

ABSTRACT

YADUSKY, KAYE LAURA ADAMS. Succeeding Against the Odds: Exploring the Experiences of Academically Underprepared College Students Who Successfully Transition from Pre-curriculum Studies to Full Enrollment in Curriculum Courses. (Under the direction of Dr. Chad Hoggan and Dr. Susan Barcinas).

Academically underprepared learners have been enrolling in college at increasing rates over the last several decades, yet their success rates in the courses designed to remediate their deficits have remained low. These courses serve as either gateways or gatekeepers to certificates and degrees for academically underprepared college students seeking to increase their opportunities for economic stability. The high attrition rates in college remedial studies suggest that they are serving as gatekeepers more often than gateways, interfering with students' educational attainment plans. This qualitative case study addressed the question: How do academically underprepared college students at a two-year minority-serving institution experience the transition into, through, and out of pre-curriculum studies to earn full enrollment in curriculum courses? Framed by transition theory, this study found that the participants: 1) experienced enrollment in pre-curriculum courses as stigmatizing, marginalizing, and as a threat to identity; 2) needed time to adapt their assumptions and behaviors and develop the internal and external resources they needed to support their progress through pre-curriculum courses; and 3) that the participants who internalized these adaptations developed interpersonally, intrapersonally, and cognitively. This study also found that the participants' interactions with empathetic faculty were critical to their willingness to adapt their assumptions and behaviors and develop the resources they needed to complete their remedial studies.

Succeeding Against the Odds: Exploring the Experiences of Academically Underprepared
College Students Who Successfully Transition from Pre-curriculum Studies to
Full Enrollment in Curriculum Courses

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the students who inspired it and to my support team who made it possible.

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BIOGRAPHY

Kaye Laura Adams Yadusky stumbled into teaching in higher education when pursuing a graduate degree at the University of Maine at Orono. She has enthusiastically continued teaching in diverse settings since completing this degree. Her desire to develop a deeper understanding of adult and college student learning and development drew her to the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis degree at North Carolina State University. She hopes to apply what she has learned from this program and her research to promote social equity and justice and encourage the next generation to embrace their opportunities to reimagine and remake their worlds.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Over half of all public and private college degree-seeking students in the United States are identified, at enrollment, as academically underprepared for college curriculum courses in either math, reading, writing, or a combination of these skills (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Bailey & Jagers, 2016; Boatman & Long, 2010; Chen & Simone, 2016; Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018; Quint, Jagers, Byndloss, & Magazinnick, 2013). Two-year colleges with lower admissions requirements or open enrollment serve the greatest proportion of academically underprepared students with some institutions reporting over 75% of their first time enrolling students as requiring remediation in at least one core curriculum area (Boatman & Long, 2010; Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018). Academic under-preparedness also disproportionately affects learners with minority, low socio-economic, and first-generation college student status (Attewell et al., 2006; Bahr, 2010; Gasmon & Conrad, 2014; Harmon, 2012; Li, 2007).

Most, but not all, two-year colleges require students identified as academically underprepared to enroll in non-credit, academic preparatory courses that are designed to remediate their academic skill deficits. Underprepared students who are motivated to earn degrees pay or go into debt to enroll in these courses (Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018). In spite of their willingness to invest time and money in these preparatory course, the majority of academically underprepared students who enroll in them do not complete them and even fewer go on to fully enroll in curriculum courses or complete the degrees they came to college to pursue (Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018; Quint et al., 2013). Instead of remediating academically underprepared learners and retaining at-risk students, post-secondary academic

preparatory courses appear to serve as a gatekeeper or barrier to full enrollment in curriculum courses for the majority of academically underprepared college students (Attewell et al., 2006; Collins, 2010; Crisp & Delgado, 2013; Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012; Quint et al., 2013).

This problem has drawn the attention of educational researchers and practitioners, economists, political leaders, and government agencies and has led to the production of numerous studies quantifying the high rates of attrition for academically underprepared college students across diverse contexts (Crisp & Delgado, 2013; Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018; Higbee, Arendale, & Lundell, 2005; Rouse & Barrow, 2006; Martorell, & McFarlin, 2011). In addition to focusing on the high failure rates of academically under-prepared college students, this research addresses the economic consequences of failing to persist and methods for minimizing attrition rates in these courses (Bahr, 2013). Although there are many published studies on this topic, there is an absence of research into the lived experiences of the academically underprepared college students who stop or drop out of college before completing their remedial studies (Bahr, 2013; Higbee, et al., 2005). Even less is known about the lived experiences of the minority of academically underprepared students who complete their academic preparatory studies and successfully transition to curriculum courses (Bailey, Jaggars, & Scott-Clayton 2013; Higbee, et al., 2005; Perin, 2013).

This study addressed this gap in the literature by exploring the experiences of academically underprepared students who managed to succeed in completing their preparatory courses in spite of multiple factors for risk that made them vulnerable to exiting college early. This study was conducted at a two-year minority-serving institution (MSI) that enrolls a substantial number of students with first-generation and low socio-economic status and who are identified as

academically underprepared (IPEDS 2015-2016). The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who successfully transitioned from academic remediation into full enrollment in curriculum courses. The goal was to discern how the participants in this study adapted their assumptions about themselves and their situations, engaged in goal-oriented strategies, and developed support networks that promoted movement through and out of remediation and their transition into full enrollment in curriculum courses (Anderson et al., 2014). Knowledge generated by this inquiry has implications for college student remedial programming and practice and for future research.

This chapter provides background and contextual information regarding the issue of academically underprepared college students, states the purpose of the research, and identifies the research question at the center of this study. It introduces the conceptual framework and the research approach that the study employs. This chapter also offers a rationale for the study, explains the significance of the research, and includes a set of definitions to provide clarity and content understanding.

Context

In the two decades preceding 2004, college enrollment more than doubled and continued to increase over the next decade an additional 30 percent (Li, 2007; NCES, 2016). Most of this increase is attributable to growth in minority and female enrollment (Li, 2007; NCES, 2016). During this same period, academically underprepared learners were also enrolling in colleges at ever increasing rates (Boatman & Long, 2010; NCES, 1999; NCES 2009; NCES, 2012a). It is estimated that over half of all first-time enrolling college students are academically underprepared and that at least two thirds of these students are enrolling in two-year colleges (Bailey, 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Boatman & Long, 2010; Chen & Simone, 2016; Collins, 2010; Hughes

& Scott-Clayton, 2011; Quint et al., 2013). Academic under-preparedness is also found at higher rates among minority college students and at minority-serving colleges (Attewell et al., 2006; Bahr, 2010; Chen & Simone, 2016; Gasmon & Conrad, 2014; Harmon, 2012; Li, 2007; Marwick, 2004).). As well, minority college students persist and complete remedial or pre-curriculum courses at lower rates than their majority peers in the same institutions (Bremer et al., 2013). Because pre-curriculum courses serve as gateways or gatekeepers to curriculum course enrollment for the students who place into them, failure to complete them stops or stalls degree progress, interrupts educational goal attainment, and interferes with students' economic aspirations (Diaz, 2010; Fowler & Boylan, 2010).

Pre-curriculum Programming

There is considerable debate about the best practices and outcomes for pre-curriculum programs in the United States and, as a result, there is wide variation in how programs to remediate college academic under-preparedness are designed and executed (Boatman & Long, 2010; Bailey, 2009; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Perin, 2006; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Jaggars & Hodara, 2011). In a study of pre-curriculum or developmental programs in the United States, Perin (2006) found that there were more approaches to programming than there were colleges providing it. The divergence in approaches underscores the underlying issues associated with the conflicting goals in the field. These include, but are not limited to, the goal of increasing curriculum enrollment and retention and the potentially conflicting goal of raising standards for defining post-treatment academic preparedness (Jaggars & Hodara, 2011). The disparity in execution is also evident in programming structure and instruction; methods, standards, or scores for defining academic under-preparedness and placement into pre-curriculum studies; the number and length of classes in a pre-curriculum in a sequence; and the post-treatment methods,

standards, or scores that indicate preparedness (Bailey, 2009; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Perin, 2006).

These variations in approach make researching patterns across colleges, states and regions challenging and limits opportunities for generalizing results across diverse contexts. Wide variation in approach also contributes to the emergence of data sets that sometimes appear to support conflicting outcomes. Some studies, for example, indicate that remediation supports persistence and progress in curriculum courses while others report data that suggest that it hinders progress and still other report mixed results (Attewell et al., 2006; Bettinger & Long, 2008; Calcagno & Long, 2008; Chen & Simone, 2016; Kurlaender & Howell, 2012; Schmidt, 2008). Variation in programming, however, can also be understood as customizing curricula to meet the unique needs of students in a given context (Bremmer et al. 2013). Programming designed to address the specific and unique learning and developmental needs of the academically underprepared students in a given context often promotes an increase in student persistence and progress in that setting (Diaz, 2010; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Jagers & Hodara, 2011).

Identifying Academic Under-preparedness

Traditionally, colleges and universities relied on high school and college transcripts to determine students' placement into curriculum courses and did not require additional institutional testing to identify student readiness for college course demands. However, as enrollment and academic under-preparedness in two- and four-year colleges increased over the last three decades, many institutions began to use standardized or institutionally-designed testing, or a combination of these, to further inform the course placement process (Bailey, 2009; Bailey, et al., 2010; Collins, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Grubb, 2010). At colleges that

require SAT or ACT testing for admission, students whose Math or Verbal scores that do not realize an institution's designated cut-off are recommended or required to engage in additional testing to discern reading, math, and writing readiness (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

At other institutions, especially those that do not require SAT or ACT testing for admission, all first time enrolling students are asked to take placement assessments to determine their academic preparedness (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). There are a few colleges that do not require either placement testing and/or do not require academically underprepared students to enroll in remediation. The majority of schools, however, have a designated placement test cut-off score in each of the three core competencies of math, reading, and writing. When students' scores on an institution's appointed placement assessment fall below the predetermined score, they are referred to some type of academic remediation, often in the form of one or more quarter or semester-long courses (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). The data generated by a single test taken on a single day is often the only information an institution uses to determine students' course enrollment eligibility (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Quint et al., 2013). Although a small percentage of schools use additional information to determine academic readiness, most do not because the process of collecting and analyzing additional data is labor and time intensive and is often not considered cost-effective (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Remediating Academic Under-preparedness

Like pre-curriculum programming, pre-curriculum courses also vary across contexts. Courses may be self-paced, in the form of modules, or structured like traditional college courses on the quarter or semester system (Bailey, 2009; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Institutions that use a traditional structure for remediation may offer a single course in each of the core competencies, or multiple courses or levels through which an academically underprepared

students must pass in order to achieve the institution's definition of college curriculum readiness (Bailey, 2009; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Institutions that offer multiple levels or sequences of remediation identify certain placement assessment score ranges with different levels of preparedness and place students within a sequence according to their placement test scores. A student who scores in the lowest segment of scores on the placement test will generally be compelled to enroll in the lowest level pre-curriculum course and must take all of the subsequent courses in the sequence before gaining access to curriculum courses (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Edgecombe, 2011). Multiple courses that address different levels of academic readiness permit institutions to place similarly skilled students together, allowing instructors to target these students' specific academic needs (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Although offering sequential courses may provide more effective instruction for some students, they often increase the time a student is enrolled in remediation. Increased time to completion contributes to attrition rates, such that the longer the sequence, the greater the likelihood that students will become discouraged and stop or drop out before completing remediation and never enroll in curriculum courses (Bailey, 2009; Collins, 2010; Edgecombe, 2011).

