truck is one of seven siblings. I obtained Truck's contact information from the registrar of the small college he attends and from that information learned which high school he attended. The state Truck is from has a listing on their State Department of Education website of all the career academies. His high school is listed as an approved partnership academy with two specific academies in-house: Information Technology and Multimedia. Information Technology Academy (ITA), which has two career strands including computer programming and website development. Truck was in the website development strand.

The Interview Process

Truck identified the connections he built both in the career academy and at college as critical factors for his educational success. During our first meeting Truck made a statement that highlighted the impact the career academy had on his transitional stages:

[At my college] I like the teachers and advisors because they actually like to interact with the students. And that's one thing that they're [the academy and college setting] both similar, because like I said, Chris, he still stays in contact with me. My [college] advisor... that's my man right there and I'm pretty sure he would do the same thing.

As soon as I received the information from the registrar and learned that Truck attended a career academy high school, I reached out to him via email. He responded almost immediately that he was a member of his high school's academy program. After a few emails we set our initial meeting date and time on the campus of his college. I had never met Truck so I was shocked to see a man of his stature show up for our meeting. When he walked into the office, I saw a large man – at least 6'3" tall and weighing well over 300 pounds. His head was just inches from the door frame when he entered the room. He was dressed like an athlete with a sweatshirt and slides on and his smile stretched from ear to ear. My initial reaction was, "Wow! This guy is big, but he seems like a teddy bear." We discussed his home state, his family, and what brought him to the Midwest. He shared experiences of playing sports and the importance it had in his life along with his academic experiences in ITA.

A few weeks later we had our second interview where I learned more information about Truck and his family, personal struggles, and current college involvement. It was during this meeting that I asked him to choose an alias for my research. It took him only seconds to say, "Truck." When I asked why he picked that name he replied, "Because that's what I do on the football field. I "truck" people!" We laughed and I could tell we had established a strong rapport where he felt comfortable talking with me.

From our conversations it was easy to ascertain that Truck was well-liked in both his high school academy and college. His demeanor was kind, and his smile went from ear to ear. It was easy to have a conversation with him.

Moving In: The Career Academy Situation, Support Systems, Individual Self, and Strategic Components

Truck explained what his high school experience was like and the structure of the career academy. He shared what this situation was like in the following narrative:

My high school was very diverse with very diverse races. It was a pretty cool high school honestly for being with the people that they had. It had also a lot of clubs and a lot of different things that people could do.

Everybody in the school has to pick an Academy so they could put you in certain positions with certain classmates and stuff like that. With Multimedia, it was more pictures and like how to graph everything and how to edit, but ITA, it was more like how to make your own website and more business stuff. I thought that was going to be more of my profession and not taking pictures and try to edit pictures and stuff like that.

I had roughly the same people in my classes, but my school was pretty big. [My academy was] called ITA. So when you're a freshman, you get to choose if you want to be in Multimedia [Academy], which is like where you take pictures and you learn how to edit and things like that. Or you can do ITA, which is more coding and how to like code a game, how to make a game, and things like that. So I started my sophomore year because as a freshman, you get to choose. My sophomore year we just did like a partial thing of coding. Like they would just teach us how to do like the basic coding, how to like pretty much set up your website and like [make a] website you need to use if you actually want to start making a website. We had to like put codes into them [robots] to make them move and things like that. It was very hard for us, but at the time I was probably only 16. Like I

was like, this is, this is pretty hard, but it was fun though. If you got it, then you, you have a lot of fun with it.

We also learned how to make clothes. So, one of the projects that we had was [our teacher] gave us a choice to be make like a sweatshirt, a shirt, anything that we wanted. We had to make a website for it and be able to sell it and things like that. That was like our first like big project and for us being, you know, kids, it was a little challenging. It was also a lot of good information and it was lots of fun. We also got to sell the shirts around school and then we also like had like a contest. It was, it was pretty cool. Making the shirts was one of the most fun things because you just competed with everybody in the class. Like everybody had their own style and you have to like really just find yours.

It [the website class] was pretty much the only class that we had to take where we just learn how to make the websites and stuff. And then once you learn how to make the websites, then you learn how to add on things too. That was pretty much all we had to take [in the Academy]. Then we'll just take regular core classes because each class was on a block system and met roughly an hour and like 40-something minutes. It was almost two-hour classes and you had either four or three every day. So, it was like a lot, but you stay in that class for a long, long time.

My junior year they had an assembly for the incoming people that were interested in ITA. I was one of the people that spoke at the assembly, because it had either Multimedia and ITA in the same assembly. I was one of the spokespersons. So, uh, it was pretty, it was pretty neat.

Support Systems

The teacher and peer support in the academy were an influential component for Truck.

He shared how these supports were instrumental in his educational journey:

The people [in the academy] really cared about you. That was one thing I actually liked. We're close with our counselors and advisors so that when we talk to them, they put us in specific classes for the major that we wanted to choose for college. So, because we had this [academy], we had this place called Student Success, which we have it here [at college]. We would all go in there and talk about college and things like that. Like me, I really didn't know about college until I was a junior. So, once I talked to them about college, then they all set me up to put me in the classes that kind of specialized for psychology and things like that.

The four teachers [really cared about us.] It was an older teacher, and he was the advanced one. He would teach all the higher, upper classmen and stuff like that. Then we had a guy named Chris. He was the business guy [who organized] field trips to places and got us shirts. Then we had a technology person, like the person that makes sure all the computers work. But Chris -- that was my man right there. He was, he was one of my favorite people. When we went on field trips, he made sure we all understood the purpose while we were there. He'll even like check on us even to this day. Like I still get emails from Chris saying, "Hey man, how ya doing?" and things like that. So yeah, they really cared about the students. That's, that's one thing I really liked about it.

[The teachers] I would say [had a lot of] composure in ITA-- like the kids in the class they weren't the easiest kids to deal with, but they somehow dealt with the kids. So

I'll say the composure that they kept while dealing with the kids was, I'll say it's very good.

Most of my friends were in my class. Whenever I went to class, I had at least 10 people [that I] already [knew]. I either grew up with them, or that I knew then already. So that was one big advantage. Cause like, if I didn't understand [I could say], "Hey, can you come help me?" And then my friend that went to BC [Boston College], he was in that class. Thank God. Cause he graduated high school at a 5.0 and I don't know how he did it, but he did it. My friends are a lot smarter than I was, so to them this came very, very easy. A lot of my friends became electrical engineers. It kinda fit the picture for them to learn that and it also gave them a head start.

Individual Self

Truck learned a few things about himself during his time in the academy. First, he learned that careers focused on information technology were not for him. Due to life events, he developed a passion for helping people. Second, he learned the value of making personal connections and the importance of having a good student/teacher relationship. These relationships, he realized, were better cultivated in smaller classes. This realization came from the strong support system he found in the academy. His connection turned into a method of accountability for Truck. He shared what he learned about himself:

My junior year when we did the coding, I felt like it was too hard for me. Don't get me wrong, it's fun to do it, but it's also very complex because you have to memorize a lot, like memorization. That's one important key. Especially me being a kid and, you know, playing baseball all the time and football, it was kind of hard to kind of fluctuate. And

then I kind of lost interest cause I was like, I'm not really going to do it in my future. Psychology [became] my passion.

When things started falling in my life, I kinda was like, I really don't even know what I want to do. But then once, once my grandma passed away, I was like, I just want to help people. So, I was like, with me wanting to help people, what do I need to do to be able to do that? And like, I guess I'll say, it just wasn't my priority at the time to take ITA. Cause I was like, one it's pretty hard. And also my grades weren't perfect. I also had to go to summer school and stuff like that. Like college was not on my list at all. I was like, well, what do I want to do at college? First, I thought about being a judge then a lawyer. Yeah. I was like, six years of school. I don't think that's going to be me. I was like, okay, well what else helps people? And then I started thinking back - a psychologist. I was like, I give people advice all the time. Now I'm like, all right, I should be getting paid for it.

If you have a personal connection [with a student], the student is going to at least think about what you're thinking. Say if I was in your class, and me and you have a personal connection and I was thinking about skipping your class, I'm probably not going to skip your class because I'm like, "she's going to be mad at me" and "she's going to care that I'm really not there." So, I feel like getting that personal connection kinda makes students like they [teachers] really do care and then they don't want to disappoint them.

I like small classes because in middle school we only had maybe about 15 kids in my class. [In] high school it went to 30, 40. It was pretty big classes, but I mean, they managed that way, which I liked. I mean, me personally, I like small classes; I'll be able to interact with the teacher if I need help. If I do send a teacher email, she might be

swamped with emails from some of the other students. But like, if it is smaller class, she's more likely to respond a little faster and stuff like that. And more hands-on learning when you're, when you have a smaller class. Cause then you get individual time during class.

Strategic Components

In addition to field trips, the academy offered internships with local business partners and college credit with a local college. Truck, however, did not take advantage of either of these opportunities. He noted that the academy did open his eyes to new things and felt that more options for students within the academies are important.

We also went on these field trips. We went to this place in Berkeley. It's like a science museum. It's awesome. We got to make real life ice cream, like from scratch with ice. We had to shake it up in the bag and put the vanilla in and it was crazy. We got to see all these other kinds of things. We also went to this art museum and it was just fun.

Where I come from, we really don't know that much about like the outside world or anything other than what we've been seeing.

Moving Through: The College Situation, Support Systems, and Knowing Himself

Truck is very active in college. He is a member of the varsity football team, works as a resident assistant, and is the vice president of the Student Senate. He noted several benefits from his academy experience that supported his college experience.

College Situation

Truck knew before he started college that he wanted to pursue a degree in psychology. He declared a major in psychology when he entered college and has not changed that degree plan. He shared his passion in the following narrative:

It's just been my passion for the past couple of years because I just like helping people. I felt like that was my calling from God. He was like, "You're going to be a healer. You're going to be a helper." So that's just something I really want to do. And you know, mental health in the world is very, very tough. I studied mindfulness for four years and I've been a mediator for two years. It's not easy when you have mental health; it's not easy at all. And I just, I just want to help people, especially kids. Like I want to give them the treatment and the help that I wish I had when I was their age. So that is the only main reason I want to be a psychologist.

The college Truck attends is a Christian college. He sees that as both a positive and negative in his education.

Everyone here is predominantly Christian. So, I feel like that is some of a good way, but also in may be a fault a couple of times. Dealing with clients there's so many things that could be happening. And there's so many things that are in Christian views that we have to deal with. So I feel like, yes, it's good to kind of view things as a Christian, but at the same time, it's kind of bad because you don't want to get in the habit of maybe like, all right. Cause like, it ain't gonna be all Christian. I'll say it would have benefits but at the same time, it will have its faults. Like you have to expand your mind. You can't only have one thing that you're focusing on, but to be a psychologist you need to expand.

Truck feels that his coursework has prepared him for his future career choice. While some students would feel that essays are difficult, Truck embraces the learning. He found his academic work to be very beneficial:

Many people they would say they don't like this, but like the final essays. I would say because usually the final essays for my psychology class are maybe seven to eight pages.

So, me gaining all that information and looking it up and having to study and actually get the information for the eight-page paper. It helps a lot because like you don't think to look up all that stuff by yourself. Like you wouldn't just sit there and look up all these disorders and try to figure out which ones that other people have. So I feel like it might seem basic, but I think that the essays are pretty helpful for me and that kind of solidified it [his career plan].

College Support Systems

Support systems are a critical element for Truck. He shared how his support system encouraged him to stay in college and has helped him persist through his academy journey:

[At my college] I like the teachers and advisors because they actually like to interact with the students. And that's one thing that they're [the academy and college setting] both similar, because like I said, Chris, he still stays in contact with me. My [college] advisor, that's my man right there and I'm pretty sure he would do the same thing. I love, oh my God, he's a great teacher. People always talk about how the teachers seem to actually care because they actually do. Even like, when teachers say that you can't miss more than nine classes. We [students] were like, dang, like, why not? But at the same time, we're kind of like, they want us to be in class. If we show that we actually care about the work, they will help us. So like, that's the one thing I do see the similarity [between the academy and my college].

I'm also the Student Senate vice president. I didn't know it at the beginning of the year. Cause she asked me if I wanted to apply and I was like, sure. Why not? But they didn't tell me if I got the job or not until like, they started like having meetings and they're like, Oh wait, you were supposed to be, I was like, Oh, I'm, I'm the VP? I was like, okay.

All we do is distribute money to different clubs. They make requests for stuff and then we say yay or nay if we should give them money or not. Next year I am supposed to become president, I believe. It's pretty cool. We have a great group of people. It's pretty nice and it's very diverse too which I like.