On the other hand, some institutions offer as few as one level, or one single course, for remediation in each of the core competencies. This has the advantage of cutting time and expense to completion for those students who are able to achieve academic readiness in the designated time period. However, these courses place students of all levels into a single classroom, challenging instructors to address their diverse knowledge and skill levels. In addition, students who do not remediate successfully during the course timeframe experience failure and must repeat the same course until they successfully master the content. As a result,

they receive no rewards for incremental progress and may perceive themselves as penalized even though they are progressing. This creates opportunities for students to become discouraged and stop out.

Most institutions that serve academically underprepared learners provide remediation through non-credit pre-curriculum courses that do not count toward degree attainment or GPA's (Bailey, 2009; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Students often pay the same for these non-credit courses as they do for curriculum, for-credit courses, even when they repeat them (Bailey, 2009; Collins, 2010; Edgecombe, 2011). Students who use government or private loans to pay for their enrollment go into debt to pay for them. Regardless of how they pay for the courses, for the many students who invest in them and then fail to complete them, these courses become not only barriers to degree attainment, but also a loss of time and money that renders no tangible benefits (Boatman & Long, 2010; Diaz, 2010; Fowler & Boylan, 2010). Because only-one third to one-half of students complete their pre-curriculum courses, each student's investment is at risk of becoming a loss and potentially a debt (Bahr, 2012; Bailey, 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Collins, 2010; Grubb, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Statement of Problem

Research indicates that academically underprepared learners are enrolling in colleges at increasing rates such that over half of all college students enrolling for the first time are identified as academically underprepared (Bailey, 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Collins, 2010; Grubb, 2010; NCES, 1999; NCES, 2009; NCES, 2012a; NCES 2012b). These students' enrollment in college and their willingness to invest time and money into the remediation process indicates that they are motivated to earn college degrees. In spite of this desire, only 25 to 40 percent complete their pre-curriculum preparatory courses (Bahr, 2012; Bailey, 2009; Bailey et

al., 2010; Collins, 2010; Grubb, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Of these completers, it is estimated that fewer than 25% successfully transition to curriculum courses and go on to earn degrees (Bailey, 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Collins, 2010; Grubb, 2010). Without curriculum experience or degrees, these students' educational under-attainment may prevent them from realizing competitive, sustainable wages, and increases the likelihood that they will incur costs to municipalities, states, or the federal government in the future (Rouse & Barrow, 2006).

While there is much research on college under-preparedness, most of it is quantitative in nature and does not give voice to the experiences of the academically underprepared students who enroll in the courses, nor does it provide an understanding of the degree to which affective variables influence students' persistence and progress in these courses (Bahr, 2014; Higbee et al., 2005; Perin, 2013). Bahr (2014) acknowledges this gap and points to the need for "the richness of qualitative data and analyses...for making sense of the many ambiguous findings that arise in quantitative research" (p. 148). He asserts that this lack of understanding of academic underprepared college student experiences at two-year colleges limits institutions' opportunities to effectively improve outcomes. Higbee et al. (2005) echo the need for qualitative research to establish a more "nuanced" view of the issues related to underprepared college students and call on researchers to "listen more directly to student voices and perceptions of their college experiences..." (p. 8). Bailey et al. (2013) also draw attention to the need to not only understand the students who do not complete, but emphasize the need to better understand the "...developmental students who complete their [pre-curriculum course] sequences." (p. 8). Bahr (2014) also argues for the need to better understand the experiences of the most vulnerable of the academically underprepared college students, those with minority, low socioeconomic, and first generation status.

This qualitative case study sought to address this gap in the literature and give voice to at-risk college students identified as academically under-prepared and placed into remedial studies. The purpose was to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in pre-curriculum courses and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses. Rather than focus exclusively on the barriers to post-secondary success, this study sought to understand the experiences of a group of students who managed to overcome the barriers. It was designed to gather the stories of college students who had immediate experience with academic under-preparedness and persistence through remediation. It addressed the question:

How do academically underprepared college students at a two-year minority-serving institution experience the transition into, through, and out of pre-curriculum studies to earn full enrollment in curriculum courses?

Conceptual Framework

This study examined college student development using the conceptual framework of Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory. Although this theory arises out of the field of counseling, it has been applied to understanding adult and college student development in response to a threat that places strain on some dimension of identity, such as a role, relationship, routine, or assumption (Arnett, 2000; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995/2002; Dean, 1987; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Dela Cruz, Farr, Klakovich, & Essinger, 2013; Keorin, Harrigan, & Reeves, 1990; Mims, Mims, & Newland, 2009; Pizzolato, 2005; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007; Plummell, Harwood, & Lavellee, 2008; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schaefer, 2009; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Schlossberg, 1989; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Wheeler, 2012). Anderson et al. (2014) argue that transition theorists "position transitions within a

developmental framework, defining them as turning points” that prompt cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development (p. 30). Transition theory was employed in this study to explore the experiences of academically underprepared students at a two-year MSI as they moved into, through, and out of pre-curriculum studies, and on to full enrollment in curriculum courses. This model created a framework for examining and understanding how the participants in this study adapted their assumptions and behaviors in response to identification as academically underprepared (Anderson et al, 2014).

Anderson et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of the self-regulating actions of taking stock and taking charge and the role of concurrent stress in promoting and/or hindering an individual’s transition through a threat or challenge. To inform and contextualize the transition theory conceptual framework and to ensure a rich understanding of pre-curriculum college students, this study included a review of literature addressing at-risk, first-year, and college student development theory (Anderson et al, 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2001/2004; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; DiBenedetto & , 2013; Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Although research on first-year, at-risk, and college student development theory informed the research process, transition theory was used exclusively to frame the study’s research question, design, and the data analysis process (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995). The conceptual framework, how it was informed by college student cognitive development, and its influence on and application to the research are described in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Research Approach

To answer the research question, the study used a qualitative case study approach that employed informal, in-depth and member-checking interviews and reviewed archival records

and documents for relevant information to support and triangulate the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Analysis was both deductive and inductive, but the emphasis was on inductive analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The case study approach was instrumental and focused on a group of individuals who were experiencing the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2014). The study combined an exploratory and theory-based approach by framing the exploration of a phenomenon of interest using a theory-based model (Cresswell & Maietta, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). Because it was both exploratory and qualitative, the analysis was interpretive and focused on developing an understanding of the participants' experiences as they revealed them during the data collection process (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Methodology is addressed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Rationale and Significance

Interest in this study arose out of the researcher's desire to find strategies and approaches to facilitate academically underprepared college students' persistence in and completion of pre-curriculum courses. Understanding how some students develop both the academic and non-academic skills that promote progress toward pre-curriculum course completion served as the rationale. Participants in this study had experiences of transitioning into, through, and out of pre-curriculum courses. Their experiences provided insights into how and why they navigated the barriers that hinder and halt the progress of the majority of their peers nationwide. An increased understanding of the experiences of those who successfully made the transition from academic under-preparedness to full enrollment in college curriculum courses produced findings that can be used to inform future research and college remediation practice, policy, and programming that promote improved outcomes for academically underprepared college students. Improved outcomes for academically underprepared college students benefit 1) students, by improving

their potential for economic productivity; 2) educational institutions, by retaining and graduating more students, and; 3) communities and governments, by producing wage earners that contribute to tax bases and citizens who contribute to social institutions (Carnevale, Cheah, & Strohl, 2012; Rouse & Barrow, 2006).

Definitions of Key Terminology

Academically underprepared: a phrase to describe students who do not meet the requirements for academic preparedness for college curriculum courses as defined by a post-secondary institution. Under-preparedness may be further defined as earning scores on one or more assessments that fall below an institution's designated minimum score in one or more of the three core competencies of math, reading or writing. It can also be used to indicate a gap between a student's existing skill in reading, writing, or math and the skills considered grade appropriate (Cole, Goets, & Wilson, 2000).

At-risk: an adjective to describe learner characteristics that have the potential to interfere with educational progress. They may be related to socioeconomic, minority, first-generation, or disability status, academic preparation, or other personal characteristics (Cole et al., 2000).

Attempt: the act of enrolling into a course. An attempt may end satisfactorily by passing all requirements or unsatisfactorily by failing it or withdrawing from it (Bahr, 2014).

Completion: the act of enrolling in and satisfactorily completing a course, or sequence of courses, or a degree (Bettinger & Long, 2009).

Curriculum course: a course for which post-secondary institutions award degree credit.

Drop out: the act of failing to complete one or more courses within a given semester and not reenrolling (Bailey, 2009).

Exit exam: the final test in a course on which a student must receive a passing score before

moving onto subsequent courses in an academic sequence (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Gatekeeper: a course, or series of courses, that students must complete before enrolling into subsequent courses (Bailey et al., 2010).

High-risk: an adjective to describe learners who have two or more characteristics for risk (see definition of at-risk). Each additional factor for risk increases student potential for stopping or dropping out of college early (Cole et al., 2000; Pizzolato, 2003/2004; Siram, 2014).

Pre-curriculum: a non-credit course, course sequence, or course module designed to prepare students for college curriculum courses. These courses/modules are also described as developmental, remedial, compensatory, and preparatory (Higgs et al., 2005).

Minority-Serving Institution (MSI): a post-secondary educational institution that serves at least 25% of an identified minority. There are six types of MSIs: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU); black-serving, non-HBCUs; Native American/Alaskan-serving including Tribal Colleges (TCUs); Pacific Islander serving (PICUs); Hispanic-serving (HCUs); and other, which refers to colleges that serve minority groups other than those identified above (Li, 2007).

Persistence: the act of enrolling and remaining in a course until qualifying to exit either demonstrating skill or knowledge competence (Bettinger & Long, 2009).

Progression: the act of enrolling in a course of study and satisfactorily completing multiple courses in a sequence (Bettinger & Long, 2009).

Stop out: the act of failing to reenroll in a subsequent semester after completing one or more course in a previous semester (Bailey, 2009).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an introduction to a qualitative case study that explored the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in

and completed pre-curriculum courses and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses. It provides a brief understanding of the background and context related to pre-curriculum studies and academic under-preparedness in colleges in the United States. It states the problem the study examined, the study's purpose, and its research question. This chapter provides a brief description of the conceptual framework and the research approach employed in the study. It also presents the rationale, addresses the significance of the study, and defines key terms to support understanding the central phenomenon of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in and completed pre-curriculum studies and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses. The study was designed to develop an understanding of how the participants perceived and responded to identification as academically underprepared and how they adapted their assumptions and behaviors to complete their remedial studies when the majority of their peers, nationally, fail to do so (Attewell et al., 2006; Bailey, 2009; Collins, 2010; Crisp & Delgado, 2013; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012; Quint et al., 2013). This study employed Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory as the lens for examining how the participants experienced academic under-preparedness and their enrollment in and completion of remedial or pre-curriculum courses. To ensure a thorough understanding of the participants and their experiences, it was essential to engage in a review of the literature related to college students in transitions. This chapter reviews the literature related to transition theory and the role internal and external resources play in promoting retention for academically underprepared, at-risk, and first-year college students.

This chapter describes how the sources for the literature review were accessed and provides background information on the subject of remedial or developmental studies in the post-secondary setting. It explains the approach this study took to the topic, reviews literature related to transition theory, and defines incremental adaptation and the three overarching phases employed in this study. This chapter discusses the role of internal and external resources in

promoting adaptation and movement through a transition. It also provides a critique of Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory, describes its application and appropriateness to the study, and justifies its selection as the conceptual framework.

Sources

The sources of the literature in this review were gathered using multiple strategies and access points. The researcher used articles from peer-reviewed professional journals and periodicals and accessed dissertations, books, and e-books on relevant research. Some of these sources were accessed via hard copy, others via the Internet using search engines and databases, including ProQuest, Eric, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. The researcher also reviewed research and statistics posted to credible government, university, and foundation sponsored websites. While the researcher sought to use the most recent research wherever possible, she did not limit searches by timeframe. Keywords varied based on whether a search was related to academically underprepared, at-risk, or first-year college students, college student development theory, or transition theory. The researcher also used literature referenced in accessed resources to find related, relevant, informative sources.

Background

Much attention has been drawn to both the increasing numbers of academically underprepared students enrolling in college and the longstanding failure of over 50% of them to complete their remedial studies, foreclosing on their degree attainment goals (Attewell et al., 2006; Bailey, 2009; Collins, 2010; Crisp & Delgado, 2013; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012; Quint et al. 2013). The high attrition rates in pre-curriculum courses suggest that many students find stopping or dropping out of college favorable to the costs of persisting to complete their remediation or no longer believe they are capable of

succeeding in remedial or curriculum courses. Some researchers argue that the traditional models for post-secondary remediation contribute to students' unwillingness to persist by: 1) introducing additional time and cost to degree completion; 2) failing to accurately diagnose academic readiness and address students' specific academic skill deficits; 3) overly relying on less experienced instructors and ineffective curricula that employ skill and drill approaches and fail to connect remediation to meaningful, college-level content; and 4) by failing to address the multiple non-academic skill deficits that interfere with college student success (Attewell et al., 2006; Bailey & Jagers, 2016; Bettinger & Long, 2008; Calcagno & Long, 2008; Conely, 2005; Grub & Gabriner, 2008; Schmidt, 2008).

When institutions fail to sufficiently address students' academic and non-academic resource deficits or when they create structures that students perceive as barriers to their educational goal attainment, they are communicating a lack of support for pre-curriculum college students and contributing to student attrition. These messages become external resource deficits or liabilities. Students who interpret identification as academically underprepared as predicting pre-curriculum or curriculum course failure will doubt their competence (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004). Those who want to be in college and want to earn a college degree will experience these external messages as a threat to their existing identities or their desire to belong in their new context and as a threat to their imagined future possible selves with earned college degrees (Anderson et al., 2014). Some may also perceive placement in remediation and segregation from their prepared peers as marginalizing, stigmatizing, and as implying they are inferior (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis & Pietrzak, 2002; Richman, Martin, & Gaudagno, 2015).

Perceptions of threat to identity, marginality, or stigma create stress and strain for college students, especially those who are at risk and in their first-year of enrollment. These experiences interfere with integration into the college community and contribute to students' interests in stopping and dropping out of college early (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schlossberg, 1989). As perceptions of identity threat, marginalization, stigma, and doubt accumulate for individuals in transition, they sometimes opt to relieve themselves of the strain by denying its relevance or disengaging from it (Anderson et al., 2014). Pre-curriculum college students who perceive themselves as not having adequate internal or external resources to successfully complete their remedial or curriculum courses or who want to avoid the strain of the stigma, marginalization, and the threat they pose to identity will find stopping or dropping out of college as favorable to persisting through remediation. Exiting college before completing remediation also provides pre-curriculum students a way to avoid conclusively proving they are not college material (Ballard et al., 2016). This study explores the role of the participants' perceptions of identification as academically underprepared and the experiences they perceived as promoting or hindering their persistence in academic remediation.

Approach

The participants in this study differed from the majority of academically underprepared college students in that they persisted through the strains associated with pre-curriculum enrollment that threatened their personal identity and their degree attainment goals (Anderson et al., 2014). This study sought to understand this difference by exploring how they perceived enrollment in their remedial courses and navigated the threat pre-curriculum enrollment posed to their identity. Specifically, the study explored how the participants adapted their internal resources and engaged with the available external resources to create and sustain a willingness to

complete their remedial studies. In this study, external resources or deficits include, but are not limited to financial status; family roles and responsibilities; emotional and contextual supports; and concurrent stresses. Internal, or psychological, resources include cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal development; outlook and processing style; and self-regulatory strategies, among others (Anderson et al., 2014). Although the study sought to understand both the experiences that hindered and promoted course completion, the goal was to develop insights into the personal and contextual variables and resources that generated and sustained the participants as they journeyed through their developmental courses.

To support this understanding, the researcher reviewed literature related to adapting resources in response to an event or information that threatens personal identity. Transition theory, which has been applied to understand college student and adult adaptation, examines how individuals experience a threat to their current or their imagined future possible identity (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Coney, 2012; Dean, 1987; DeVilbliss, 2014; Dela Cruz et al., 2013; Johnson, 1999; Keorin et al., 1990; Mims et al., 2009; Plummell et al., 2008; Schaefer, 2009; Schlossberg, 1981/2016; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Wheeler, 2012). It provides a structure for exploring the process by which individuals strengthen and expand their internal resource inventories to support resolution of the threat and to understand the developmental outcomes that result (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). This model aligned with the goals of this study and provided a systematic way for exploring how the participants in this study perceived their academic under-preparedness and their internal and external resources at the outset of their transition into remedial courses. It also provided a way to understand how they adapted their assumptions and behaviors and developed interpersonally, intrapersonally, and cognitively in response to resolving the threat to identity (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016).

Schlossberg (1981/2014) emphasizes the importance of internal and external resources in the adaptation process. Her transition model recognizes that individuals in a transition adapt their perceptions of their situations in response to experiences and interactions with their external resource assets, liabilities or deficits. For example, she suggests that individuals experience intense psychic pain, such as fear or anger, when they initially experience a threat to their identity. But these intense emotions are often moderated by an interaction with an external resource that reassures them of their ability to resolve the identity threat. This reassurance acts as an external resource asset when it prompts a change in assumptions about self or situation and moderates the intense emotions (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). A change in assumptions reflects an adaptation in an internal resource. Adaptations in assumptions also tend to relieve individuals of some element of doubt about their ability to navigate a transition, creates a hope for completing it, and encourages them to adapt their behaviors in ways that promote movement through it (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Although Schlossberg (1981/2014) acknowledges that some transitional experiences may generate an abrupt change, she suggests that adaptation usually occurs incrementally.

To develop an in-depth understanding of the participants, their internal resource inventories, and the influence of the external resources available to them in their college context, it was essential to review the literature related to academically underprepared, at-risk, and first-year college students. The purpose was to develop an understanding of the specific external resources that tend to hinder or promote retention of students in their early experiences in college. It was also designed to understand the relationship of risk to the need for external resource support. The review also addressed the role of internal or psychological resources on college student persistence and examined patterns in college students' internal resource

adaptation. It addressed college student development from the perspective of self-authorship and knowledge construction and explored the influence of approach- and avoidance oriented self-regulatory strategies, and outlook and processing style on persistence in college (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; DiBenedetto & Zimmerman, 2013; Edwards & Clark, 2013; Gerhart, Baker, Hoerger, & Ronan, 2014; Pizzolato, 2004).

Transition Theory

Transition theory examines human development as it occurs in response to an event or the introduction of information that triggers the need to adapt, such as losing or changing a job or the birth of a child (Lowenthal, Thurnher, & Chiriboga, 1975). Schlossberg (1981/2016) refers to these events as transition triggers. Neugarten (1979) suggests that transition triggers are events or information that generate a loss or gain while Pearlin and Schooler (1978) frame transition triggers as pressures and strains that prompt the need to adapt to minimize or eliminate the discomfort. Schlossberg (1981/2016) recognizes that transitions may be perceived as a loss or gain, as a threat or an opportunity, but argues that the trigger places strain on a dimension of self or identity and that these strains are evident by the pressure they exert on existing roles, routines, relationships, or assumptions. The strain on one or more dimensions of identity indicates a deficit in existing internal or external resources necessary to resolve the threat or take advantage of the opportunity (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Resolving the threat or seizing the opportunity requires strengthening of existing resources and the development of new ones. This process of adaptation promotes and reflects personal development. Completing a transition reflects achievement of the opportunity or the resolution of the threat and culminates in achieving a new developmental perspective (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016).

Schlossberg (1981/2016) organizes resources according to their relationship to situation, self, support, and strategies. The greater the pressure a transition imposes on one of the dimensions or expressions of identity, or the more dimensions that are affected by it, the greater the stress or strain an individual experiences. Degree of strain on a dimension of identity also indicates the degree of deficit in the corresponding resources of self, situation, support, or strategies. Lower pressure and strain indicates greater access to resources while high pressure and strain indicates access to fewer resources for adapting (Anderson et al., 2014). The greater the strain, and the weaker the resources to cope with it, the more likely an individual will choose to avoid engaging in the transition or resolving the threat (Schlossberg, 1981/2016).