I wanted to leave [college at one point]. I was just in a bad place. I'll say my faith wasn't that strong. I was like, I just want to leave. It was my freshman year. I just got here, and like before I came, I lost my uncle. Like maybe 20 days before I showed up to campus. I was like, "I don't want to be here." I had no friends. So I'm like I don't know anybody except for my family in [a nearby town]. It was, "Maybe [college] is not for me." And then I also wasn't playing [football] my freshman year. I'm a freshman and it's kind of expected. But the one thing that did help me stay is my friends. If you ask anybody about [my college], the first thing they would say is the people is the most thing that they like. The people here, they just, they made me better. Back home where I live is not the best place like at all. So like having people that actually is nice and actually cares and that actually wants to interact and actually wants to start a conversation, that's nice sometimes. Some people need that. So at [my college] and having the teachers like you and like Mr. P. that is like, cool and they want to actually help you pass and actually care about if you're engaging or not, this is really reassuring. Like, yes I had that in high school, but actually having that in college when I thought I wouldn't have. Everybody said the professors, like they kind of sometimes might not be more interactive with you, but like that's, that's one thing that kind of made me want to stay [at my college].

Knowing Himself

Truck lives in a dorm on campus serving as a resident assistant, an upperclassman who is responsible for supervising and assisting other, younger, students who live in the same residence hall. He referred to his academy teachers and the composure he witnessed them display as they dealt with a diverse population of students. Truck now tries to model that same level of composure when he works with students in his capacity as a resident assistant. He shared how this learning impacted him and his career choice:

Me being an RA now and having to deal with my residents and things like that, they [academy teachers] I'll say aid me, because they never really showed that they were like, mad, if that makes sense. Like, they were just like, "It's okay." Like, "Come on, you're going to get through this together. You got this." Even when kids were not even wanting to do it, like they would still even try. That's the one thing I would say I gained from [the teachers].

I didn't want to do coding. Computers are awesome, but I'm [not] going to be either a typing person or a medical person or a math teacher or a chemistry type of person. I could be [working] more with your own opinions and your own thoughts and helping people gain closure. So I chose the closure.

Moving Out: The College Situation, Support Systems, Individual Self, and Strategic Components

Truck is ready to begin his transitional stage of moving out and has developed a plan for that stage of his educational journey. He shared his moving out plan in the following:

I have a plan. I just found this out yesterday that I still have two more years of eligibility left for football because this year doesn't count. So my previous plan was to just play my

final year, next year and graduate, and then go to Cal Berkeley and get my masters and then go into this program at my high school which is called the James Morehouse program.

So when I was in high school, the James Morehouse program was basically like the clinicals for the therapists and that's where I learned about mindfulness teaching. We also had this program where you taught mindfulness in the classroom. It was pretty awesome. We did mindfulness and things like that. So I would probably join that group because the James Morehouse programs have interns from Cal Berkeley. So that's how they get their credits and experience from my [high] school. For two semesters, they [interns] had like clients and stuff, and they talk to the kids and things like that. Even like some of them, they teach mindfulness. So I'll plan to do that.

But if not, if that doesn't go through, then once I get my master's, which I'm getting my master's either way. So once I get my masters, I will either go down to San Diego and my auntie, because she's also a psychologist and then study under her, become like maybe an intern and then get my clientele and then hopefully proceed from there.

Support Systems

Truck referred to the support systems that he had developed on his college campus during both of our interviews. Those systems were instrumental in each of his transitional stages as he noted that they are what kept him in college during his moving in stage and propelled him toward degree completion in his moving through stage. Truck said that his career academy lead teacher continued to reach out to him after he left high school and he feels he has the same connection with his college advisor. He said, *[The academy lead teacher] stays in contact with*

me and my advisor, that's my man right there. And I'm pretty sure he would do the same thing. The [college professors] actually do care.

Truck felt as if the connection he had developed with his college advisor mirrored what he experienced in his career academy and was confident that he could continue to rely on his advisor as he began to move out into the workforce. He found a genuine sense that his advisor cared about him and his journey beyond the college experience.

Individual Self

Truck realized that his current daily habits would need to change as he prepared to move out. The normal thinking of just living day to day required a deeper thinking and planning. He knows that he wants to continue learning and growing so he can have a greater impact on others.

[When thinking about a future workplace], I can't wear shorts no more. I can't wear slides all day. I'm actually going to have to be prepared to work. I'm also going to have a plan, like, you know, most college kids, we just go day by day, but sometimes the day feels like it's just repeating itself. When I actually move out [into the workplace], I'm going to have to kind of get away from that, like kind of want to experience new things every day and kind of change my life around to. I need to make a better impact on myself and have more experience, because the more experience I get the more knowledge I have and the more knowledge I have, the more I could give to other people.

Strategic Components

Truck felt that the classroom experience of the degree program at his college prepared him for his moving out phase. The components of that program taught him about acceptable workplace requirements and helped him to begin thinking about what changes he would need to make to adapt to a workplace setting.

I feel like at [my college] they sort of got us ready for the workplace. I feel like maybe once I'm more of a senior, I would see more of that maybe because like, they usually do like more aiding and things like that around [the community]. I feel up until now they kind of helped us get ready for work.

Improving the College Experience

Truck is a junior and has not had any field experience in his degree program at this point. When asked what he needed to know to be able to transition out into the workplace, he noted that he would benefit from more experience and a better understanding of the career field and its structure. He noted that he was like any other college student who wears shorts to class and does the same thing day after day. He needs a better understanding of the workplace environment. While he feels strongly that he has chosen the best career field for himself, this hands-on, practical experience would provide him insight to what the day-to-day duties of the job entails.

Summary of Truck's Story

When Truck was presented with his academy choices, he chose ITA because it sounded fun to make websites and he thought he could use that for his business career. Life circumstances changed his perspective and Truck experienced some low times in his life including a divorce in his family, the death of a grandmother, and the death of an uncle. These life events left him in a low place, and he discovered a new love of helping others which lead him to consider psychology as a career. School was not really a priority, but he found the team aspect of the academy to be something he could associate with his love for sports.

Truck continued to experience and thrive in a small, private college that offered many of the same internal support systems he experienced in high school. Truck's mother was an important external support influencing his experience in college. He said, "*My mom. That's my*

best friend.” She encouraged him to go to college and her vocation as a social worker has influenced his career choice through fueling his desire to help others.

Andrea

Andrea is a female student at a large, urban university. She moved to the United States from India when she was 12 years old. Andrea’s high school was designed so that everyone in school, sophomore through senior, was required to select an academy. This type of academy setting is called “wall-to-wall” (Hackmann et al., 2018). Freshman students attend a Freshman Success Academy where they learn about the academies before making their choice.

Based on the process I went through to gain student information, I did not know which high school Andrea had attended. In my early correspondence I specifically asked about her involvement and experience. Her response clearly indicated that she was actively involved in an academy and did not simply attend a high school that had an academy. I learned Andrea was in the Health and Human Services Academy at her high school. The high school Andrea attended is in a large, urban city and the student population of over 1200 students was very diverse.

The Interview Process

During our first meeting Andrea made a statement that highlighted the impact the career academy had on her transitional stages. Through the programming of the career academy Andrea was exposed to a variety of medical professions that helped her realize her passion for this career field. She stated:

If I would have went to any other high school here in [my town], I don't know what I've been doing at this point. I really don't. Maybe I would have been a business major. I don't know. I think going to [my high school] really did help me in terms of understanding, yes, I do want to be in healthcare.

After receiving my potential list of participants, I quickly began emailing students to invite them to participate. Andrea responded on the same day I sent the email and we corresponded briefly via email to set a date and time for our Zoom call. When the Zoom video opened, I saw a young woman who looked younger than her 22 years. On her desk sat a pile of books and with her hair pulled back, she appeared to be in study-mode. At our initial meeting we discussed her high school experience, career choice, and college setting. Andrea identifies as Indian, is very self-reflective, and does not see herself as a strong communicator or leader. She talked about the expectations placed on her by her family to attend college and her struggles to finally decide on a specific area in the medical profession. While she does not see herself as a trailblazer, she is resilient and continues to persist even through the unknowns of college and her career choice.

At our second meeting we talked about an alias for her to use. She could not think of a name, so I offered to make a couple of suggestions which she liked. I searched for female names that meant strong or resilient and sent those to her because Andrea said she was shy and lacked confidence. She selected Andrea from the list of choices. We reviewed some of the questions from our initial interview to be sure I clearly understood her story and she elaborated on a few areas of her experience.

Moving In: The Career Academy Situation, Support Systems, Individual Self, and Strategic Components

As Andrea prepared to move into college, she was reflective of the impact the career academy had on her career choice. She recognized that the academy set the foundation to propel her into her educational journey. She stated that her high school

career academy provided her with a true understanding of the medical field and solidified that healthcare was the best career choice for her.

Andrea explained the setup of her career academy structure and the opportunities she was afforded in her classes by stating:

[At my high school] we had an option to do two academies at one time. I was not one of them [students who did two academies]. I wish I would have also done something like business, or maybe fine arts. I was just not good at fine arts, so I could have done business for sure. But, there was an option and it should not be limiting, but at the same time, having those options there does help for sure.

Our academy started in 10th grade because freshman year is basically Freshmen Academy where they teach us different things about different academies. So that by the end of the year, we can decide what Academy we want to choose. In 10th grade it started off with an introduction to health science and what it is and we were basically introduced into the health care system. We were taught about certain like common healthcare professionals like CMA, CNA, nursing, and medicine. We talked a little bit about physical therapy and things like that. Nothing in detail, just the basis of it, like how the human body works and medical terminology and things like that. And then starting the junior year of high school is when we were taught more in detail about health, and medical terminologies.

[We did shadowing] in junior year and in senior year is when we were asked to choose what we wanted to do in terms of CNA, CMA, phlebotomy, EKG technician, EMT. I chose the fall semester, I chose EKG technician and for spring semester, I chose the

phlebotomy technician. So that was pretty much my entire high school in the Healthcare Academy.

Yes, [we were with the same group of students in a lot of classes]. For Healthcare Academy we had certain other science classes that we had to take. For example, business and engineering didn't have to take Anatomy and Physiology. As health academy students we had that class together. I believe it was my senior year when the Healthcare Academy introduced sport medicine. It was an intro level Sports Medicine class. I was in that with a couple of my friends from Healthcare Academy. So yeah, we did have more classes together compared to other academies. So the three classes where I would see students from other academies were math classes, advanced level English classes and some science classes like chemistry or physics, which I took both. It [class size] was different for every class. So it wasn't the same in some classes. I had 30 people in, some I had 20, but it was between 20 to 30 in most of them. I know I knew them [Healthcare Academy students] through my freshman year or some, even from seventh grade, from the first time when I came to America. I knew people; I was familiar with them for years.

[We] learned things like how to check or rate your pulse, how to check for blood pressures, how to like, understand medical terminology and different careers. And Healthcare Academy helped me go on and decide, Oh, I have so many options. I just have to understand what they do, what the professionals do and what I need to do in college for those professional, for those programs. And just get it, get it done.

Support Systems

Support systems were an important of Andrea's high school. These systems were found in the academy as well as the academic support program for high level learners she was involved in. She shared how these support systems prepared her to move into college:

We had this main principal, then there was an assistant principal for every Academy. And in that Academy, there was one counselor who was there to help students with what classes to choose, how to decide your schedule for next year or just they were just there to help us understand how to get things done. Under the counselor there's the Academy leader. So Academy leader was basically my health science teacher in 10th and 12th grade. And she was always there for us as students to help us. She was also my AP Literature teacher. So, I made [a] connect. I made a really good relationship with her. Yeah, she is actually very diverse in terms of her education. She was a nurse, an RN. She also had her degree in education and she also had her degree in anthropology. I don't know if it was bachelor's or master's, but she was very diverse in terms of her education. So, she helped us a lot.

I would think that I was a good student in high school, so I didn't really need one-on-one with teachers as often as some of my other classmates probably should have asked for help. But for the most part, I felt like I had good relationships with my teachers where I could approach them and ask questions and just talk.

Being in AVID that really influenced my high school career in general because we had a lot of assignments that just helped us prepare for college. In a sense, Healthcare Academy did not prepare me for college. It was AVID that prepared me for college. Healthcare Academy prepared me for knowing what I want to do, but it didn't prepare me for what to expect in college. If that makes sense.

With my classmates, it was more of just being there together for each other, helping with assignments, just talking through what was going on in class. Just working together as a group that helped. In senior year a lot of us were divided into different

groups based on what we selected in terms of what certifications we wanted. So, at that point, groups were changed, but at the same time, they were there to help us with, “Hey, this is what we're doing for this assignment.” If you have any questions, we're here for each other just, we'll just help each other.

Individual Self

No one in Andrea’s family was in healthcare, but she found an interest in by being in the academy where she was exposed to various medical professions. She learned about the many opportunities in healthcare and shared how that knowledge helped her:

Growing up as a kid, no one in my family was in healthcare professional professions. I actually wanted to be in healthcare because of that, or maybe just because I was interested in health. I knew I always wanted to be either a doctor or physician assistant or a nurse or something. But when I was in high school, I thought that I cannot be a nurse. Like, I don't have that in me. Back then I thought, “Oh, surgery is cool. I want to be involved in surgical team, no matter what profession I choose.”

There were quite a few moments, especially when I went to a hospital for our shadowing during the junior year, I felt like I did not want to be a nurse back then because I was shadowing nurses. And then at that time I was pretty immature. I mean, every teenager is. I had no directions. I thought nursing is not for me just because I know how hard nurses’ work. Like that is not something that I could do. I couldn't see myself doing it back then. Now I can, for some reason, which is working great for me. So back then, I thought that nursing was not for me because I did the shadowing through school during the junior year. And then I started working. I started working as a CNA CMA and

that influenced my decision to go to nursing. So yeah, I went from one extreme to another,

I knew I have to go to college because it's a rule in my family; it was normal for me. That was what my mom was expecting for me and my sister. But, I knew that even if I don't want to go to college, there's always something that I can do, in healthcare you know. But I knew that I wanted to like finish bachelor's and hopefully at least do a master's program. So, I have better job opportunities and just move upwards in my career. I feel like I knew a lot of things about a lot of different careers from my Healthcare Academy experience.

Strategic Components

The career academy had components designed to support students to become college and career ready. Andrea found that the academy offered her those advantages including job shadowing, a student organization, and college credit. She explained those components in our discussion:

The first semester [of my junior year] we were prepared to go into a shadowing that we have for second semester in junior year. In the second semester of junior year we went to [local hospital] and we were allowed to go in all different units where we shadowed with the nurse for that class period, which is like a one and a half hour. We got to be on floor for one and a half hour with the nurse and we shadowed the nurses on the floor pretty much. We also had some physician assistant students from [a local college] come in and talk to us about the physician assistant program and what they do and how to get the degrees and how to get certifications and just their role in healthcare system. I did shadow an anesthesiologist for one hour, class period. And that was pretty interesting. I

actually went to surgeries three different times in that semester. So that was another interesting experience.

Yes, [we earned college credit] and those were medical terminology and then there was this Disease and Disorders class, which is like just an elective class that I was able to take because I chose the phlebotomy and EKG. I was also in AVID. Because of AVID I had to take multiple college credits and AP courses. So, I did get my college credits from those classes as well. I practically was a sophomore [when I entered college].

I was also part of HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America). What we basically do is we compete in that program and then if we get like first or second or third positions in those contests, then we're sent to nationals, which I didn't get to go, but just being in that program was a good experience for me. She [the academy lead] was basically the one who helped with HOSA. She was the one who was my teacher in junior year and senior year. She was the one who helped me with all my assignments. If I had any questions, I could just go to her and yes, she was very influenced and she influenced a lot in a positive manner.

Yes, [we could have earned certifications]. In 10th grade, in my sophomore healthcare class, we did get a CPR certification through American Heart. In order for me to get the CMA, I have to take CNA. I could have done that in high school, but in high school, I was not able to take CMA because I have to be 18 in order to take that class. And by the time I would graduate I would not have been 18. I would still have been 17, so I couldn't take CMA. I could've still done CNA, but I just thought, why not just do other cool things? You know, cause EKG technician program was something that it was the

first or second time it was offered in my school. So, I was like, let me just do this because it sounds interesting and I've always liked things that relates to cardiac systems and that was just an option.

I've had a lot of good exposure to healthcare field back in high school. It has influenced my college career but at the same time, you know, I have a lot, a lot of options.

Moving Through: The College Situation, Support Systems, and Knowing Herself

After a difficult moving in experience, Andrea found that her moving through experience improved once she selected nursing as her degree choice. Her support systems improved as she developed relationships with instructors and her instructional environment changed with more experiential learning opportunities.

College Situation

Andrea found that some classes in college were especially challenging, but others provided exceptional learning experiences for her. She shared examples of those courses as she discussed her moving through experience:

And then I moved to college and here I was in a class of 50 plus, 60 plus, 70 plus people. And I was clueless. It was hard for me in the first semester. I wasn't putting any effort in the first semester. I mean, in terms of classes, I was doing all the work that needed to be done, but it wasn't the best quality of work. And I don't think I was even learning anything because it was just too, it was too different than what I expected college to be. I have been to a lot of universities within [my state], but at the same time, I didn't know what to expect in college, you know? So it was, was difficult, but it [the academy] kind of helped and influence a little bit.

I took AP Statistics in my senior year of high school and I had no value of it at that point, but then I started nursing school and we have this class and for a semester called Evidence-based Practice. It's basically a statistics class where we are taught how the experiments are done, how the research is done, how to read the research papers, and like, just understanding what the research is all about. And I was lost because one, I had the college credits back in senior year of high school. So, I had no college experience in terms of like understanding statistics in the nursing field. And then suddenly here I am exposed to statistics in nursing and I have no clue what's going on. So, I struggled in that class.

My first psych class was a very basic college level, like introduction college level class. And then as I went through the other classes inside [the degree], I learned more through the healthcare profession lenses. I took an Abnormal Psychology, and I learned a lot about the medication treatment and the psychiatric treatment and in terms of behavioral therapies. I just learned more about the disorders in general through the healthcare professional lenses. And then we were also required to take classes like Pharmacology, Diet and Nutrition, and they were taught very focused towards a health care professional student. So that helped for sure. So yes, having general education classes targeted towards students who know what they want to do are very beneficial so that once they are into their programs they're able to better connect to those programs, you know?

This fall semester, I had no clue what I was doing because of COVID. We didn't know when we knew we were going to be able to go to the hospitals, but because the way that clinicals just stopped last semester, our instructors were not sure how it's going to go

this semester. So what I'm trying to say is I did not feel confident starting this semester, but as we went through this semester, it got better just because one thing I got used to it, and then second I, I was actually learning and I've had great experiences with nurses on the units that I've been.

My practicum courses and my capstone courses I think are going to be the best learning experience for me because I'm a very hands-on learner. What I read in textbooks doesn't always make sense to me. And sometimes it's just too much reading at one time, messes up with my mind. It just makes me lose my thought process if it makes sense. So being on the floor in different units and learning about different nursing careers and different processes that we have to go through are really helping me understand, Oh, okay, this, this patient has this condition. So now I have to do this for them. Being in clinicals are a really great experience for me. I have to do pediatrics for five weeks, which is like one day a week and then Med Surge for entire semester. So those two for next semester.

College Support Systems

Support systems were available to Andrea, but she chose not to participate in many. She explained the challenges of limited support in her first years of college, but then shared how that support improved as she got further along in her degree:

When you ask if I've had any small learning experience in college, I would say no, because the classes that I took was always like 40 plus students. I never had the opportunity to have study groups or just small learning activities. I mean, we would have small discussion groups in classes, but we didn't really make meaningful student or peer relationship, if that makes sense.

I did one semester of community service board. But in terms of like other small learning activities I haven't done any. I wish I would have, and it would have looked really good on my resume, but I, one I didn't have time and two, I didn't know what I wanted up until like a year ago. There are dental student association groups, and then there are pre-med student groups. And then there are nursing student groups and I have been involved in those and then a couple of my classmates are also into being in a leadership position for our class, like vice president, president, treasurer, and some things like that. But I have not been one to like step up in a leadership position or any small activities.

The first freshman year I actually never even met my advisor face-to-face. It was all through email. My advisors would help me choose classes. And then the second year I started meeting another advisor and that advisor wasn't very encouraging. So I just kind of felt like, "this is how college is?" I kinda want something different. When I was a pre-med [major] my advisor basically discouraged me into doing pre-med because I had low grade in my biology class. I wish I would have had a better, more positive adviser who would encourage me, but I felt like I was discouraged, which is fine. I'm pursuing school. I'm halfway through the program. I got this. I wish I would have had more positive experience starting, but now that I'm in nursing school, some of my instructors, nursing instructors are amazing. They're always there for us and we can always openly communicate. I believe I got really lucky with my clinical instructors because they are some of the most amazing instructors we have in our program. When I need help, I just reach out to my instructors, which my instructors are amazing. I'm doing great now.

Knowing Herself

Andrea described herself as lacking in communication skills and confidence; however, she has learned to persevere and persist in obtaining her college degree. Through her academy and college experiences, she has learned what type of medical profession she wants to be and shared that in her narrative:

I did feel lost because I didn't know what to expect in healthcare. Like I told you, I don't have anyone to guide me in healthcare. I'm the first one in my family who's went into healthcare. My sister is in health care management, but she's not working in healthcare right now. She's doing her masters right now, but that's MBA and it's not the same thing.

To be honest, in terms of communication, I did not have that developed in high school and I still don't think I have really good communication skills, but I think that you just develop that over time. And what I've learned in nursing school is that your communication skills are always something that you can improve on. And for me, communication skills has always been mine because moving from another country, I didn't know what the norm was. I'm still getting used to some things. I feel like I don't have confidence to do that [be in leadership] at this point, maybe in the future, once I get, once I learn what I want, but at this point I'm still clueless.

But then after I started [college], I learned that I didn't want to be a doctor. So, I looked into physician assistant program and then I realized that it's going to take me six plus years to become one, so it's easier if I just do find something else. Around the same time I did CNA and CMA courses, at the end of my [college] freshman year. And once I started working as a CMA, I discovered that, "Oh, I like nursing." I switched my major from healthcare management. Because at that point I was also management with the

physician assistant, so I changed from that to nursing. I did it [took a CMA and CNA class] after I graduated from high school in my freshman year in college and I just paid for it by myself. And it was not through [my college]. It was just a thing that I wanted to do and I just took it while taking my regular gen ed courses. There's an eight- or nine-week course from what used to be [a local college] back then. I paid out of pocket for it and I did a couple of weeks of in class and then we did like four or five days in a nursing home for clinicals and that was it and then I took the Kansas Department of Aging CNA test and CMA. So that was like both, both CNA and CMA work, eight weeks back to back.

But now that I'm finished my med surge clinicals, I discovered I don't want to be. It's, it's very competitive and very cold in a way. It's just not for me. I want to be more involved in patient care. And then at this point I'm more interested in neonatal nursing, but I also know that I can do a lot more things in nursing.

I am also interested in oncology which is cancer care, pediatrics, and women's health. I know I don't want to be in med surge, like regular med surge floor or even ICU at this point. I'm like, that is not a place for me. I want more of a full patient care, like interacting with them and just helping them get better.

Moving Out: The College Situation, Support Systems, Individual Self, and Strategic Components

Andrea began her clinical observations during her junior year and is ready to continue her work-based learning experiences. She has a plan to become a nurse and eventually further her education:

I always wanted to be in health science and healthcare field, and I just didn't know where I wanted to be. And I kind of moved from one place to another, to the

third one. And here I am finally in the nursing program. So that's all my journey in college was, always a place. If I were to say it that way first started off with pre-med. Then I decided not to go with that. Then I went to Pre-PA decided that was not for me, just because I have to get a degree before I could actually go on into PA program. I just wanted to get started with something with my bachelor's degree. So nursing was something that I could do right off. Right as I graduate, I could graduate with a job waiting for me, you know, and once I start working in nursing field, my goal is to go to a master's program within like three to four years. At least I'm going to give myself three to four years before I start masters or any masters, to be honest at this point. Something in nursing though.

Support Systems

The support systems that Andrea developed in her junior year provided her confidence in knowing that nursing was the right career field for her. She noted that she had great instructors in her program and described them as “amazing.” She stated that her instructors are always there for her and she felt she could easily communicate with them. This support helped her build confidence to move out into the healthcare profession.

Individual Self

During the interviews, Andrea referred to her personality and how she sees herself. She is ready to move out and begin a career in nursing, but she recognized that this new transition would bring anxiety.

When I go from one place where I'm very comfortable to a completely different place, I get anxious a lot. The first couple of months I know will be hard for me, but as I get used to it, it will get better for me. And I know it because when I started working as a CMA in

a facility, I did not know what I was doing. I used to be anxious at that point. But as I started learning and I started, you know, getting used to whatever, what needs to be done, how it needs to be done; I got better at my job. I know that it's going to be difficult at first, but I just have to understand what's going on and just do it. Whichever career I ended up choosing it would have been a new thing for me. I have to start at one point, so starting can be rough, but as I go through it, it's going to get better. I'm going to learn things I'm going to have to learn new skills and new, just new ways of doing things and understanding how to do my job, basically.

At this point, I want to be a neonatal nurse, but at the same time, I know that field of nursing is so broad, so broad. I could go into ICU, I could do peds, I can go into oncology. It's just a big field. So many things; I can even teach if I want to, which I don't think I will, but I didn't know that yet because I've never taught anyone.

Strategic Components

The clinicals, practicum courses, and capstone courses of her degree program were what Andrea said truly prepared her to move out into a nursing career. These courses were hands-on and supported her learning style. She described reading a textbook as something that “messes up with my mind and causes me to lose my thought process.” By being on the nursing floor in a hospital unit, Andrea was able to experience and better understand patient processes and how to care for the patient. The hands-on, practical approach to learning were the strategic components of her program that proved very beneficial.