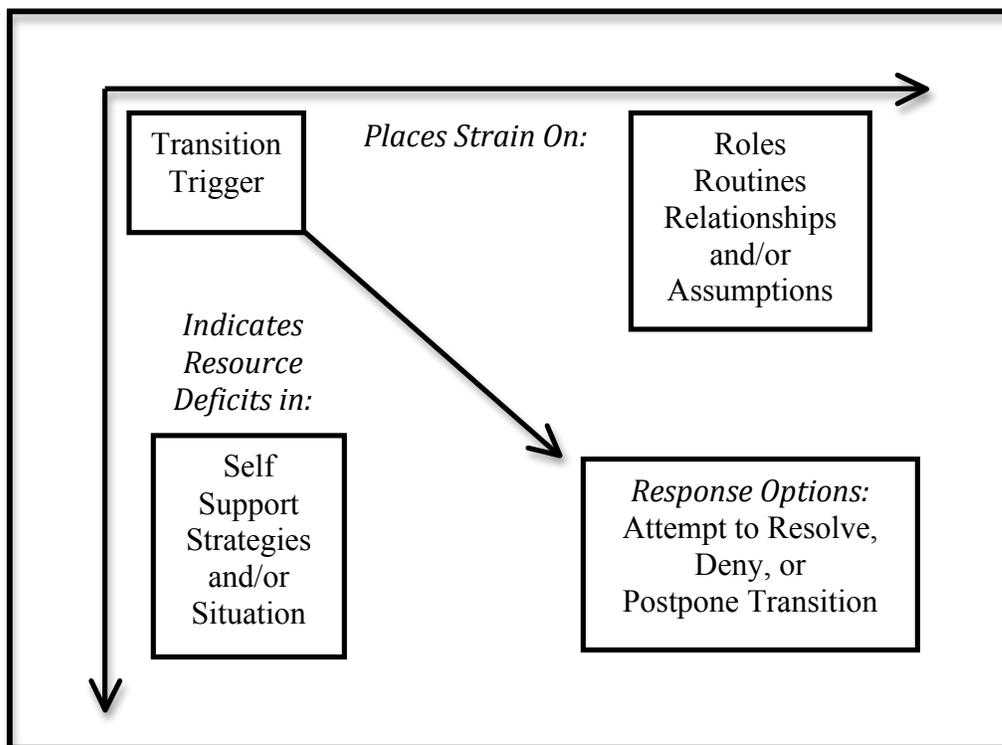


Figure 1. Relationship Between Strain, Resources, and Response

Likewise, the greater the available resources and the lower the strain to identity, the more likely an individual will develop the resources and energy necessary to move through a

transition. Schlossberg (1981/2016) refers to the relationship between available resources and resource deficits as the asset-to-liability ratio and argues that this ratio directly impacts whether individuals will choose to attempt to navigate a transition, deny its relevance and retreat from it, or find a reason to postpone engaging in it until a later date (see Figure 1). Transition theory provided a lens for examining the strain the participants in this study experienced in response to identification as academically underprepared.

The stress and strains associated with a given transition reflect individuals' perceptions of the multiple variables of transition type, aspects of identity impacted, resources available for supporting movement through it, and timing (Anderson et al., 2014). Schlossberg (1981/2016) notes that transition type and timing also influence the degree of stress and strain individuals experience. She identifies transition type based on the transition trigger event or the nature of this event. She classifies events by whether they are on or off time, anticipated or unanticipated, and normative or non-normative (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Normative events and transitions are those we are socialized to expect to occur, such as marriage, and non-normative events tend to be those we do not expect to occur, such as an accident. Events that occur that are not expected may also be identified as unanticipated.

Normative events may be major or minor events that have an expected timetable for occurring and are usually elective in nature. When normative events occur during the expected timetable, they are on time, but when they occur before or after the expected timetable, they are off time. For example, individuals often expect to engage in the major life event of marriage during a specified age-range, depending upon the culture. When normative events do not occur during the anticipated time period, they become non-events. Expectations for normative events, and their expected timetables vary across cultures and may include going to college right after

high school in one culture, but not in another (Anderson et al., 2014). Normative transitions tend to be anticipated and often create less stress and strain than unanticipated events. Unanticipated transitions are those that are not planned for and are usually unelected. They often involve a crisis or a loss, but can include gain, as well (Anderson et al., 2014).

Academically underprepared college students who view their enrollment in pre-curriculum courses as anticipated, on time, or normative will experience less stress and strain, have more optimistic outlooks on successfully completing them, and be more likely to sustain their willingness to persist to complete them (Anderson et al., 2014; Hayes et al., 2013; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002). However, those who perceive their enrollment as off time, unanticipated, or as non-normative are more likely to experience higher levels of stress and strain and be less optimistic about their opportunities to be successful in these courses (Anderson et al., 2014). In addition to whether a transition is on or off time, any additional events and stresses an individual is concurrently experiencing contributes to their perceived strain and their access to the energy and resources necessary to navigate it (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012).

Perspectives on Adapting

Moos and Tsu (1976) suggest that movement through a transition is characterized by the ways individuals manage their psychological resources and identified two phases of adaptation that reflect these changes. Because individuals experience high levels of stress at the outset of a transition and focus their energy on managing and minimizing the stress and strain, they described this initial phase as the acute phase. Because the second phase is characterized by accepting the need to engage in the transition, adapting to it, and “returning to normal functioning,” they described it as the reorganizational phase (Moos & Tsu, 1976, p.15). Bridges

(1980) recognizes 3 phases in the transition process based on the evolving actions of adapting: the initial event-triggered adaptation which involves managing the higher levels of stress, followed by a phase characterized by adapting existing patterns of thinking and acting, and finally, a moving out stage during which an individual completes one transition and prepares for the next one (Bridges, 1980).

Bridge's (1980) stages are suggestive of Schlossberg's (1981/2016) phases of moving in, through, and out of a transition. She recognizes that moving into a transition tends to involve high levels of stress and affirms the application of the term acute to describe it. She also recognizes that moving through involves reorganizing the way individuals view their situation and selves and involves actively adapting, or reorganizing assumptions and behaviors to resolve the threat or seize the opportunity (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Like Bridges (1980), she views moving out as a time of integrating any adaptations in resources into their identity and preparing for future transitions. Schlossberg (1981/2016) adopts the terms moving in, moving through, and moving out to reflect a general pattern of progress through a transition, but recognizes that the phases individuals progress through vary depending upon the unique characteristics and resources of the individual in transition, the phenomenon that triggers it, and the context in which it takes place. To provide evidence of the ways in which transitional phases vary, Schlossberg (1981/2016) refers to the phases of adaptation documented in several studies, including Levin's (1976) study of men who emigrated to Canada to avoid serving in the Vietnam War and Kubler-Ross' (1969) stages of grief.

Schlossberg (1981/2016) uses Levin's (1976) study to demonstrate how phases of adaptation emerge in response to the unique characteristics of phenomenon, individuals, and timing. Levin (1976) found that the men in his study experienced four phases of adaptation, but

that they experienced each phase uniquely and for different lengths of time. He found that a general pattern of adaptation emerged that reflected the need to adapt perspectives and behaviors as they fled the US, sought exile in Canada, and made decisions regarding settling into their new homes. He observed that psychic pain, guilt, and isolation characterized the first phase and used the term disorganized to capture their initial experiences (Levin, 1976). He identified a second phase in which the men in his study began to externalize, or act out, their emotional discomfort and their sense of isolation and used the term, acting out, to describe this phase, their anti-social behaviors, and the lack of productivity that characterized it (Levin, 1976). As the men moved out of this phase, they began to develop a growing willingness to seek and explore ways to make meaning out of their experiences and make productive use of their time. Levin (1976) used the terms searching and exploring to describe this phase. He also observed a fourth phase he described as adaptation and reintegration, in which some of the men developed a new, productive lifestyle, but noted that only a few of them achieved this final stage (Levin, 1976).

Schlossberg (1981/2016) also referenced Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of adaptation in response to grief to evidence variation in transitional phases. Although originally applied exclusively to bereavement, Kubler-Ross's (1969) phases of death and dying have been applied to understand transitions through diverse experiences from retiring from professional sports to organizational change (Anfara, & Mertz, 2006; Wilson, 2010; Wyllemana, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004; Zell, 2016). The five phases of grieving an imminent death include, denial, anger and resentment, bargaining, preparatory depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Researchers who have applied these stages of grief to other contexts and transitions have added a 6th stage reflecting reintegration or integration of adaptations into identity (Zell, 2016). Both Levin's (1976) and Kubler-Ross's phases reflect a period of intense emotions, followed by some

form of reorganizing of perspective, and movement toward reintegration or resolution similar to the trajectory provided by Schlossberg’s (1981/2016) three generalized phases (see Table 1).

Table 1. Variations in Phases of Transition

Moos & Tsu (1976)	Bridges (1980) Schlossberg (1981)	Levin (1976)	Kubler-Ross (1969)	Shared Characteristics
Acute	Moving In	Disorganized/ Acting Out	Denial Anger Resentment	1) High stress/ Intense Emotions/ Discomfort
Reorganizing	Moving Through	Searching/Exploring	Bargaining Preparatory Depression Acceptance	2) Acting on Discomfort/ Reorganizing Perspective/ Adapting Behaviors
	Moving Out	Reintegration	Reintegration	3) Integrating New Perspectives and Adapted Behaviors into Identity

While these studies demonstrate the ways in which adaptation within the three overarching phases are similar, they also draw attention to the way in which they vary based on the unique characteristics of the phenomenon that triggers the transition and the equally unique resources of self, context, and timing (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). These perspectives supported developing an understanding of how the participants experienced the transition into, through, and out of pre-curriculum courses in ways that echoed the overarching tendencies, but also emphasized the need to be attentive to the ways in which they uniquely adapted their assumptions, resources, and behaviors as they moved through these courses. Kubler-Ross’s (1969) phases of denial, anger, resentment, and acceptance contributed to an understanding of the initial, intense emotions the participants in this study experienced and drew attention to the importance acceptance played in supporting their willingness to persist through their pre-curriculum courses. Levin’s (1976) observations of his participants’ initial discomforts and their subsequent need to act out them out

provided insights into how the participants' initial discomforts led some of them to act out. His participants' subsequent movement toward a willingness to search and explore ways to become productive in their new situations contributed to understanding this study's participants' need to go through some trial and error experiences as they explored and experimented with adapting their assumptions and behaviors and developing goal-oriented and effective self-regulation.

Although the above phases suggest movement through a transition occurs in a somewhat linear fashion, transition theory recognizes that a single transition does not occur in a vacuum. Rather it occurs in an open system characterized by multiple, nonlinear, disordered, overlapping transitions that represent both threats and opportunities in multiple different contexts (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goodall, 2009; Bright & Pryor, 2008). As a result, an unlimited number of variables and concurrent stresses contribute to individuals' experience of an identity threat and their willingness to endure it. Adaptation and the development it reflects do not unfold in clear sequences, but occur in a disordered and recursive manner. For example, an individual may still be experiencing the intense emotions of the acute phase of a transition and outwardly expressing anger, but also inwardly beginning to reflect on their options for moving forward and contemplating activities associated with the reorganizational phase (Anderson et al., 2014).

Phases of adaptation through a transition, for this reason, must accommodate the disorder of modern experience; the uniqueness of individual resources, experience, and context; and the non-linear, unpredictable way in which adaptation and development occur (Bussolari & Goodell, 2009). This suggests that pre-curriculum college students progress through the three overarching phases in a disorderly, non-linear manner; that they may engage in the actions prescribed to any one phase at any point; that they may move back and forth through specific activities and phases, as needed; and that they will progress through these phases at different rates according to their

internal and external resources (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goodall, 2009; Bright & Pryor, 2008).