Improving the College Experience

When Andrea described her college transitions, she indicated a very rough start in her moving in and part of her moving through stages. She alluded to the first advisor she

was assigned and how he discouraged her regarding her career choice and only communicated with her via email. To improve the college experience the advisor should be in the student's major, meet with the student in a face-to-face or virtual meeting such as Zoom, and provide recommendations with supporting reasoning and positive choices.

Andrea described herself as reserved, lacking confidence, and not a leader. Because of this, large class sizes were a disadvantage for her, and she struggled to make personal connections. Smaller class sizes in the general education courses that are typical in the moving in stage would have provided Andrea with a better environment to make peer and professor connections. Andrea also noted that she would tell those in charge of college programming to relate general education courses to the student's degree choice.

So my first psych class, it was a very basic college level, like introduction college level class. And then as I went through the other classes inside, I learned more through the healthcare professional lenses. I took an abnormal psychology, and I learned a lot about the medication treatment, the psychiatric treatment and in terms of behavioral therapies. And then I just learned more about the disorders in general through the healthcare professional lenses. And then we were also required to take classes like pharmacology, diet and nutrition and they were taught very focused towards a health care professional student. So that helped for sure. So yes, having, having general education classes targeted towards students who know what they want to do are very beneficial so that once they are into their programs that they selected, they're able to better connect to those programs, you know?

Summary of Andrea's Story

Andrea is a strong student who works hard and perseveres despite obstacles of learning the nuances of the Americanized English language, moving to the United States of America, not understanding many cultural differences, and learning a new schooling system. Her first year in college was a rough transition, but her experience in the Healthcare Academy prepared her with a solid foundation for what to expect in the healthcare field. She's now a junior in the nursing program and loves what she is doing. While she might not have fully decided on a specific area of nursing, she knows there are many opportunities ahead for her and has confidence that she is well on her way to a successful future.

Penny

Penny was the final participant that I interviewed for my research. Penny is Caucasian and grew up in a town located in the central part of her state, attended the local high school, and lived in the same house all her life. She attends a large, urban university with a major in Social Work and chose this university because of an academic scholarship she received and because "*it felt like the right place to be.*" Penny's high school was also "wall-to-wall" academies where every student, 10th-12th grade, selected an academy.

Like Andrea, initially I did not know from which high school Penny had graduated. I only knew that she had attended a high school that had an academy. After our initial correspondence and her description of her academy involvement, I knew Penny's experience would make her a good candidate for the study. Her high school was the first in the state to implement a wall-to-wall academy setting in 2003. They began with a Freshman Success Academy in 2002 and evolved into a full-blown academy school the following year.

The Interview Process

During our interview, Penny stated one of the key components of the career academy that helped her through her college transitional stages:

My parents didn't complete college and so kind of trying to navigate that was a little challenging for me. I think one of the most beneficial things was that they just have a lot of resources about just the different career paths and opportunities you can have, even if it wasn't specifically like exactly the Academy, like pathway you were in.

Penny replied to my email within hours of sending it. She answered my questions to verify her level of involvement in the academy and she fit the requirements for participant selection. After comparing schedules, we met via Zoom for our initial interview. When the Zoom video came on, I saw a young, petite, blonde-haired student with a friendly smile. Penny was articulate and had quick recall of her academy experience. We talked effortlessly for 45 minutes and discussed all the transitional stages of her educational journey.

Our second interview was also done using Zoom. She had just finished working at her on-campus job and was packing to go home for the Thanksgiving break. She informed me that she would stay home now until second semester and take her first semester finals online. Penny selected her alias by using a random name generator, so it really had no special meaning to her. I explained that it might feel as if I was repeating some of my previous questions, but I wanted to be sure I clearly understood her experience.

Moving In: The Career Academy Situation, Support Systems, Individual Self, and Strategic Components

Penny was a member of the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) Academy in her high school. She selected this academy because of her initial desire to be in healthcare and this academy focused on healthcare under the Science heading.

Penny explained how her academy was set up and the themes that were focused on in her academy situation:

I think the classes really were set up in a way that I was prepared for like the structure of college classes a lot more than [others] from what I can tell. Like my friends that didn't go to a school that had a program like this. A lot of my classes within my career path in high school were structured in a way that it was kind of, I wouldn't say it's completely self-paced, but there are self-paced elements. And I think that's really similar to the college structure. [The greatest impact was] the class structure, like the size of the classes and how they're like ordered to kind of like become more independent.

Our general education classes for the most part, were divided up by Academy, unless your schedule was a little weird and it had to be switched up. So, like even like my English classes were full of students that I was in the Health Science Academy with. We have just classes that were like called health science -- like Health Science I, II and III. I took Anatomy along with those and then AP Chemistry at the same time. They were all kind of a part of the pathway and you didn't have to complete them all, but they kind of like mesh together, I guess.

The overarching [themes] were science, engineering, and technology. It got a little confusing because we had like robotics and things like that, like the engineering and technology side, but the computer classes were more a part of the business school. So, it was like a weird divide there. I think for the most part, it was just health science classes, as well as engineering, like architecture, robotics, and various things like that.

So, when I was in high school, I thought, "What if I'm not interested in this?" Like, what if I'm stuck in a field? I definitely was the person that was like, terrified of

that, but you're not like stuck forever if you don't end up liking it. I'm a good example of that. That isn't the field I wanted to go into, but the relevance of the structure of it was so beneficial.

Support Systems

The support system in her career academy helped Penny make decisions that impacted her transitional stages in college. She had administrators and teachers she felt she could talk to and ask for advice which she noted helped her prepare for her moving in stage:

I kind of enjoyed it because it was really easy to get to know people and like have those bonds. So, if you needed help with something, it was really easy to find someone to reach out to. Whereas if we switched around a lot, I don't think I would have had the same access to my peers as I did because of the academy. I think our school did a pretty good job of that, at least the classes I were in. I wouldn't say disciplinary, but we had the option to take classes outside of our academy. So we still got that experience like with people in different fields than ours. But in general, I really enjoyed being around the same people just because it's really easy to feel lost in a crowd if you're switching between people a lot. If you're around the same people and they remember your name and your face, they'll reach out if you're not in class or help you figure out what you missed.

I think I had the same English teacher for two of those three years. I also had TA'ed [teacher assistant] one of their classes. I felt like it was really easy to bond with my teachers just because of how often I saw them. And even if you weren't in their classroom, you were in the general, like hallways of their classroom. You could always go say hi.

One of my biggest support systems was definitely my government teacher, which is really random, but I really enjoyed her class, and the classroom was a welcoming environment. In the Academy specifically, we had Academy principals as well as. I don't know if they're referred to as like advisors or counselors, but they also worked in the office. And then there was also someone that always worked at the front of the office. I think that structure was really beneficial because it's really hard to get the attention of the high school principal if you need something. But when you have those Academy principals, I felt like it was really easy to communicate with the administration. They were pretty supportive of student initiatives and stuff, as long as you really communicated with them. And I think having individual advisors and counselors in there really helped specifically, because if you're interested in one thing, you're like school choices and like career options are going to be different than someone like in the business school. So, having an advisor that was specific to what you were interested in was really helpful in just figuring out what you wanted to do and getting support for scholarships and various things like that.

You were in the same Advisory [class and teacher] each year. I liked the advisory because we had various opportunities to do career aptitude tests and learn about things we were interested in. [You were with] those students and then just a new, like handful of students from the grade below me would join it. So, it wasn't like a certain academic class or anything like those students from each grade level there, but it was the same students every year.

I think the main thing that was [helpful were the resources.] My parents didn't complete college and so kind of trying to navigate that was a little challenging for me. I

think one of the most beneficial things was that they just have a lot of resources about just the different career paths and opportunities you can have, even if it wasn't specifically like exactly the Academy, like pathway you were in. They were really informative on all the other options you have. I didn't know how to go retake my ACT and I didn't know the best way to write a narrative statement to be able to apply for college and specifically if you're looking at certain majors too, they might need to be written like in one way. So, it was really helpful to just have that advice.

Individual Self

From her academy experience, Penny discovered the career field she was most interested in. She shared how these components helped her learn about herself:

It was more towards my senior year of high school [that I realized I did not want to go into healthcare]. I had taken both College Psych and Sociology, my senior year of high school and I really enjoyed those classes. And then my government teacher actually, I guess, was kind of the person that made me realize that maybe it's not what I was interested in just cause like I would talk about those other classes. I guess I didn't really know what my other options were just because I was so used to being in those health science classes. I'd say like, like middle of my senior year and while doing my internship that same semester that I'd say I realized it. I realized that that internship wasn't necessarily what I wanted. [During my internship] I learned a lot about the field and it definitely helped me realize that that's not what I wanted to do. I learned a lot about what I enjoyed in a workplace and what I don't enjoy in the workplace. Honestly, it might've stopped me from pursuing a curriculum that I wouldn't have enjoyed because I learned

there that maybe that's not what I wanted to do full time. My interests weren't exactly as I thought they were.

I think first of all, it [being in a student organization] helped me with confidence. I did pretty well in HOSA and I think that really just like showed me that, "Oh, maybe this might not be my main interest, but like, I can still go for it and try it. Maybe I'll learn something new that I really love."

Strategic Components

Penny's academy had several strategic components in place to help students become college and career ready. These components included a student organization called Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), dual college credit courses, and work-based learning in the form of internships. She discussed how they each played a role in this transitional stage:

I was involved in a student organization there even though it wasn't directly related to my current career plan. Through the student organization, which was HOSA, the future health professional's organization, I competed in the behavioral health side of it, which kind of helped me decide on my career plan. It was still helpful even though it's not directly related now. I wasn't [originally] in HOSA. One of my teachers from one of my pathway classes convinced me to try it and I was, "Okay. Sure." I was prepared, but I wasn't like super prepared cause I didn't really know what to expect. And I ended up getting to go to Dallas with them for nationals. That was really cool experience.

I think [I had] 27 credit hours coming into school here. Some of those were directly related to my Academy and some of them are more in gen ed courses. I took College Algebra, Psychology, Sociology, and then there's a couple of classes I had taken over the summer and like at community college. That was all through a program that was

with a partnership between our high school and the community college. The tuition costs were covered for certain classes because of their connection. I also took a, which is really weird, general computers class, just to get computer skills. [Because of all my college credit] it's given me a lot more freedom to like explore interests because I didn't have to worry about going to be in these classes right now in order to graduate on time. The one [requirement] with the scholarship I have is I have to graduate within four years. A lot of students feel like they have to choose between graduating in four years and exploring your interests and seeing if there's other things. I personally, having that many credits, have gotten to take lots of fun and interesting classes. Some of them are related to my future and some of them have just been a good way to broaden my horizons. Right now, I'm in an Honors Seminar about national parks and there's no way I'd be allowed to take that if I didn't have those credits coming in.

I did an internship my senior year. I originally was planning on doing an occupational therapy internship, but that didn't work out because of the town. We just didn't have the opportunity. So, I ended up interning at a physical therapy clinic. It was very informative. I learned a lot about the field and it definitely helped me realize that that's not what I wanted to do. It still gave me that connection with people because I got to work with their patients and talk to them. I would definitely do it again. Like I said, it isn't the same field I ended up in, but the experience was worth it. It gave me the internship experience and it gave me [an understanding of] now I know that isn't necessarily what I was interested in. Whereas if I didn't have the opportunity to test that out when I was going to free public education, I may be like wasting money now figuring that out. I think it was definitely a very beneficial experience.

In addition to the strategic components associated with the career academy, Penny was also active in National Honor Society and worked at her mother's dance studio.

Penny mentioned that one of the reasons for her successful moving in transition was simply because her school had an academy model. The programming of her career academy helped create a smooth transition from moving in to moving through and alleviated some anxiety related to the adjustment to college life.

[If a high school is considering this], I would be like definitely just go for it and try it out because I've, it's really interesting to like, reflect on how much it parallels to my college experience. So if they're in a district where they have a lot of students pursuing higher education, it's definitely something to try because I think it really prepared me for college. I was really excited to see how similar it was because I was really scared. [I thought] everything was gonna be completely different in college and it would be a really hard adjustment. And I think it really helped my adjustment.

Moving Through: The College Situation, Support Systems, and Knowing Herself

Penny seems to have made a seamless transition to college. She enrolled in the Honors College as a freshman and found that she could take some honors courses in place of large general education courses – which she preferred. She also was exposed to mentors and advisors early and became involved in campus student government.

College Situation

The Honors College was a perfect transition for Penny and she immediately made connections to her college setting:

It's weird because it [the Honors College] originally was an honors program, but I think in 2015 became its own like separate college. So, we have like the College of Liberal Arts

and like the Health Professions College. So, it's a separate entity, but you can belong to the Honors College as well as like, if I was a nursing major, I would also be in the health profession or like a Health Sciences College. With that, it requires you to take at least 12 credit hours of honors classes to graduate with honors track on your transcript. Most of the time, those can kind of be intertwined with your major classes. When visiting [the college], they kind of gave us a quick little tour of campus and they mentioned the honors college and I started looking into it. I was able to join because I was scared of being in super, super big classes and I was told that a lot of my gen eds I could take as honors classes and they were smaller and more discussion based. I really liked the idea of that. I also was just interested in the different opportunities. They have like a student lounge and you get free printing, which is a big deal.

While Penny has not participated in any specific internships yet in her program, she is involved in a student research project. She described this research project:

It's actually a combination between the dance and the sociology department and we're interviewing people that live in nursing homes about their moms and like their mother's homes. They're working on making an art show about it. I'm more on the interview and data collection side of that, but it's medical experience.

College Support Systems

Penny's college support systems started during her freshman orientation with a weekend visit and an assigned mentor. She shared how her support system grew with her involvement in the Honors College and student government:

I went to an extended freshman orientation, which just means you got to stay the night. I can't remember if we stayed one or two nights in the dorm. So, you kind of knew what to

expect when you lived there. [For the visit] you weren't necessarily paired with someone in the dorms that was in the same major area as you, but that was just kind of based on when you checked in who you got placed with. [It was] like a dorm mate for the weekend we were there. When we were going through orientation and doing the different activities, we were grouped up and we had a mentor who was in the same academic college with us. So, mine was from the Liberal Arts and Sciences college and with that, they kind of stayed in contact with us throughout this summer and that first semester of college trying to make sure we're transitioning okay. It's kind of cool because you would see those people around and you have those connections before you're actually here.

She [the Honors College advisor] recommends that you see her and one of your advisors from your major just to make sure, but she's capable of doing that [advising you]. When you take honors sections of classes, I think there's a cap on the number of students. I don't think there can be more than 15 students in the class and they are much more discussion-based and like seminar style classes.

I recently joined SGO (Student Government Organization). I had played with the idea of joining, like since I came to [my college], just cause I had seen kind of the work they've done and I was really interested in it. But when I was first coming in, I was too scared to get too involved and like get burnt out really quick and not be interested in the things I like. So I kind of stepped back from that and didn't join. I actually have a friend that worked in SGO before I did, and she told me they were opening up new positions and kind of explained them to me and this particular position that opened up was in policy research and that's something I'm really interested in. And so I just felt like it was really good fit for me. And so that's what I did. Several of my closest friends are all like really

involved in SGO, and so kind of hearing from their experiences drew me in. I really enjoy it because I feel it's a very welcoming place and it's also very easy to communicate with everybody there just because it is a small group. I think there'll be like important connections that we'll use later on in life just because I get to work so closely with those people.

Knowing Herself

Penny continued to learn a lot about herself as she transitioned through college. As an initial psychology major, she took classes which helped her realize social work was of even greater interest to her:

I actually came in as a psychology major. It was still just like, I don't know what I'm doing. I took an Intro to Social Work class just to fulfill a requirement that I needed for the social science department or something. I'd already taken some of the other classes that people usually take to fill those up. And in there, I just liked the various directions I could go. If I still wanted to do something in the health field, I could still do social work like in a hospital or if I want to decide to like go more towards psychology, you can get clinically trained in. So I just liked the broad opportunities there. I think that's a big challenge with a lot of people is they just don't know what options they do have. I didn't know that social work had so many various options inside of it and that's kind of what solidified my decision is that I'd have a lot of flexibility. I switched like right after my first semester.

Moving Out: The College Situation, Support Systems, Individual Self, and Strategic Components

Penny already has a plan for moving into the next transitional stage of her life. She plans on attending graduate school. She's not sure whether that will be at her current college or somewhere else. She says her college experience has prepared her for the transitional stage of moving out.

I think at least personally in my department, we do a really good job of connecting students to practicums or internships and trying to like build those connections to the community to potentially get a job in the future or be able to do that. And I also think just the classes as well as the connections I've made with professors has really helped me grow my communication skills. I'm much more prepared to be able to sit in on an interview or be able to figure out how to apply for a job. I plan to go to graduate school. I'm not really set on a school – if I plan to stay here or go somewhere else.

Support Systems

Penny referred to multiple support systems that she developed during her moving through stage that helped her become confident of the career field she selected. The Honors College helped her make connections on campus that encouraged her to join student government that helped her connect with an on-campus research project. These supports opened the door to a better understanding of the possibilities that are available to her in social work. She found that she is interested in policy writing that impacts social agendas and that knowledge all stemmed from the support system she developed on campus. By better understanding her career choice Penny noted she is ready to move out to her next transitional stage.

Individual Self

Penny noted that she is anxious about the next phase of her educational journey. The practicum experience will provide true insight into the workplace and Penny is ready to experience that next step.

I'm really excited to have that opportunity [for practicums]. It's like the workplace culture. I'm really excited to have that opportunity before I graduate to be prepared for the workplace.

Strategic Components

Some of Penny's senior coursework provided opportunities for transitioning to the workforce. She described a specific course that focused on real-life scenarios that resembled actual workplace experiences.

I just finished my practicum interview this morning, so that won't start until next fall, but I do have like kind of an idea of my potential placements and what that's gonna look like for me. It's kind of in conjunction with a couple of our senior classes that we take. We each have practicums for like it's roughly 15 hours a week, sometimes more. There's one class specifically about your practicum and you get together to discuss different scenarios you've encountered and just like what being out in a real like workforce is like.

Improving the College Experience

Penny did take some large general education courses but felt those classes could have been administered differently and that would have been of benefit to her experience.

I'm all about interdisciplinary collaboration, but I think general ed courses get really large and it's really hard to connect to the students, especially if you aren't in the same classes otherwise. I think like maybe not necessarily major based general education

courses, but maybe just like finding a way to match those students up within their courses. That way they have like a support system and people to reach out to, because they'll probably be in classes with those students later on. So why not build those connections as early as possible.

Summary of Penny's Story

Penny demonstrated determination and resilience and seems to have found her vocational passion in life. She enjoys being involved on her college campus and used her experiences in the career academy to make career decisions and course selections. The career academy offered her multiple supports that created a smooth moving in transition and set the stage to propel her through her college experience.

Summary of Participant Findings

These narratives share the experiences of four participants as they transitioned from a high school career academy and moved into college, moved through, and have begun to move out and into the workforce. Their experiences have many similarities in terms of the make-up of the academy structure, and their individual reaction to the academy. As outlined in literature the four components of a quality career academy include: small learning community, work-based learning, college/business partnerships, and career-themed instruction. include. Table 3 shows that each participant experienced three components with the career-themed instruction only in the career and technical education classes.

Table 3*Students' Experience with A Quality Career Academy*

| | Small learning community | Work-based learning | College/business partnerships | Career-themed instruction in core academics |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Kim (BEACH) | X | X | X | |
| Truck (ITA) | X | X | X | |
| Andrea (Health & Human Services) | X | X | X | |
| Penny (SET) | X | X | X | |

While all participants shared similarities in their high school academy settings, Table 4 highlights the experiences of each participant during their transitional stages.

Table 4*Participants' Transitional Stages*

| | Changed career choice in college | Moving In | Moving Through | Moving Out |
|-------------|---|---|--|--|
| Kim (BEACH) | No - education | Smooth transition – similar high school and college population/setting | Actively involved in campus (track and Mental Health Group); on track to graduate from college | Will student teach in Spring 2021 |
| Truck (ITA) | No – career change was made in the career academy from IT to psychology | Struggled with personal loss, but found supports to help; transitional situation improved | Actively involved in campus (football, resident assistant, Student Senate VP); on track to graduate from college | Will return to home state and attempt to enroll in James Morehouse program at Cal Berkley and get a master's degree; OR may stay one more year at current college and use athletic eligibility |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Andrea (Health & Human Services) | No - healthcare | Difficult transition; was overwhelmed by college due to personal issues and an unclear direction of a specific career within the medical field | Little campus involvement; struggled with degree choice, but settled in during the sophomore year and is doing great now | Wants to get a job immediately in nursing; possibly pursue a master's degree in 3-4 years |
| Penny (SET) | Yes – psychology to social work | Smooth transition due to Honors College setting and campus mentor | Actively involved in campus (Honors College, campus job, Student Government Organization); on track to graduate from college | Feels very prepared for the workforce and plans on pursuing a master's degree |

All four participants shared the same components of a quality career academy and had exposure to the same foundational elements. Of the four participants, three entered higher education with a degree plan in mind and did not change that plan in terms of staying within the chosen field. The fourth participant had a degree plan identified when moving in but changed her field after her first semester due to exposure to coursework in a different field of study that ultimately lead her to her current major focus. Two of the participants had smooth transitions into college and two did not which was due to personal issues for one student and lack of preparation and decision making for the other.

Another similarity between the participants was that three were actively involved in their career academy student organization and all four were involved in some aspect of high school. Truck was not actively involved in his career academy because he chose not to pursue an IT career path. This lack of academy involvement did not, however, hinder his college campus

involvement. Of the three students who were active in their career academy, two continued to be active on their campus. Only Andrea struggled with campus involvement.

All four students have a plan for either obtaining an advanced degree in their chosen field or moving into the workforce after graduation.

A Sense of Self Began to Develop During their High School Years

One of the 4 S's from Schlossberg's transitional process included the "self" component. Self is identified as the "person's inner strength for coping with the situation" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). A sense of self also includes a person's optimism, confidence, and ability to deal with ambiguous situations. The analysis of each participant's narrative showed a growing sense of self with the ability to act with confidence and an efficacy to change. Each participant shared how the career academy helped define their career goals before leaving high school.

This sense of self developed in Kim during her college-credit Intro to Teaching class in high school. She knew that education was the right career field for her, and her observation hours solidified that decision. She noted that she selected her degree in high school and did not change that decision. The college observation hours and her college coursework confirmed that she is ready to move out into student teaching with confidence.

Truck learned that information technology was not the career field for him. He struggled academically and IT proved too difficult for him. Through a supportive career academy staff and life events, he found his true passion in helping others thus strengthening his sense of self. This sense propelled him to choose a degree in psychology.

Andrea's sense of self was boosted by a strong foundation of knowing about healthcare opportunities in her career academy which guided her to her current degree of nursing. Her degree path took some turns, but her sense of self and desire to be in some aspect of healthcare

helped her find a true calling as a nurse. Andrea is also very self-aware and, while she does not see herself as a leader or strong communicator, she has developed the strategies that help her persevere and overcome obstacles.

Penny shared how her sense of self began to develop in high school and continued to grow early in her college experience. She recognized through her career academy work-based learning experiences that healthcare was not the career field she wanted and, with the support of her government teacher, began to explore her current vocational choice of social work. She also grew in confidence when she participated in the Health Occupations Student Association (HOSA) and competed in an event that she was not fully prepared for yet qualified for the national competition. Penny had the self-efficacy to step out, learn something new, and then applied that confidence to her current involvement in Student Government on her college campus.

While two of the participants stayed true to the theme of their career academy and two chose degree paths that differed, all four developed a strong degree of self-awareness about who they were as a person and the vocational direction they wanted to pursue. The roots of each participants' sense of self were rooted in their career academy experience which propelled them to transition through their college experience, and on-track to move out into the workforce.

Experiential Learning and College Partnerships were Critically Important

The foundational elements of a quality career academy include small learning communities, work-based learning experiences, partnerships with businesses and colleges, and career-themed instruction (Brand et al., 2009; Stern et al., 2010). Career-themed instruction was present in the form of a career and technical education course within the academy; however, it was not present in core academic areas.

Experiential Learning

The experiential learning element took the form of internships, observations, job shadowing, guest speakers, and field trips and highlighted the benefits of business partnerships. Each participant spoke to the impact that this type of learning had on their academy experience. Kim and Andrea have experienced observations through their college experience while Truck and Penny are looking forward to those in their senior year programming. Andrea will also continue to have more hands-on learning in her senior year. All participants elaborated on the benefits as outlined by Bailey et al. (2003) and Kazis (2005) in their research on student benefits associated with work-based learning.

One such benefit was enhancement in work-related skills and understanding of careers. Kim, Andrea, and Penny gained in-depth knowledge of their career choice. This knowledge helped Kim and Andrea choose to stay within their academy theme while Penny veered from the physical side of healthcare to social and emotional support. While Truck said the field trips were interesting and informative, IT was not his passion and he choose not to participate in in the business partnerships.

College Partnerships

Andrea and Penny demonstrated the greatest benefit of their high school's college partnerships. Andrea started college "as practically a sophomore" and Penny entered with 27 hours of college credit. Penny noted that this partnership afforded her the freedom to take exploratory classes of interest rather than focusing on just graduating in four years as required by her scholarship. Both participants, along with Kim, discussed how these partnerships helped them determine career interests before incurring financial burdens from student loans or time lost due to uncertainty of a career choice (Lanford & Maruco, 2017).