Schlossberg's View of Adapting

In addition to providing insights into the variations in adaptation triggered by diverse phenomena, Schlossberg (1981/2016) draws from the above, additional studies, and her own research to construct a transition model that captures the general trends in adaptation. By borrowing Bridges (1980) flexible terms of moving in, through, and out of a transition, she avoids being too prescriptive about the potential variations in adaptation that diverse transition phenomena prompt and the unique way individuals respond. This allows the unique patterns of individual adaptation to emerge in response to variations in identity threat, context, and participant characteristics. Schlossberg (1981/2016) describes the general nature of each of these three overarching phases. She observes that individuals in the acute phase of moving into a transition experience high stress, discomfort, and intense emotions. If or when individuals recognize the need to adapt their assumptions and behaviors to resolve the identity threat, she argues they move through the reorganizational phase. She asserts that when they begin to integrate their adaptations in assumptions and behaviors into their existing identities, they are entering the reintegration phase or moving out of the transition (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). She argues that the integration of adapted assumptions and behaviors reflects identity adaptation and cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016).

Schlossberg (1981/2016) argues that individuals thinking and behaving in each phase are shaped by the nature of that phase. In other words, the initial high levels of strain of the first phase, the need to reorganize assumptions and behaviors in the second, and the resolution of the

identity threat in the third is reflected in individuals' thinking, behaving, and the actions they engage in during each of these phases. She provides descriptions of the experiences and activities that typically tend to occur in each of these phases and articulates how these adaptations contribute to movement through them (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). These experiences and activities are explored in greater detail as they relate to the phases in which they occur (see Table 2).

Table 2. Schlossberg's Phases and Experiences/Activities

Phases	Description	Experiences/Activities
Phase 1: Moving In Acute or Disorganized	Experience: Intense emotions, Distress and discomfort	Experience identity threat Manage the stress, strain and emotions Assess the situation Engage in short-term coping strategies
Phase 2: Moving Through Reorganizational	Recognize the need to: Act on discomfort Adapt assumptions Adapt behaviors	Reassess the situation Adapt assumptions Take stock Take charge Develop self-efficacy
Phase 3: Moving Out Reintegration	Demonstrate integration of new assumptions, roles, routines, and relationship into identity	Reassess the identity threat and situation Evidence personal development Prepare to Separate

Moving In or The Acute Phase

The over-arching phase of moving into a transition focuses on the initial responses to the identity threat; managing the stress, strain, and the emotions it generates; and developing an initial assessment or perception of it based on the pain and discomfort it generates (Anderson, et al., 2014). It also involves an assessment of the resources of self, situation, support, and strategies. Moving in, or the acute phase, tends to be the most emotionally intense and stressful of the three overarching phases. In addition to experiencing identity threat, or threat to existing perceptions of self or imagined future self, individuals also experience the need to let go of old roles, routines, relationships, and assumptions (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016).

Letting go of preexisting or hangover identities and habits often involves pain, loss, and a difficult adjustment period. It also requires processing time and adds additional stress to the initial experiences of a transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Moreover, these multiple concurrent shifts create a sense of disorder and generate additional emotions (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Research on college students affirms that most first-year students are attached to the roles, routines, relationships and assumptions that served them well in their previous educational and residential contexts and struggle with letting go of them (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Parella & Terenzini, 2005; Schlossberg, 1989). Pre-curriculum learners that expect the strategies that they used successfully in their high school classes to be effective in their college courses will experience disappointments. If these disappointments contribute to their self-doubt, they will add to their perceived internal resource liabilities or deficits and contribute to the appeal of stopping or dropping out of college (Anderson et al, 2014). However, if these disappointments cause them to recognize the need to adapt and they perceive themselves as having the energy and resources to resolve the threat, they are more likely to persist through the transition (Anderson et al., 2104).

Schlossberg (1981/2016) suggests that individuals in the initial phase of a transition respond to the strains, stress, and intense emotions by engaging in coping strategies that attempt to minimize them. Minimizing the impact of a strain often involves engaging in denial- or avoidance-oriented thinking and behaviors (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Elliot & Covington, 2001). Avoidance and denial strategies allow individuals to detach from the pain associated with a personal threat. As a result, these strategies minimize psychic and emotional stress and strain, manage fear and anxiety, and protect individuals' sense

of self from enduring the full impact of an identity threat (Anderson et al., 2014; Hayes, Levin, Plumb-Villardaga, Villatte, & Pistorello, 2013; Wiebe & Korbel, 2003).

Avoiding and denying a threat to some aspect of identity temporarily moderates the discomfort associated with it and influences individuals' to develop an unrealistic assessments of their situations and resources, impacts their willingness to navigate it, and influences their tendency to adopt self-sabotaging behaviors (Anderson et al., 2014; Elliot & Covington, 2001). These initial assessments and assumptions can have a powerful impact on individuals' willingness to navigate the transition (Anderson et al., 2014). For example, to protect their sense of competence, pre-curriculum college students may initially attribute their placement into remediation to rushing through or not caring about the placement test. This evaluative narrative provides a justification for lower test scores, gives them a reason to deny membership in a stigmatized or marginalized group, and reduces the threat under-preparedness poses to their identity and degree attainment goals (Anderson et al., 2014; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011). But this perspective is often unrealistic and reflects an externalizing of cause and denying personal responsibility. Accepting and taking personal responsibility is essential to the adaptation process (Anderson et al., 2014). Individuals who maintain these initial denial- or avoidance-oriented assumptions struggle with finding a reason to adapt their resources and complete their transitions (Anderson et al., 2014).

Denial- and avoidance-oriented strategies, if continued, sabotage progress through a transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Elliot & Covington, 2001; Hayes et al.2013; Kobossa et al., 1982). Schlossberg (1981/2016) adopts the term, short-term coping strategies, to underscore their ineffectiveness if continued. But because these initial assessments avoid or deny the relevance or reality of a transition, they can temporarily preserve self-worth, energy, and internal resources

until a time when individuals are better prepared to navigate the transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Elliot & Covington, 2001; Hayes et al., 2013; Kobossa et al., 1982).

Moving Through or the Reorganizational Phase

Individuals who persist through the acute phase of a transition into the reorganizational phase find reasons to reassess their situation and, usually, develop a more realistic than view than that of their initial assessment. In response to this reassessment, they adapt their assumptions and begin to engage in threat-resolving strategies (Anderson et al., 2014). The reorganizational phase is also characterized by accepting the need to adapt and by engaging in self-regulatory or coping strategies that become increasingly more goal-oriented and less avoidance- or denial-oriented (Anderson et al., 2014; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Schlossberg (1981/2016) uses the terms taking stock and taking charge to describe the self-regulatory reflection necessary to engage in and promote movement through a transition.

Taking stock involves assessing and evaluating the internal and external resources available to support movement through the transition. It involves assessing the costs and benefits of persisting through the identity threat, the potential for successfully resolving it, and comparing these costs and benefits to those of retreating from the transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). For the pre-curriculum college student, this translates into assessing one's intellectual and psychological resources, or one's capacity to be successful in either the pre-curriculum or the curriculum courses. It also means comparing the costs and benefits of persisting through remediation and completing a degree to the costs and benefits of dropping or stopping out. Individuals who perceive their resources as adequate—even when this assessment is unrealistic—are more likely to engage in and complete a transition (Anderson et al., 2014). Pre-curriculum college students who take stock, assess themselves as capable, and determine that

the benefits of completing remediation or a college degree justify the costs of the psychic pain, make decisions to invest the effort and energy necessary to complete them (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Those who take stock and determine that they do not have sufficient resources to complete the remedial courses or endure the pain will be less likely to persist.

Those who persist, and develop strategies that help them achieve success will experience an enhanced perception of their ability to resolve the threat (Bandura, 1977). As individuals accrue successes in response to proactively engaging in threat-resolving strategies, they develop an increased sense of being in control that encourages them to take charge of their situations (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 1977). Taking charge involves engaging in goal- and approach-oriented self-regulatory strategies, such as setting goals, proactively developing and strengthening resources, and managing time, emotions, effort, distractions, and responsibilities (Anderson et al., 2014; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Increased self-efficacy also reflects an adaptation in assumptions about self, situation, support, and strategies; reduces stress and strain; improves self-esteem; and encourages an increased willingness to continue to strengthen resources (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 1977; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin, 1996; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Pre-curriculum college students that take charge of their situations and consistently and proactively engage in goal-oriented self-regulation will move toward resolving the threat under-preparedness poses to their identity. They will also evidence adaptations in assumptions and behaviors that increase their likelihood of completing their remedial studies.

Moving Out or the Reintegration Phase

Moving out of a transition is characterized by resolution of the identity threat that initiated the transition. It involves the continued use and development of internal and external resources, a

growing sense of self-efficacy, and identity reintegration, or the integration of the new roles, routines, relationships and assumptions into the psyche (Anderson et al., 2014). Individuals who achieve reintegration often reflect on and, again, assess their situation, selves, support, and strategies, finding that their adaptations have rendered unexpected, positive outcomes (Anderson et al., 2014). Pre-curriculum college students who complete their remedial studies are likely to experience relief from the stress and strain of the threat to their identities and future possible selves (Anderson et al, 2014). Those who have internalized their adaptations will evidence increased self-efficacy, resilience, and interpersonal, intrapersonal and cognitive development (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). These developmental outcomes are addressed more fully in this chapter as they relate to internal resource adaptation. Moving out of a transition may also involve preparing to separate, to some degree, from one or more of the transition-generated roles, relationships, routines or preparing for one or more new transitions (Anderson et al., 2014).

The Role of Resources in Adaptation

In addition to describing the overarching phases individual process through, transition theory also describes the relationship between individuals' existing and developing internal and external resources to their responses to an identity threat. Schlossberg (1981/2016) argues that individuals response to a transition trigger is directly related their perceptions of their existing internal and external resource assets or deficits and their assumptions about their capacity to adapt these resources sufficiently to resolve the threat (Anderson et al., 2014). As they move through a transition, their assumptions regarding their resources evolve. Transition theory asserts that all resources, both internal and external, are interconnected (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goddall, 2009). Individuals with stronger external resources often have stronger internal resources and vice versa. For example, internal strengths in optimistic processing facilitate the

development of external resources, such as support networks; and strong external resources, such as family and peer support, facilitate the development of internal resources, such as hope (Anderson et al., 2014). Likewise, those with weaker external resources, such as lower socioeconomic, minority, disability, or first-generation status, often, but not always, have weaker internal resources.

Risk is, in effect, an acknowledgement of an absence of resources. The more characteristics for risk college students bring to their enrollment, the fewer their potential resources for sustaining them through their challenges (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terezini, 1991; Schlossberg, 1989). The greater the risk individuals bring to a transition, the greater their need to strengthen their existing internal and external resources and their need to develop new ones (Anderson et al., 2014). The more characteristics for risk pre-curriculum college students bring to enrollment, the greater their need to develop new, and strengthen existing, internal and external resources (Anderson et al., 2014). Similarly, the more risk they bring, the greater their need for institutional support to compensate for those deficits. The relationship of risk to the need for compensating resources provides a way of understanding academically under-prepared students need for support to improve student retention. This examination of the role of internal and external resources was central to this study and its goal to better understand the influences on pre-curriculum college student attrition, especially students with additional characteristics of risk, such as minority, low socioeconomic, and first-generation status.