College partnerships also allowed the students to experience college coursework, understand the levels of college rigor, and have a truer understanding of the career field. These partnerships were important factors in the successful transition into college and created a solid academy foundation for the participants. Kim expressed that her high school college-credit Intro to Teaching class was rigorous to the point of being more challenging than her current college coursework. She credits this level of understanding in her college coursework to the number of hours of observation and learning in her career academy college partnership. Penny also shared that her high school college-credit coursework helped her learn about a career field that was not strongly emphasized in her career academy and opened the door for her to experience a career field that she had not yet considered. Her college partnership also allowed her to experience courses that she would have not had the flexibility to take which allowed her to pursue personal interests. While partnerships were available for Truck, he elected to not participate in those opportunities as he considered another career field.

Themed Instruction Was Not Identified as Critically Important by Participants

Each participant's career academy included career and technical education (CTE) courses with the goal of implementing academic coursework in a relevant and rigorous program of study (National Career Academy Coalition, 2019). In the CTE courses are where the field trips, guest speakers, and observations were typically implemented, and these courses focused primarily on the student's individual career choice. It was here that all four students made the connection to their career choice. The CTE course for all participants was also offered for college credit.

According to the four students, this career connection was limited to just the CTE courses and not infused in the core academic classes. This absence of career-themed instruction in core academic classes did not impact the overall effectiveness of the academy on those transitions.

While students commented that they could see benefit of career-themed instruction in English or science, for example, it did not diminish the influence of the career academy on their college experience. Kim noted that while she could see benefit in this type of instruction, she could not see how her teachers would do this with such broad career themes in each academy. Kim's BEACH Academy housed Business, Education, Arts (Fine), Culinary, and Human Services. Participants found college coursework to be more career-themed as they get closer to moving out into the workforce. In her college degree program, Andrea took Evidence-based Practice which was a statistics class for nursing students. In this course she learned how experiments were done, how research is conducted, and how to read research papers. This math class was taught through the lens of a healthcare professional which she noted as being very helpful and relevant.

Penny noted that none of her core academics in high school included career-themed instruction, but that did not diminish the impact the academy had on her experience. She felt that type of instruction would be "interesting," but in order for it to work the academies would have to be "split up a little bit more." Even without the career-themed instruction Penny said she would advise any school district to consider this model of instruction.

Different Sources of Support for Participants Influenced College Experiences

Each participant shared how connections with peers and teachers was an important piece of their academic experience. A study by Libbey (2004), found that students who feel they belong and are connected to the school and have teachers who are supportive and treat them well will do better in school both academically and socially. The essence of school is gaining knowledge, but the attention to the non-academic aspects contribute significantly to the student's success (Libbey, 2004).

Career Academy Support

Lanford and Maruco (2017) called the consistent grouping of students over three years the “single greatest benefit to participation in a career academy” (p. 619). This benefit is felt between students and teachers as well as between students and students. Each participant shared stories of how peers, career academy teachers, and academy leads were influential in their high school experience and in the moving in transitional stage of college. Each of the four participants named supports in their career academy that continue to influence their experiences in college. Kim identified high school academy friends that she continues to stay in touch with even during her college years. Truck referred to his academy lead, Chris, as “the man” and his academy peers as strong academic helpers who helped him through his academy classes and who would help again if he needed them to. Andrea talked about her academy lead who was also her Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) advisor and taught two of her classes. This advisor encouraged her to join HOSA and she created a strong connection with this teacher. Penny noted the influence of her government teacher on the selection of her college major and talked about how her government teacher encouraged her to pursue her interest in college-credit courses.

Along with the support provided by the career academy, each of the participants also specifically noted the importance of community as a contributing factor to their career choice and successful transition into and through college.

College Support

Mauder et al. (2013) explored the importance of active social relationships in the first and second year of college, fear of a new environment, and the desire to form close relationships. This experience was shared by Penny who realized she wanted the same small, learning environment due to a fear of large classes and enrolled in the Honors College her freshman year

of college. The Honors College provided her class sizes of approximately 15 and allowed her to make peer connections that led to involvement in student government and an on-campus job at the Honors College. Kim and Truck also both found connections to their college as they transitioned in by connecting with their respective athletic teams – a bond similar to their high school athletic team bonds. This initial involvement in athletics formed the foundations to friendships and future involvement on campus. Truck specifically identified that the connections he had on campus are what made him stay in college when he struggled his freshman year. Andrea did not make this connection early in her college transition but did later in her junior year as she advanced in her nursing program.

Each participant identified a college support that helped them through their transition through and out of college. Kim identified her college advisor as her “go to” and the person who she went to for help when needed. Just as his academy lead teacher, Truck referred to his college teacher/advisor as “the man” and alluded to the overall teaching staff who “made him better” as a student and person. Andrea talked about current nursing instructors who she referred to as “awesome” and helped her connect with college. Penny mentioned college student groups within the Honors College and student government where she feels welcomed and able to connect with others with similar interests. All four participants learned how to make and use beneficial connections in their years with the career academy and applied that experience to make strong college connections during their transitional years which helped them persist through to the moving out stage.

Ways Institutions of Higher Education Could Improve Participant’s Experiences

The student participants were asked to reflect on ways that their experiences transitioning through higher education could have been improved. Three of the four students identified

making college connections early in the moving in stage as important. For Kim and Truck, athletics were the early connection to integration, and for Penny the Honors College and mentors she interacted with during freshman orientation provided that connection. Andrea, however, did not have those kinds of positive experiences. She instead was assigned an advisor who met with her via email, discouraged her from her career choice, and placed her in large classes where she struggled to make peer connections. Drawing from their own experiences, each student also suggested specific ways the college or university could improve on the participant's experience.

Kim's suggestion was to make a connection to the career field earlier in the student's educational journey. She realized that she was fortunate enough to have an internship that provided her with 130+ hours of classroom observations and many of her peers did not. Kim felt like allowing students to begin observing sooner would provide a better experience and connection to their career.

A key element for improving Truck's college experience would be increasing exposure to the workplace earlier in his degree plan. This could include any type of work-based learning such as a job shadow, internships, or field trips to help him better understand the career itself, but also how to function in today's workplace setting. Truck described himself as a typical college student who simply goes through the day-to-day repetition of class and homework with little exposure to the workplace. Additionally, Truck had not had any previous work experience as his parents encouraged him to participate in athletics.

Key things that would have improved Andrea's higher education experience were meeting face-to-face with an advisor who supported her, being placed in smaller class sizes, and finding connections in her general education classes to her career choice. She felt disconnected from the start of her moving in experience as she herself struggled with communication skills,

lack of self-confidence, and uncertainty about college life. Her primary motivation for persisting in college came from her family, as getting a degree was a family expectation.

Like Andrea, Penny too felt that classes sizes were too large in general education courses and did not promote peer relationships. She saw value in building early connections due to her initial freshman orientation experience and noted that these connections should be done early in the moving in stage. Penny suggested that limiting the number of students in general education classes, similar to her experience in the Honors College, would help students make connections and be more successful in transitions.

The stories of these four students demonstrate an ongoing influence originating from the high school career academy and lasting through the stages and the 4 S's of Schlossberg's Theory of Transition. Findings indicated that all participants were influenced by attending high school career academies, and much of the evidence is seen in their responses to the questions focused on situation, self, support, and strategies. The career academy experience had a positive influence in each area; however, each participant had their own personal experiences that also informed their paths in college and university life.

Participants shared how the academy helped them regarding major selection and career preparation in the university setting. Two participants, Kim and Andrea, choose their degree in high school and continued with that degree plan through college. Truck completely changed his degree path while still in high school and Penny stayed under the umbrella of human services but moved to mental health as opposed to a medical profession. Knowing what their degree plan was or how to make a new plan helped all four participants with course selection and degree persistence.

Each student described ways the university influenced each of their transitional stages. Early campus connections were instrumental for three of the four participants, but the fourth, Andrea, made strong connections during her junior year. Students noted that they developed a strong sense of self in their career academy that continued to develop during their moving through transitional stage. This development came from coursework, student organizations, and on-campus activities experienced in the moving through stage. Experiential learning opportunities helped Kim and Andrea prepare to move out into the workforce immediately upon graduation. Truck and Penny expect their future experiences pursuing their career majors to do the same. The following chapter will provide a discussion of the implications of this research.

CHAPTER 5

As participants reflected on the experiences in their high school career academy and their transitional stages of higher education, Kim, Truck, Andrea, and Penny described how the influence of the career academy impacted many aspects of their life. I found some similarities within their narratives and some unique transition differences. Stories they shared about their experiences included career academy programming, campus connections made upon moving in and moving through higher education, and growth in the areas of confidence, self-efficacy, and perseverance. This chapter will focus on discussions and implications drawn from the findings found in Chapter 4 of this research. The chapter will conclude with exploring recommendations that can be relevant for higher education administration as they work to retain students and encourage persistence toward degree completion as well as for secondary schools as they consider career academy programming.

Discussions and Implications

High schools devote much time to investigating which postsecondary path their graduates chose, be it a postsecondary institution, military, or career. Higher education also invests considerable time to gather data on such areas as first-year students, first-generation students, and retention. While both institutions are tracking valuable data, neither is tracking how a high school career academy influenced the college student as they transitioned in, through, and out of higher education. Research on the impact of a career academy on students in higher education has been primarily quantitative in nature focusing on college acceptance rates, needs for academic remediation at the university level, and measuring and comparing university graduation rates between career academy and non-career academy student populations (Maxwell, 2001; Orr et al., 2007; Stern et al., 2010; Stern et al., 2007). Using a narrative inquiry approach,

this study was designed to learn about the experiences of a high school career academy graduate and to hear their perceptions on how the academy model impacted them in higher education. To learn more about these students' perceptions, this study explored two research questions: 1) How do participants describe the influence of their participation in a high school career academy relating to their transition decisions regarding major selection and career preparation in the university setting, and 2) Based on their career academy experience, how do participants describe ways the university influenced their transitions of moving in, moving through, and moving out?

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition was a valuable framework in providing a lens to analyze and interpret each student's narrative. The 4 S's of this theory contributed to my understanding of the student's experience and helped me organize the narratives into four consistent areas. Through the transitional stages of this theoretical framework, I was able to better understand how the academy impacted each area of the students' journey in higher education.

Discussion of Key Impacts Experienced During Transitional Stages

Three areas emerged as significant items for discussion. These areas come from the narrative data provided by the research participants and are supported by literature. The following discussion highlights three topics that each of the participants experienced in their transitional stages of moving from the high school career academy, through their college experience, and into preparation of their moving out phase.

Components of Career Academy Strengthens Confidence in Choice

All four participants shared that they enjoyed their career academy experience and the components of the academy model provided them a strong foundation for understanding the

career field they had chosen. They all also shared how being a part of an academy helped them better understand themselves and their interests. Self-confidence was promoted and fostered by the components of the career academy; however, the participants experienced growth in this area in different ways as they transitioned through college.

Two participants entered college with a degree plan in mind. Kim's experience in her career academy solidified her choice of a career in education and she found that as she stayed consistent in her college degree plan, she continued to grow in her confidence that she had selected the right career path. This confidence enabled her to develop strong connections with her advisor, seek out college involvement related to her major, and develop an assurance that she was equipped to move into her next educational transition of student teaching. Her self-confidence soared when she did classroom observations and found that she knew what was happening in the classroom, understood the teaching strategies being used, and recognized the structure of lessons to incorporate common core instruction. She recognized that she was much more advanced in understanding of her career as opposed to her peers due to her career academy programming.

Truck too developed a sense of confidence in his career academy that stemmed from learning about a career in IT and deciding that it was not for him. This decision was also impacted by life events, but it was solidified by the coursework in the academy. Truck was able to explore psychology classes while in the IT academy due to the unique scheduling system at his high school and he developed a strong interest in this career field. Upon entering college, he chose psychology as his degree and found ways to engage with his career choice while on campus. Truck's self-confidence was strengthened through his extra-curricular involvement on campus. He found that serving as a resident assistant afforded him opportunities to work

individually with residents, help them solve problems, and be an aide to those in need. He described this as his “calling.” Truck’s involvement in Student Senate is another example of developing self-confidence. By joining this campus organization, he was also able to help others by setting policies and procedures that impacted his peers. Truck began to identify his desire to help people while in the career academy and prompted his choosing psychology as a career focus. Career academy instructors helped him switch focus areas to explore his changing interest. In higher education, extra-curricular campus activities were where Truck’s self-confidence grew based on his career academy experience.

Two of the participants began college with a degree plan in mind but changed direction during the early stages of their journey. Penny entered college with a declared major of psychology because she found an attraction to this field based on her career academy programming. Because she started college with 27 hours of college credit, she was able to take upper-level degree courses as opposed to a schedule full of general education requirements. As a university freshman, Penny knew the career field she wanted and had a strong understanding of herself that enabled her to recognize a particular area within that field that piqued her interest. During her first semester she took a course within her psychology degree plan related to social work. It was in this social work course that Penny found her true career passion and changed her major to social work. Her self-confidence continued to develop as she made connections to peers in her social work classes and joined Student Government Organization (SGO) due to these connections. Her SGO membership was another step in her development as Penny found that SGO exposed her to research opportunities on campus that further solidified her passion for social work. She declared social work as her major at the end of the first semester of her freshman year and has not deviated from that plan since.

Andrea's journey in college had a significant setback in her moving in transition and in her early stages of moving through the first two years of higher education. While in the high school career academy, Andrea found her passion in healthcare due to career academy programming which exposed her to various career choices through observations and specific coursework. She moved into college with a clear direction of finding a career in healthcare; however, she was uncertain of the exact direction to take. Upon entering college, she found herself enrolled in general education courses of 70 or more students and felt overwhelmed by the experience. To add to this poor transition, Andrea did not have a good experience with her advisor. She never met him in a face-to-face setting and his only advice was to discourage her from the pre-med degree path she had selected. While these experiences caused her to question her college experience, Andrea persevered. She learned about certified nursing assistant (CNA) and certified medical assistant (CMA) programs while in the high school academy and waited until the end of her freshman year to take these courses so she would be eligible due to age restrictions. As she moved through her sophomore year and had the opportunity to work as a CNA, her confidence grew, and she dropped her pursuit of physician assistant and healthcare management and selected a degree in nursing. In discussing her confidence in selecting a career field Andrea referenced the experiential learning component of her career academy. She identified her involvement with HOSA as helping her build her tenacity in overcoming personal challenges. After three semesters in higher education Andrea decided to pursue a degree in nursing that resonated with her previous successes in coursework and experiences related to the field. She found the university nursing staff to be welcoming and supportive and Andrea had now found her place within healthcare.

The experiences of all four participants demonstrated that seeds of self-confidence started in the career academy and continued to grow through the students' educational journey. The development of self-confidence through a strong sense of knowing yourself is supported by Schlossberg's 4 S's of the theoretical framework. The "self" component of the theory is defined as who the student is, his or her optimism level, and how he/she deals with ambiguity. The framework illustrated ways in which the students' experiences of the components of a career academy contributed to the development of knowledge of self. The literature review also noted that students were more likely to persist when the higher educational institution fostered a connection through their career interest or early experiences with an advisor (Hoyt, 1999). Kim, Truck, and Penny found those connections to their career interests much easier than Andrea experienced; however, all four had the courage to persist and are on track to graduate in their selected degree.

Social Integration is a Key Element to College Success

The participants' narratives in this study highlight the importance of relationships built through small group settings in the transitional stages of their educational journey. These relationships provided a sense of belonging, support with academic decisions, and encouragement to be involved in student organizations and activities. In her work on small learning communities, Cotton (2001) noted that these communities create an environment that works to promote increased student learning, enhances collegiality, and allows for individualized relationships between teachers and students. Small learning communities are an integral part of the high school career academy and the higher educational experience which can build on a student's need to feel connected by providing small group supports.

During the transitional stage of moving in two participants were immediately connected to an athletic cohort and campus connections were made with other athletes on their respective teams. As noted in his narrative, it was this connection that encouraged Truck to stay in school. As they continued through their educational journey and matured as individuals, both Kim and Truck sought out additional on-campus involvement that connected them to the campus and other student associations. For Kim, this connection was a group that promoted mental health and for Truck it was serving as a residence assistant and student senate membership. Both Kim and Truck came in with an established support system, but they continued to develop other supports that connected them to their career field. They also fostered a strong relationship with their advisors that they felt was significant in helping them transition out of college. Kim and Truck were very connected to their campus setting which has helped them persist toward degree completion.

Another participant also made early campus connections in the smaller class sizes of the Honors College. Penny was able to form friendships in the smaller settings as well as made ties with students from her extended, overnight orientation experience. Her Honors College connections helped her obtain a job in the Honors College and introduced her to membership in the Student Government Organization (SGO). Her SGO membership introduced her to policy work which in turn helped her see a connection to how policy research could impact her degree of social work. Like Kim and Truck, Penny continued to look for additional supports related to her degree as she transitioned through college and matured as an individual.

Andrea's social integration was more challenging in her moving in transition. She was not a part of a living learning community, a scholar's program, or a departmental organization. She participated in some class group discussions but struggled to make college connections

which she attributed to challenges with her language and the large class sizes. The lack of connection with her advisor also hindered her social connection as she was discouraged in her choice of degree causing her to second-guess her involvement in specific degree-centered groups. It was not until Andrea selected a degree in nursing later in her sophomore year that she found a connection to her nursing instructors and made college connections that helped her persist in her degree completion.

The small learning community is not only an important factor in the high school, but in higher education as well. The high schools represented in this study ranged from a student population of 550 to 1,500 and the higher education institutions included a small, private college with an on-campus enrollment of approximately 600 and a large, urban university of over 11,000 undergraduate students. Participants from the small settings to large, all noted the impact of a small, learning community and the support of campus connections. In her work, Cotton (2001) wrote that students can find ways to better connect and care about one another in smaller environments as opposed to larger settings. The conclusion here is that the overall student population of the school may not matter. What does matter is that there is a community that students are engaged in and those connections should be made early and continue throughout the college experience. This small learning community connection is proven to be significant element to college success as all four participants are on track to graduate and move out into the workforce.

Early Exposure to Experiential Learning is Important

Research notes the many challenges of moving from college to the workplace such as a change in culture (Chao, 2005), uncertainty of what to expect and lack of workplace decorum (Hettich & Landrum, 2014; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008), and a

general unpreparedness for today's workforce needs (Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006). These challenges can be addressed through experiential learning at the college level. Four main student benefits surface throughout research regarding work-based learning including improvement in academic learning, enhancement in work-related skills and understanding of careers, growth in social and emotional development toward adulthood, and engagement in soft skills of critical thinking and problem solving (Bailey et al., 2003; Kazis, 2005). Just as this learning helped students make career choices at the high school level, it can prepare them to move out into today's workforce by immersing them in the workplace. In the high school career academy experience, students reported that their job shadows, internships, and observations were deciding factors in their career choice as it gave them real-world exposure to the vocation. This experiential learning experience at the college level will also promote a sense of readiness and preparedness for students as they transition into their moving out stage.

Kim shared that her college observations truly prepared her for student teaching and a future career as an elementary teacher. She noted that as she observed and assisted in her observation classes, she felt ready and understood the requirements of differentiated instruction, common core teaching, and technology tools to use to improve teaching and learning. Kim's career academy experience allowed her to experience classroom observations much sooner than her peers. She noted that the observation element for her classmates may not have started until their sophomore or even junior years, a practice she disagreed with. Kim found value in being able to get into classrooms early as it confirmed her degree choice and better prepared her to become a teacher.

Andrea had also experienced many hands-on learning activities which she said helped her to better understand the classroom learning. These experiences started late in her sophomore

year and will continue until she is done with her nursing program. She has more hands-on learning to come in her practicum and capstone courses and felt like these courses will be the best learning experience for her yet. Andrea specifically mentioned that she learns better by doing rather than reading from a textbook and this program meets her learning style.

Truck and Penny are at the end of their first semester of their junior year and have yet to experience any experiential learning component of their degree. They both will complete their practicums during their senior year academic plan. During the senior year Penny will have a class that allows students to discuss different scenarios encountered during their practicums and what being out in the workforce is like. She noted that her school does a good job of connecting students to internships and making connections to the community, but not until the senior year.

All four students expressed the importance of their academic coursework; however, getting into the field was an important element of their program and what they looked forward to most. The experiential learning piece of the academic program was the greatest benefit and most anticipated component of the program for these four participants. Higher education institutions who are intentional about getting students into experiential learning activities earlier in their degree program will build confidence, understanding of the career, and knowledge of today's workplace setting. Even the students who had no exposure and lacked any first-hand experience into the actual career setting understood and valued its importance. Experiential learning is the connection from the classroom to the career and, according to research and the experience of these participants, is a critical element for successful transition into the workplace.

Implications for Educational Programming

Career academies provide opportunities for career exposure, personal growth in confidence and self-efficacy, and chances for the development of relationships with peers and

teachers. Higher education may also attempt to provide these opportunities but understanding whether the institution is accomplishing these goals are best done by listening to the individual experiences as told by the students themselves. The literature review supports the need for students to make campus connections to promote personal growth and develop relationships that foster a greater understanding of their career choices. This study's participants through their distinctive experiences confirm what literature suggests and this narrative data contributes to this literature. All four participants had unique experiences based on how they connected with their campus, built relationships, and prepared to move into their chosen career.

The Importance of Campus Connections for Successful Social Integration

While each participant shared how they built connections on their campus, their stories varied based on the initial transition of moving in. This early intervention promoted either a positive or negative experience. In a study by Klem and Connell (2004) researchers found that institutions where students feel faculty and staff are involved with them and care about them are more engaged and connected to school. This same study also noted that students with caring and supportive social relationships in school report more "positive academic attitudes, values and more satisfaction with school." The experience of the students in my research echoes the findings of this study.

Three participants had immediate engagement in their respective schools through a cohort they entered on their first day on campus. Kim and Truck had coaches that engaged with them instantly and teammates that they formed bonds with. Penny too had immediate engagement in the smaller class sizes of the Honors College. The students in this study shared that their positive connections are what kept them in school, opened doors for additional extra-curricular involvement, and introduced them to a greater circle of influences. A study by

Friedlander et al (2007) found that social support was an important factor that assisted students in transitioning to higher education. This transition was improved when students perceived they had supportive social resources. Maunder et al (2013) identified this need for social relationships beyond the initial moving in transition and into the moving through stage.

Andrea's initial moving in experience was negative due to a lack of campus connection. She did not find supportive social relationships until she connected with the professors in her nursing classes later in her college experience. Due to a lack of support, Andrea struggled in her early university years. The participant narratives in my research demonstrated the importance of building early relationships and sustaining those relationships to encourage additional supports in their overall network. Early avenues of support are important during the first year of higher education as they set the foundation for expanded campus connectivity, personal growth, and stronger, more developed social relationships with faculty and peers. Additionally, it is important that institutions provide that additional structure within their campus setting to sustain and foster social connections as students move through and out of college.

Career Development is Essential to Completion of Higher Education Programming and Movement to the Field

The opportunities to connect directly with their chosen career field in their higher education institutions varied between the study participants. For some it happened in the first year and for others they have yet to see their career in a real-life experience. Exposure to the career field prior to graduation is essential in helping students develop workplace skills specific to their industry (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Stevens, 2005; Stewart et al., 2016). This exposure also helps students develop realistic expectations of workplace decorum and improves the chances for higher job satisfaction upon entering the workforce (Marcia, 2010).

In this study, participants who had experienced experiential learning found this to be rewarding and affirmed their career choice. They found practical, hands-on learning that gave them a sense of growth and confidence in their chosen degree path and in their employment skillset. Those that had yet to experience this learning looked forward to it as the area that would bring the most beneficial learning of their higher education experience. Exposure to career development through experiential learning can help students experience academic achievement, degree completion and successful transition to the labor market through such activities as describing the recruitment processes, researching the most compatible work environment, and connecting students to potential employers (Sampson, 2011). Career development activities that put students in the workplace and provide the real-world applications of classroom instruction increases the importance and applicability of their learning.

These narratives provide guidance and implications for higher education programming to include experiential learning as a key element in each student's degree plan. Together the literature and narratives demonstrate that colleges who create opportunities for students to participate in this learning encourage academic momentum toward degree completion.

This research provides implications for programming at higher education institutions as well as at the high school level. The experiences of the participants in this study highlight the institutional programming needs that have propelled them toward degree completion, but also practices that could have better supported their educational journey.

Higher Education Programming

The narratives of this study's participants indicated the importance of experiential learning in their high school career academy. Because they found this as an invaluable piece of their education journey, higher education should seek to include experiential learning early in the

student's moving in and moving through transition. Schools could evaluate positions held in student success departments or in student orientation classes and designate individuals to facilitate a job shadow and/or internship during the students' freshman year. This practice will either affirm or discount major selections and foster momentum toward degree completion. To facilitate this experiential learning, staff should build a base of job placements and business professionals that will partner with the college to provide these opportunities. Liaisons could also be assigned between the college and businesses to ensure that students are meeting the experiential learning objectives and to provide an avenue for businesses to voice opinions regarding their partnership.

Many career academy students enter college with multiple college credits and a confident plan for their major selection. For these students, internships, observations, or other longer experiential learning activities will allow them to continue building on their career academy experience by growing their professional network, continuing to learn about the career, and developing workplace skills specific to that industry.

A second area for higher education programming is to seek opportunities to create smaller degree paths to foster social integration. Rather than having large general education courses filled with students of mixed degree paths, general education courses could be consolidated to smaller settings, focused on degree selection. This will foster a greater sense of community and connection with peers in the same degree. It will also provide opportunity for professors to know their students more intimately, allow students to feel cared for, and promote degree completion as noted in literature. These smaller class sizes support findings from literature and the narratives expressed by participants.