Transition theory advances the idea that individuals' risks and resources are adapting continuously in response to the multiple variables that contribute to their collective experiences, placing them in developmental state of flux where they are responding simultaneously to

variables that both promote and hinder adaptation (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goodall, 2009; Bright & Pryor, 2008). It also affirms that adaptation in one resource leads to adaptations in others or that a loss or regression in one resource can also produce loss or regression in other resources, producing a compounding or cumulative effect in either direction (Anderson et al., 2014). This study attempted to develop an understanding of how each of the participants uniquely experienced identification as academically underprepared while simultaneously experiencing the multiple new demands on their roles, routines, relationships, and responsibilities associated with the transition into college. It explores the effect these concurrent stresses had on the participants' perceptions of their internal and external resources.

Schlossberg (1981/2016) organizes resources around the concepts of self, situation, strategies, and support, the 4 S's, and refers to these resources as factors influencing progress through a transition. She regards self and strategies as contributing to the internal resource asset-to-liability ratio and support and situation as contributing to the external resource asset-to-liability ratio. For this study, the external resources of situation and support bled into the internal resources of self, especially in regards to the participants' perception of situation and support and their willingness to proactively engage in them. To manage this overlap, this study organized resources according to whether they were internally or externally generated. It also classified resources or interactions that promoted movement through pre-curriculum courses as assets and those that hindered movement as deficits or liabilities (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Participants' perceptions of their experiences determined whether a resource was viewed as an asset or deficit.

To facilitate an understanding of the influence of internal and external resources on the participants in this study, this review explored literature that addressed the impact of institutional and non-institutional resources on academically underprepared, at-risk, and first-year college

students' persistence and development. It also addressed literature related to the role of college students' internal resources during their first-year of college and how they develop these to promote progress through a challenge, conflict or threat to identity. External resources that influence pre-curriculum college student persistence include interactions within the college context and with those connected to their home lives.

The Role of External Resources

External resources are relevant to movement through a transition and the identity adaptation that occurs in response. When external resources support transition, they are assets, and when they hinder transition, they are liabilities or deficits (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). This study was sited at MSI in order to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students with additional risk factors for exiting college early. The goal was to develop an understanding of the ways in which vulnerable students with multiple resource liabilities or deficits defied the odds against them, persisted in and completed their remedial studies, and achieved full enrollment in curriculum courses. Characteristics related to family composition, minority, first-generation, disability and low socio-economic status are often correlated with risk and lower levels of external resources for supporting persistence in college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Harper & Quay, 2009). This study used these characteristics, first, from a descriptive perspective to develop a thorough understanding of each of the participants. But it also examined them from an exploratory perspective to attempt to understand the influence of them and other external resources on the participants' movement through their pre-curriculum courses. Other external resources relevant to the pre-curriculum college students include interactions with institutional personnel, programming, and classmates, roommates, intimate relationships, and affinity groups.

Schlossberg (2004) developed the concept of the triadic psychological portfolio, composed of identity, relationships, and involvement to describe the role of external resources in adapting internal resources. This portfolio, she argues, links the past self to the future self in the transition process. As a result, successful transition includes becoming involved in meaningful activities, adapting existing and new relationships to accommodate change, and integrating these new roles, resources, relationships and assumption into identity. Each of these components of self develops based on the interaction of self with environment or context (Schlossberg, 2004). Meaningful involvement and identity adaptation are also considered critical to college student development and persistence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al, 2010; Pascarella & Terezini, 1991; Schlossberg, 1989; Rayle & Chung, 2007). Like the triadic psychological portfolio, college student development is often tied to institutional involvement, relationship formation, and successful integration into the college community (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al, 2010; Pascarella & Terezini, 1991). Letting go of hangover identities and voicing acceptance of new identities have been identified as critical to college persistence and are tied to interpersonal, intrapersonal and cognitive development (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2012; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1991).

When individuals experience interactions with external resources that promote movement through a transition, they begin to feel validated and affirmed, develop a sense of mattering to others in the context, adapt their identities, and develop personally (Anderson et al., 2014). Meaningful involvement, such as finding and joining an affiliation group has been shown to promote persistence by creating opportunities to form relevant relationships that support identity adaptation and the adoption of new roles and routines (Anderson et al, 2014; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1991; Schlossberg, 1989). Developing relationships with instructors has been found to

support persistence by providing a path for perspective change, the adoption of new assumptions, and the development of knowledge construction (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Meaningful involvement and developing new relationships promote integration into the college culture and academic success (Anderson et al., 2012; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1991; Schlossberg, 1989).

In a study of college students, Schlossberg (1989) described the roles of mattering and marginality in the transition to college. She defines mattering as the degree to which others depend upon and are interested in an individual and marginality as not feeling accepted or as mattering to others (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg (1989) suggests that first-year college students' experiences of belonging fall on a spectrum from marginalized, or not feeling accepted, to mattering, or belonging and being engaged. She argues that most freshmen college students initially identify on the lower end of the spectrum, toward marginalized, and that this leads to discouraging feelings that can negatively impact academic outcomes and cause them to consider exiting college (Schlossberg, 1989). She found that students who developed context-based connections that made them feel as though they mattered experienced higher rates of persistence (Schlossberg, 1989). Rayle and Chung (2007) found that first-year students who experienced higher levels of mattering also experienced lower levels of stress. Perceptions of mattering promote integration into the college context, campus involvement, relationship formation, identity adaptation, and a willingness to persist in the transition to college (Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989).

Any type of relationship that projects mattering to first-year freshmen contributes to their sense of feeling supported, encourages willingness to resolve identity threats, and promotes movement through a transition and identity adaptation (Anderson et al., 2014). Support

relationships are defined by type and source of support and the degree of intimacy or frequency of interaction (Anderson et al, 2014). Types of support include offering aid, assuaging affect, providing affirmation, and delivering honest feedback (Anderson et al., 2014) Aid in this study refers to providing supplies; offering guidance or perspectives on approaching or working through challenges; and teaching, or providing skill-related instruction. Assuaging affect refers to supporting an individual in processing through emotional challenges. Providing affirmation refers to validating individuals' worth, competence or choices (Schlossberg, 1989; Lee, Tovar, & Simon 2009). Anderson et al. (2014) argue that honest feedback also provides support to an individual in transition by providing evidence that thinking, strategies, or behaviors are not effective in resolving the threat to identity. Each of these forms of support has the power to encourage mattering based on individuals' perceptions of them (Anderson et al., 2014).

Institutional personnel who provide aid, affirmation, honest feedback, or offer emotional support to assuage affect are supporting student retention and personal development. Baxter Magolda (2008/2012) asserts that personnel who affirm students' voices, provide ways for them to see challenges as opportunities, collaborate with them to solve problems, and connect content to reality are supporting interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development. She underscores the importance of relationships in development, especially supportive relationships that recognize students' level of development and are sensitive to those moments when they experience an event or knowledge claim that conflicts with an existing assumption (Baxter Magolda, 2004/2012). Institutional personnel who support students when they question their own assumptions and validate their autonomous and authentic thinking, are promoting knowledge construction and college persistence (Baxter Magolda, 2012). Aid, affirmation, assuaging affect, and feedback also encourage college students to move away from being defined by others and

believing that authorities are the source of truth and knowledge. This also prompts them to take responsibility for defining themselves and beginning to construct their own knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004/2012). Defining self and developing autonomous thinking are addressed later in this chapter as they relate to internal resource adaptation.

Table 3. External Resources, Assets, Deficits, or Liabilities

External Resource	Hinder Progress	Promote Progress
Non-institutional Interactions/Resources: Family Community members (School/Church/etc.) Peers from home Pre-existing intimate relationships	When they: Distract Offer concurrent stress Create tension Deplete Energy Deplete Resources	When they provide: Aid Affirmation Honest feedback or Assuage affect When they promote:
Institutional Interactions/Resources: Placement testing Enrollment in remedial courses Classmates Peer community (Roommates/Teammates/etc.) Institutional Personnel (Faculty/Student Life/etc.) New intimate relationships	Disaffirm Marginalize Stigmatize Threaten Identity Overwhelm	Self-efficacy Mattering Validation and affirmation Personal development or Knowledge construction

The more external resource assets pre-curriculum students perceive as available to them, the more likely they are to feel they have adequate support for resolving the threat to identity that academic under-preparedness poses to them (see Table 3). External resources and interactions that promote students' perceptions of available support will also promote their perceptions of competence, and their willingness to develop the internal resources necessary to navigate pre-curriculum courses. However, external resources and interactions will hinder students' progress through their remedial courses if they marginalize them or disaffirm their membership in the college community, stigmatize them or cause them to feel inferior, or if they reinforce any perceived threats (Anderson et al., 2014). External resources that distract, deplete energy, or create concurrent stress will also hinder movement through a transition. How individuals' respond to external resources is developed further later in this chapter.

Contextual External Resource Assets and Liabilities

Although institutional influence on student persistence begins in, or potentially before, the admissions process, this study begins its examination of institution-student interaction at the point where the participants took their placement tests. Research on assessing and diagnosing academic under-preparedness reports that achieving a valid assessment of college student preparedness and ensuring accuracy in course placement requires a review of multiple measures of student performance (Barnett & Reddy, 2017; Horn, McCoy, Campbell, & Brock, 2009; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Because reviewing multiple measures is time and labor intensive, it is often cost and time-prohibitive for institutions to engage in this more rigorous process (Hughes et al., 2012). As a result, most institutions rely on standardized tests, such as the Accuplacer, Compass, or Asset, to determine pre-curriculum courses placement (Bailey & Jagers, 2016; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2015).

Institutions that are unable to provide multiple measures of performance are not maximizing students' opportunities to be accurately assessed. These conditions impact academically underprepared college students' educational trajectories and when they do so negatively, they serve as resource liabilities or deficits (Bailey & Jagers, 2016; Horn et al., 2009; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2015). These and other standardized tests have been found to be biased in favor of individuals with majority status and experience. As a result they may not accurately reflect the level of preparedness of individuals with non-majority status and experience, further diminishing some students' opportunities for accurate course placement (Horn et al., 2009; Hughes, & Scott-Clayton, 2011). As a result, relying on a single, biased, standardized measure of performance results in incorrect placements for up to a 35% of

academically underprepared college students (Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Scott-Clayton et al., 2012; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2015).

In addition, these tests are designed to predict the likelihood of success or failure in a course and are not designed to diagnose areas of weakness. They do not provide data regarding students' specific skill gaps, so students with minor, easily remedied deficits must sit through semester- or quarter-length courses before being allowed to fully enroll in curriculum courses (Bailey & Cho, 2010). Biased, less-than-accurate placement strategies contribute to the costs of time and money for pre-curriculum courses, two of the variables found to contribute to the high attrition rates for academically underprepared students (Bailey & Jagers, 2016). Because these conditions are less than optimal, these tests and policies serve as resource liabilities for some students and contribute to any other messages that disaffirm their membership in the college community. When they serve as resource liabilities, they also negatively impact pre-curriculum college students' persistence through remediation (Bailey & Jagers, 2016; Horn et al., 2009).