A third approach is to assign students an advisor in their degree. Students in this research came into college with a solid understanding of the career path they were interested in pursuing. To build on this confidence, career academy students should be assigned to an advisor in the degree that matches that career field. This early connection to their academic advisor builds an immediate campus connection for all students especially those who do not enter automatically into a cohort. These academic advisors should have training on how to advise that includes knowing the course progression of both general education requirements and their specific degree plans, understanding college enrollment tools and programs, and identifying key staff who can answer questions such as transfer credits and prerequisite requirements. In addition to these college specific areas of advising, academic advisors should be trained on empathy and ways to encourage inclusion.

High School Programming

The narratives in this research demonstrated the importance and the influence the career academy had through every transitional stage of their higher educational journey. Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, the implication for high school programming would be to implement a career academy model of instruction with the components of a quality academy as outlined in literature. These components include a small learning community, career-based experiential learning opportunities, and a college prep curriculum with collegiate partners to promote dual credit coursework. The positive experience of the four participants in this research who came from four different academy programs in three different states affirms the benefits that a career academy model of instruction provides students at the secondary level and throughout their college experience. From saving on student debt to enhancing personal growth and confidence, and in building positive relationships that are the foundation of a professional

network, the influence of the high school career academy continues to positively guide students in their higher education endeavors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STUDENT EMAIL INVITATION

Subject: Doctoral Study Student Invitation

Hello,

My name is Melinda Rangel and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to be a part of research that will be used in my doctoral dissertation. I was given your contact information from the Office of Planning and Assessment at MRU. My research interest focuses on the influence student participation in a high school career academy has on a student's future transition path through college. Since you graduated from a high school that has implemented career academies, I am hopeful that you will accept my invitation to be included in my research. I am planning to begin work on my research in the next few months with data collection beginning in the fall semester.

I would be happy to meet in person or chat over the phone at your earliest convenience to discuss this opportunity in greater detail. Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of former career academy students regarding if, or how, their participation in a high school career academy influenced their university experiences as they progress through their higher education institution. The study will record experiences from individual academy graduates in their junior or senior year of college as they look back at their academy foundational teaching in high school and apply it to their current university experience. The significance of the study is that it may provide secondary schools

APPENDIX A (continued)

with information from career academy graduates about how the program informed their post-high school decisions. The study may suggest ways that colleges and universities can capitalize on the career academy elements as they seek to recruit and retain students in their first two years of higher education. Through investigating areas of interest to higher education institutions including retention, degree selection, campus involvement and on-track graduation progress, the research will add to the literature on the impact of a career academy model.

Research Questions

The questions that will guide the study are:

- How do participants describe the influence of their participation in a high school career academy relating to their transition decisions regarding major selection and career preparation in the university setting?
- Using the career academy experience, how do participants describe ways the university could have helped them with their higher education transitions?

Methodology

The research will use a Narrative Inquiry methodology. Participants will be either junior or senior university students who have graduated from a high school career academy.

Proposed Timeline

Data collection beginning in the fall semester and continuing through New Year. There could be two interviews with the students. Some interviews could be conducted virtually, and I am offering compensation for the students as part of participation. The compensation is a \$50 gift card for each participant.

APPENDIX A (continued)

Let me know if you need further information. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have regarding your participation.

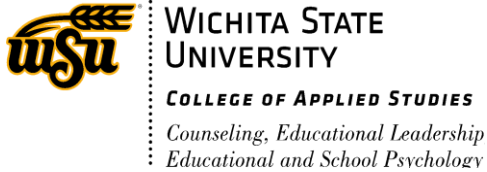
Melinda Rangel

Doctoral Student

Wichita State University , 1845 Fairmount, Box 152 | Wichita, KS 67260

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENTS



Interview Consent Form

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study, **Postsecondary Experiences of Career Academy Students: A Narrative Inquiry of Lived Experience**. This study is designed to learn the university student's experience as they transitioned through college and what, if any, impact the foundational elements of a high school career academy model had on their experience.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a junior or senior level student at WSU and you graduated from a high school career academy model. All participants must be 18 years of age or older. Approximately 4-6 participants will be invited to join the study.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. Each interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and location. Each participant will be asked to share their experiences regarding their college transitions from the high school career academy model and through the university experience. This information will be obtained via a set of questions asked by the interviewer. I plan to conduct about 1-2 interviews with WSU students. The interview will last approximately 60 - 90 minutes. Questions to be used during the session include: *"What were your most impactful career academy experiences and how did they prepare you to transition into college? What foundational elements of the career academy supported you as you transitioned through your university experience and how did the university build on those experiences? As you prepare to move out into a career, what career academy and university experiences have best prepared you for this next transition?"*

Discomfort/Risks: During this study, it is expected that the risks, discomforts, and inconveniences will be minimal. You may feel discomfort sharing your story with someone whom you don't know well, for example. Participation is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable with any question, you can feel free to not answer it. You also have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. No identifiable information will be used.

Benefits: Participants will have an opportunity to share or voice any opinions related to their transitions from a high school career academy program through their university experience. Both

high schools and universities may learn from your experience as a career academy graduate transitioning through college. The study will add to the growing research about transitional stages of university students and how past and present academic programming may impact those transitions.

Confidentiality: Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the researcher permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;
- WSU Dissertation chair and committee

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss study results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

Each interview will be digitally recorded for later transcription. After the interview has been transcribed, each participant will be given an opportunity to receive a summary of their interview for review. Digital copies of transcriptions and recordings will be secured in password-protected locations available only to the researcher. Any hard-copy items will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet in the WSU CLES office of the faculty advisor for the five years.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact the principal investigator, Dr. Kristin Sherwood, Wichita State University – CLES Office, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, (316) 978-3325, and at kristin.sherwood@wichita.edu.

If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

APPENDIX B (continued)

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Printed Name (Participant)

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| Participant Signature | Date |
|-----------------------|------|

Printed Name of Witness

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| Witness Signature | Date |
|-------------------|------|

APPENDIX B (continued)

Tabor College Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Postsecondary Experiences of Career Academy Students: A Narrative Inquiry of Lived Experience

Principal Investigator: Melinda Rangel

Sponsor: Wichita State University; Dr. Kristin Sherwood, Dissertation Chair

Date: September 25, 2020

- **This is a consent form for research participation.** It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.
- **Your participation is voluntary.** You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any of your usual benefits. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with Tabor College. If you are a student or employee at Tabor College, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.
- **You may or may not benefit as a result of participating in this study.** Also, as explained below, your participation may result in unintended or harmful effects for you that may be minor or may be serious depending on the nature of the research.
- **You will be provided with any new information that develops during the study that may affect your decision whether or not to continue to participate.** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form. You are being asked to consider participating in this study for the reasons explained below.

1. Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of former career academy students regarding if, or how, their participation in a high school career academy influenced their university experiences as they progress through their higher education institution. The study will record experiences from individual academy graduates in their junior or senior year of college as they look back at their academy foundational teaching in high school and apply it to their current university experience. The significance of the

APPENDIX B (continued)

study is that it may provide secondary schools with information from career academy graduates about how the program informed their post-high school decisions. The study may suggest ways that colleges and universities can capitalize on the career academy elements as they seek to recruit and retain students in their first two years of higher education. Through investigating areas of interest to higher education institutions including retention, degree selection, campus involvement and on-track graduation progress, the research will add to the literature on the impact of a career academy model.

2. How many people will take part in this study?

4-6 people will participate in the study

3. What will happen if I take part in this study?

University students will be able to voice their opinions about the high school career academy model they experienced and what, if any, impact it has made during their university experience. From this inquiry, high schools can use the research to improve teaching and learning. Universities can also use it to improve campus practices by building on foundational elements of the academy to increase college programming such as retention and graduation rates.

4. How long will I be in the study?

There will be two interviews each lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. Following the interviews, you will be provided copies of the transcripts for your review at which time you can make corrections. These two interviews will be conducted in the Fall 2020 semester. The entire study should be complete by April 2020.

5. Can I stop being in the study?

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with Tabor College.

6. What risks, side effects or discomforts can I expect from being in the study?

To address the issue of privacy all participants will be given pseudonyms to conceal their identity. Minimal psychological risks are anticipated as students recall lived experiences. Participants may be uncomfortable at first when speaking to someone they do not know about their lived experiences. Participants will understand that their participation is voluntary. If participants feel uncomfortable with any question, they can feel free to not answer it. They also have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. No identifiable information will be used. If at any point a participant feels uncomfortable or distressed, they will be advised to inform the researcher to discontinue their participation.

APPENDIX B (continued)

7. What benefits can I expect from being in the study?

You will be given a \$25 gift card upon completion of the study.

8. What other choices do I have if I do not take part in the study?

You may choose not to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

9. Will my study-related information be kept confidential?

Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law.

Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration;
- Tabor College Institutional Review Board;
- The sponsor supporting the study, their agents or study monitors; and
- Your insurance company (if charges are billed to insurance).

10. What happens if I am injured because I took part in this study?

If you suffer an injury from participating in this study, you should notify the researcher and your personal physician immediately. Your personal physician will determine if you should obtain medical treatment.

The cost for this treatment will be billed to you or your medical or hospital insurance. Tabor College has no funds set aside for the payment of health care expenses for this study.

APPENDIX B (continued)

11. What are my rights if I take part in this study?

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

You will be provided with any new information that develops during the course of the research that may affect your decision whether or not to continue participation in the study.

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at Tabor College reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and Tabor College policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

12. Who can answer my questions about the study?

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Meredith Voran at meredithlvoran@tabor.edu or Dr. Norman Schmidt at normans@tabor.edu.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

APPENDIX B (continued)

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

**Printed name of person obtaining
consent**

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

APPENDIX C
PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

Introductory Questions:

Tell me about yourself.

What made you decide you wanted to go to college?

What brought you to this university?

Research Question 1. How do participants describe the influence of their participation in a high school career academy relating to their transition decisions regarding major selection and career preparation in the university setting?

1. How do you feel your high school career academy prepared you for college?
 - a. What was the career focus of your academy? What did you study?
2. What college credit opportunities were available in the career academy and how did they help you to transition into the university setting?
 - a. What did that do for you?
 - b. Did this impact the course selection process at the university?
3. Did you participate in work-based learning experiences such as internships or job shadowing?
 - a. How did it prime you to go on into your college experience?
 - b. What degree did this influence your career decisions or postsecondary choices?
4. How did career-themed instruction help you in terms of course content connections, academic success, and motivation to learn?
 - a. Do you have any stories, artifacts, or documents that you would like to share?
5. Describe your small learning community experience. What impact did the SLC have on your career academy experience in terms of accountability, connection to the school, and relationships with peers and teachers?
6. Who would you consider your support system in high school that helped with the transition into college? (counselors, academy advisors, academy teachers, etc.?)

APPENDIX C (continued)

Research Question 2: Using the career academy experience, how do participants describe ways the university could have helped them with their higher education transitions?

1. What did you learn in the career academy to help you as you moved through the college experience and helped you be successful?
 - a. What were the best foundational elements that you leaned on as you moved through the university? (small, learning community, career-themed instruction, work-based experiences, college partnerships)
2. What small learning community experiences have you had at the university setting and did the career academy help you develop or participate in those SLC experiences?
3. How did the career academy experience impact your course selections, degree attainment, and persistence through college?
4. Did university programming support you as you transitioned from high school and through college? If not, what programming recommendations would you make to build on a career academy experience and help support your degree attainment?
5. You are going to be graduating soon. As you prepare to “move out” into a career setting, how do you feel about the experiences and skills you possess that will prepare you for that move?
 - a. If you have no experience (part-time, full-time employment or internship), how does that reflect on your career experience?
6. As you “move out” to your career how will you adjust to the company culture and the differences between the college and workplace setting?
 - a. What experiences in the career academy and/or your university setting helped you understand company culture?
7. How did the career academy and your university experience help you develop realistic career expectations? (i.e., workload/expectations, salary or advancement, role as an employee)
8. What were the most and least effective elements of your career academy experience that helped you through the transitional stages of university life?

APPENDIX D

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS TOOL

| <i>Condensed story for narrative analysis</i> | | |
|---|--|---|
| STEPS | DEFINITION | ANSWERS WHAT QUESTION |
| Summary/Abstract | abstract that tells the sequence of events of the narrative | What is the story about? |
| Orientation | setting of the story; the time, place, participants, and activity in the narrative | Who, when, where, what? |
| Complicating Actions | actual events of narrative can be physical or spoken statements that move the story ahead; reports the next event in response to a question | Then what happened? |
| Evaluation | information on the consequences of the event for human needs and desires; highlights interesting or unusual events; encourages the narrator to keep talking and the listener to keep listening | So what, how is this interesting? |
| Resolution | result or conclusion of narrative | What finally happened? |
| Coda | narrator stops telling about what happened in the past and returns to the present time; declares the end of the narrative. | That's it, I've finished and I'm coming back to our present situation |

*Note: Created using the following sources:

Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1997). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. *Journal of Narrative & Life History*, 7(1-4), 3-38.

Boyno, M., Akil, E., & Dolas, F. (2013). The applications of the Labovian narrative analysis to a short story in an EFL class. *Journal of Social Science/Dumlupinar Üniversitesi Soysyal Bilimler Dergisi* 1(37).