Pre-curriculum college students usually discover they have been identified as academically underprepared at the conclusion of placement testing or at enrollment in their pre-curriculum courses (Bailey & Jagers, 2016; Horn et al., 2009). This critical student-institution interaction informs them that they are not academically prepared for college courses, casting doubt upon their ability to succeed in college. At enrollment, they also recognize that they are segregated from their prepared peers. Both of these institutional-student interactions send the message that they are inferior to their prepared peers and not good enough for college courses. These interactions stigmatize pre-curriculum college students, disaffirm their membership in the college community, and contribute to their external resource deficits or liabilities (Anderson et al., 2014).

Student-institution interactions also include experiences with curricula, faculty, other institutional and support personnel, and their peers, both inside and outside the classroom. Course curricula and faculty that meaningfully engage learners and target their specific academic skill gaps serve as institutional resource assets. Unfortunately, Bailey & Jagers's (2016) review of the literature on academic under-preparedness found that institutions tend to employ ineffective curricula in developmental courses. They found that curricula and instruction often did not engage pre-curriculum students because it emphasized superficial skill and drill learning. They also found that institutions tend to hire less experienced or qualified faculty to teach these courses, further disadvantaging vulnerable academically underprepared college students (Bailey & Jagers, 2016). When these conditions exist, pre-curriculum learners do not have access to optimal external resources. However, pre-curriculum students who perceive their instructors as authentically interested in them and validated will see themselves as having access to supportive external resources. College students who feel as though they matter and have support are more likely to engage in the classroom and seek assistance when they need it (Ballard et al., 2016; Baxter-Magolda, 2014; Buck & Neff, 2012; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Elliot & Covington, 2001; Kobossa et al., 1982). External resource assets that affirm students' ability to complete their pre-curriculum studies give these students justification for devoting the time and energy necessary to remediate their skill deficits.

How pre-curriculum college students perceive identification as academically underprepared is also influenced by the way in which those they associate with assess, process, and respond to it (Anderson et al., 2014; Gupton, Castelo-Rodriguez, Martinez, & Quintar, 2009; Schlossberg, 1989). This is particularly relevant to how others perceive and respond to the stigmatization and marginalization associated with it. Their responses can serve as resource

liabilities or assets (Anderson et al., 2014). Interaction with instructors that help pre-curriculum students see their enrollment in remediation as normal and useful support moderation of the stigma, marginalization, and their stress and strain (Schlossberg, 1981). Those who help them feel comfortable seeking assistance are encouraging them to accept the reality of their skill deficits and promoting a belief in their ability to remediate their skill gaps. These interactions also encourage them to develop hope for completing their pre-curriculum courses (Anderson et al., 2014; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1991; Schlossberg, 1989).

External resources that encourage students to seek help are resource assets. Individuals who feel comfortable seeking help in navigating a transition have been found to be more likely to develop the goal-oriented strategies that promote persistence through it (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 1977; Fiske and Chiriboga, 1990). Feeling comfortable seeking assistance has also been found to be central to promoting persistence among at-risk college students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1991; Schlossberg, 1989). Because they tend to have less exposure to the context, are more likely to feel marginalized or different from their peers, and have a greater need to feel a sense of belonging, at-risk college students have a increased need for interactions with faculty that make them feel connected, valued, and validated (Baxter-Magolda, 2004; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pizzolato, 2003/2004/2005; McCoy, 2014; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pascarella & Terezini, 1991; Paulson & Armstrong, 2010; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989).

In the same way that professors and staff can encourage validation and mattering through empathetic interaction, they can also discourage it through the use of language, behaviors, and gestures that draw attention to students' differences from peers or suggest that they are not capable of college work. Whether it is intentional or unintentional, when instructors suggest that

students are not capable of competing in the college classroom, they are reinforcing existing self-doubts and any pre-existing sense of alienation (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Mendoza et al., 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schlossberg, 1989; Sylvester, 2012). Academically underprepared students can perceive comments such as, “You should already know this” as drawing attention to their personal failings and as reinforcing their existing feelings of inferiority, marginalization, and self-doubt (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pizzolatto, 2004; Richman et al., 2015). Pre-curriculum college students who interpret instructors’ language or gestures as suggesting they are not competent further reinforce any existing perceived sense of self-doubt and contribute to a desire to exit college before completing remediation. These institution-student interactions become resource liabilities for pre-curriculum students (Anderson et al., 2014).

Interactions with peers in the college context, peers from home, family, and intimate contacts also have the power to encourage or discourage pre-curriculum persistence (Anderson et al., 2014). These interactions may take place in or outside of the classroom and negatively or positively impact persistence by contributing to students’ sense of belonging or not belonging in college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pizzolatto, 2004; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pizzolatto & Ozaki, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989). Pre-curriculum college students are sharing the experience of identification as academically underprepared with a portion of their peers in the context. Those who perceive themselves as members of a large group with a shared challenge will feel less threatened by identification with academic under-preparedness, less marginalized, have more hope for completing their remediation. They will also feel less stress

and strain (Anderson et al., 2014). In this way, experiencing a threat as a shared experience contributes toward resource assets.

However, those who continue to perceive themselves as isolated and alone will not experience this benefit (Anderson et al., 2014). As well, when a transitional experience is shared with others who are responding to it in an intense, negative, or public manner, it can escalate the stress and strain others around them experience and encourage individuals to adopt these more intense perspectives (Anderson et al., 2014). This interferes with individuals' ability to develop their own authentic perspectives on the transition and tends to promote a delay in adopting approach-oriented strategies (Anderson et al., 2014). If pre-curriculum college students, for example, find themselves in a class with students who vocalize negative assessments of their enrollment in remediation or engage in behaviors that disrupt the classroom, they may adopt these students' assumptions, outlooks, or behaviors and experience a delay in their progress through the courses (Anderson et al., 2014). In this way, perspectives of others who are experiencing the same transition may contribute to resource liabilities.

Any relationship, whether family or peer, or in- or out-of-class, that draws attention to academically underprepared students' differences from their prepared peers is introducing or reinforcing stigmatization or marginalization and serving as a resource liability (Anderson et al., 2014; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Hellman, 1996; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pizzolato, 2004; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989). Parents, for example, that negatively respond to their students' enrollment in pre-curriculum courses reinforce any perceived sense of shame they are already experiencing. Likewise peers who tease or joke about pre-curriculum college students' enrollment in these non-credit courses also reinforce any existing perceptions of stigma and marginalization. But parents or peers who

attempt to assuage affect or express confidence in pre-curriculum college students' ability to navigate their courses will contribute to their resource assets (Anderson et al., 2014).

Relationships that distract students from their educational goals can also serve as resource liabilities (Anderson et al., 2014). First-generation college students often experience tensions between meeting needs related to their home lives with their need to invest in themselves through studying, going to class, and paying for school (Gupton et al., 2019). Family members or peers who do not understand the culture of college or fear losing their students to a new lifestyle can unintentionally create distractions that that divert students' attention from their goals. Messages that imply the immediate needs at home are more important than long-term benefits of earning a college degree can be conflicting, stressful, and divert energy away from students' academics (Gupton et al., 2009). As well, students in intimate relationships that struggle to balance the quantity of attention the relationship demands and the quantity of attention that their pre-curriculum courses demand will also experience energy diversions and distractions (Anderson et al., 2014). Experiences that distract or divert valuable time and energy away from investing in their pre-curriculum studies will contribute to students' external resource liabilities and interfere with their opportunities to bridge their academic skill gaps (Anderson et al., 2014: Buck & Neff, 2012).

Like relationships that distract, other stresses, threats, and opportunities that are occurring concurrently can divert energy away from adapting resources in a transition, contribute to strains, and become resource liabilities (Anderson et al., 2014: Buck & Neff, 2012). Anderson et al. (2014) suggests that stress, even the stress related to transitions triggered by opportunities, places strain on individuals. When individuals in transition experience too many concurrent stresses or strains, they are subject to becoming overwhelmed and feeling the need to retreat from it to

minimize their multiple strains. As a result of leaving home and living independently for the first time, first-year residential college students experience many of the transitions associated with young adulthood, all at one time (Arnett, 2000; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995/2002; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). They suddenly need to abandon their dependence on others, take on many new responsibilities, navigate a thoroughly different academic and residential structure, and learn the unknown codes and expectations for behavior in an entirely new culture (Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Misra et al., 2000). They also have few to no existing relationships or support in this new context and must develop these new connections.

When these multiple concurrent transitions and stresses place more strain on college students than they are prepared for, they are at-risk of becoming overwhelmed and subject to experiencing resource and energy depletion (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012). First-year college students who lack experience adapting in response to identity threats or high-pressure conditions will be even more vulnerable to becoming overwhelmed and to experiencing resources and energy depletion (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012). Like most first-year college students, pre-curriculum students often have not had the opportunity to develop the internal resources necessary to manage the multiple demands placed on them by their new setting (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schlossberg, 1989). The many risks and potential external resource liabilities associated with pre-curriculum enrollment suggests that these students have a heightened need for external resource assets or intensive institutional intervention and support. They need these external supports to promote the internal resource adaptation necessary to complete remediation. The impact of external resources on individual

adaptation is further developed in this chapter as it relates to individuals' internal resources and their development as they move through a transition.

The Role of Internal Resources in The Acute Phase

To understand the role the participants' internal resources played on their willingness to complete their remedial studies and transition into full enrollment in curriculum courses, this review explored literature related to college students' psychological resources of development, identity, and self-regulation (Anderson et al., 2014). The review of literature related to first-year college student development examines the level of development college students tend to bring to their first-year of enrollment, the work they must engage in as they transition into this first-year, and the relationship between personal development, identity adaptation, and knowledge construction (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2008). The review of literature related to college students' identity addresses perception of self, outlook, processing style, and commitments on adapting to college. The review of self-regulation addresses the multiple metacognitive and behavioral adaptations associated with building and strengthening existing strategies and inventories and their relationship to self-efficacy (Anderson et al., 2014; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991).

Schlossberg (1981/2016) describes individuals' psychological resources as including personal development; identity or perceptions of self; self-efficacy; outlook; and coping. This study supports this perspective, but replaces coping and self-efficacy with self-regulation because it covers multiple resources or strategies, including self-efficacy and coping. Coping is the regulation stress and strain (Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Zimmerman, 2008). Self-regulation includes regulating strain, as well as, regulating emotions, time, and effort; engaging in the meta-cognitive strategies of assessing situations, supports, and resources; selecting and monitoring the

effectiveness of strategies; weighing options; making decisions; proactively engaging in goal- or approach-oriented strategies; and advocating for self (Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Zimmerman, 2008). Adapting, strengthening, and building new self-regulatory strategies support the development of self-efficacy or a sense of perceived control over circumstances (Anderson et al., 2014; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Zimmerman, 2008). This study regards self-efficacy as the outcome of successful self-regulatory resource adaptation and as influencing perceived identity and personal development (Anderson et al., 2014).

This study also recognizes the overlapping, compounding effect of adapting such that adaptation in one resource promotes adaptation in another, or regression in one resource may also contribute to regression in another (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009). Adaptation of self-regulatory resources promotes cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development and as individuals develop interpersonally, intrapersonally or cognitively, their identities become more internally defined (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). Transition and college student development theorists agree that development along one trajectory or dimension, such as the intrapersonal trajectory, promotes or reinforces development along other trajectories or dimensions (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2004; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995/2002; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

This review addresses the level of internal resources that traditional and at-risk college students bring to the first-year of college to understand their role in this study's participants' initial assumptions regarding identification as academically underprepared and their ability to adapt their resources. It examines the role of existing development, perceived identity, and self-regulation in responding to a threat in the initial, acute phase of the transition, and how

individuals adapt their resource to promote movement through the reorganizational and reintegration phases of a transition (Anderson et al., 2014).

Internal Resources in the Acute Phase

Individuals bring a given set of psychological or internal resources to the outset of a transition (Anderson et al., 2014). Individuals at lower levels of cognitive, intra-, or interpersonal development have fewer psychological and self-regulatory resources and inventories available for coping with the conflict, challenge, or change (Anderson et al., 2014; Loevinger, 1976; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009). First-year college students tend to have fewer experiences with managing threats, conflicts, and strain because they are coming from environments where they have been socialized to see the world in a given way and those views often have not been tested (Baxter Magolda, 1994/2004; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Because their views tend to be untested, they tend to be at lower levels of development at enrollment into college, they have limited self-regulatory resources, and their perceived identity is largely derived from the perception of others (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Development

Development emerges from experiences that test, challenge, or conflict with existing assumptions when those experiences do not overwhelm individuals and prompt them to retreat from them (Anderson et al., 2014). Much of the literature on college student development suggests traditionally-aged, first-time enrolling students enter college with an understanding of themselves and their world based on their, usually limited, previous experiences and their untested assumptions about the world (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1978). Because their assumptions have not been tested,

most first-year college students enroll at a level of development that reflects conventional thinking and have a perception that knowledge is absolute (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1978). They also tend to have a lack of experience with enduring the multiple, concurrent strains or transitions, such as those that they experience in their first-year of college (Buck & Neff, 2012).

Lack of experience coupled with the need to endure the multiple concurrent transitions of the first-year college places all freshmen at risk of feeling overwhelmed, making them vulnerable to energy and resource depletion, interfering with their ability to self-regulate and develop resources, and compromising their ability to fully integrate into the college context (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Misra et al, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Lack of experience is an internal resource liability for most first-year college students (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012). In addition to the multiple strains associated the transition to college, pre-curriculum college students must also cope with the strains of identification as academically underprepared and the stigma and marginalization that comes with it, contributing to their internal resource liabilities or deficits.

Because most first-year, first-time enrolling college students' views have not been challenged, they tend to believe that all knowledge is certain (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1978). Described as absolute knowers because they believe that all questions have either a right or wrong answer, most first-year college students believe that authorities and experts are the source of knowledge and do not see themselves as capable of constructing their own knowledge. (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004/2014). Baxter Magolda (1992) argues that college students at this level of

development make sense of their world by accepting the meaning others have made of it and make sense of themselves based on others' perceptions of them. This means their identity is externally, rather than internally, defined (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Individuals who rely on others to define themselves are sensitive to all external assessments of their perceived strengths, weaknesses, and interests and have a need for external validation (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2001).

Because absolute knowers place a high value on others' perceptions of them, especially authorities, when authorities assess them, their talents, or abilities, they tend to accept that assessment as true and often interpret it as an expectation (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Pre-curriculum learners are identified as academically underprepared by authority figures that represent higher education. Not only are they members of the community to which they seek membership, they have educational credentials that underscore the reliability of their assessment, contributing to its perceived reliability. Absolute knowers are likely to interpret the assessment of themselves as underprepared as an expectation for low academic performance, a prediction of failure in pre-curriculum or curriculum courses, or a message that they do not belong in college (Anderson et al., 2014). Academically underprepared students who accept this assessment as accurate and who do not believe they have the ability to change this status will choose to exit college to avoid the psychic pain it generates or to avoid verifying the accuracy of the assessment (Anderson et al., 2014; Seli, Dembo, & Crocker, 2009).

Because they rely on external sources for validation and self-definition, absolute knowers also develop their goals for themselves based on the perceptions others have of them (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Pastors, teachers, scoutmasters, or coaches may perceive an individual as strong in a given subject area, discipline, or skill and encourage him or her to consider pursuing this

area professionally. Absolute knowers often accommodate externally derived assessments into an inauthentic vision for their future and make unrealistic assumptions about becoming a surgeon or professional sports figure without understanding the statistics or steps required to achieve these goals (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). Because these goals do not arise out of their self-knowledge or genuine interests, they are often vague, unrealistic, or generalized (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). Individuals with externally derived goals are often unable to sustain the commitment required to follow through with them.

However, individuals with specific, interest-generated, internally derived goals have authentic commitment that helps them endure threats and follow through with the steps to achieve their goals (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Perry, 1968). Internally derived goals are a resource asset and externally derived goals are at best neutral resources, but will serve as a resource deficit when these goals do not promote persistence through a transition (Anderson et al., 2014). Pre-curriculum students who express their goals in vague terms may be reflecting externally derived goals. In the face of the challenges associated with pre-curriculum enrollment, a lack of authentic, interest-driven purpose for earning a degree will contribute little to their willingness to endure the psychic pain associated with completing remedial studies (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2001; Perry, 1968).

In the same way that most first-year college students have not begun to define themselves or develop authentic, internally derived goals, most have not developed the intrinsic motivation associated with the desire to learn for the sake of learning. They rely on the external validation of others and the external validation of extrinsic rewards, such as grades and GPA credits (Baxter-Magolda, 2004; Prospero, Russell, & Vohra-Gupta, 2006; Vansteenkiste Lens, & Deci, 2006). This is a problem for pre-curriculum college students because remedial or developmental courses

often do not provide the extrinsic rewards that curriculum courses offer. They do not contribute points toward GPA's because they are often pass or fail and do not provide credit toward graduation (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). At the same time that these courses are not providing extrinsic motivation, they are demanding extrinsic costs in terms of time, money. They are also producing emotional costs in terms of threat, stigma, and marginalization. Depriving pre-curriculum college students of the type of motivation that is developmentally most effective for them, extrinsic motivation, contributes to their external resource deficit or liabilities (Anderson et al., 2014).

Even though college students who are absolute knowers tend to accept an authority's assessment of them as accurate and an expectation or a prediction, when an assessment conflicts with an existing understanding of themselves or an imagined future self, they may also experience it as conflicting with existing assumptions (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). This will contribute to individuals' experience of the discomfort, dissonance, and intense emotions related to an identity threat (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). However, in the same way that a threat to identity can prompt individuals to recognize a need to adapt, experiencing a conflict can prompt individuals to question their existing assumptions (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). When individuals question their assumptions or the assumptions of trusted others, they are setting out on a quest to verify knowledge. Questioning assumptions is the first step in moving away from absolute knowing and toward a higher level of development. It also reflects movement toward questioning the certainty of knowledge and experimenting with knowledge construction (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2014).

Baxter Magolda (1992/2014) argues that questioning the certainty of knowledge is central to college student and adult development. Like Schlossberg (1981/2016), Baxter Magolda

(1992/2014) asserts that when questioning assumptions leads to adaptation, it also promotes interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development. She also argues that when the strain of a conflict exceeds individuals' resources for enduring it, they will deny its relevance by discrediting the source of the conflict or by denying its reality or truth. Baxter Magolda's (1992/2001/2014) understanding of absolute knowers, their need for external validation, their lack of experience with conflicting claims, and their tendency to accept authorities' assessments of them as expectations, provided insights into understanding how and the participants in this study responded to an authority's identification of them as academically underprepared. Her descriptions of college student development contributed to understanding the role existing development plays in promoting or inhibiting pre-curriculum college students' willingness to persist through remediation. Movement toward knowledge construction is addressed in more detail in this chapter as it connects to the outcomes of adapting.

Perceived Identity

Schlossberg (1981/2016) underscores the importance of existing elements of identity in moving into, through, and out of a transition. The elements of identity addressed in this review include perception of self, or perceived identity; hangover identity; outlook and processing style; commitments and values; and imagined future possible selves. Perception of self or identity emerges over time as the self interacts with the environment. As previously noted, first-year college students derive much of their sense of self from trusted authority figures' assessment of them (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Anderson et al. (2014) assert that individuals' perception of self is reflected in the psychological resources of self-esteem and confidence and that that these resources influence outlook, processing style, and the perception of available opportunities. Processing style, commitment, and values also contribute to individuals' outlooks, their

perceptions of themselves and their imagined future possible selves, and influence how they make meaning of their situations (Anderson, et al., 2014; Seligman, 2002; Kobossa et al., 1982; Wolters & Hussain, 2015).

When opportunities or options are in abundance, the resources of self develop (Anderson et al., 2014). However, when opportunities or options for securing socially expected goals are perceived as limited, these resources wane. Moreover, individuals who perceive their opportunities and resources as chronically or pervasively limited will develop chronic self-esteem, self-concept, and self-efficacy deficits (Anderson et al., 2014; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Kitsantas & Chow, 2005; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pizzolatto, 2004; Richman et al., 2015). Depending on individuals' perception of their available resources and opportunities, perception of self directly contributes to individuals' resource asset-to-liability ratio (Anderson et al., 2014). Busollari & Goodell (2009) argue that individuals' perception of self and sense of identity are continuously adapting to their perceptions of the collective challenges and opportunities they are experiencing across the multiple contexts. In one context individuals may feel safe, confident, and accepted while in another they feel threatened, powerless and marginalized (Anderson et al, 2014; Busollari & Goodell, 2009; Schlossberg, 1989).

Feelings of marginalization are particularly relevant to transitions because they contribute to individuals' internal resource deficits or liabilities and interrupt movement through a transition. Schlossberg (1989) argues,

Every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition, the potential for feeling marginal arises. The larger the difference between the former role and the new role, the more marginal the person may feel... (p. 7).

Because the transition to college involves disconnecting from the comforts of previous roles, routines, relationships, and assumptions and engaging in the discomforts of adapting in each of these areas, Schlossberg (1989) argues that most freshmen college students will initially feel marginalized, regardless of the strength of their internal and external resources. She acknowledges that marginalization will be amplified for students who perceive themselves as different from the normal or traditional college student and suggests that college students who perceive themselves as separate or different because of a disability, previous experiences, or lack of previous experiences will experience their marginality more intensely (Schlossberg, 1989).

Schlossberg (1989) also acknowledges that institutional personnel can help college students moderate their feelings of marginalization by creating opportunities for them to feel as though they matter. College students who attempt to engage socially or are affirmed by members of the campus community are more likely to develop feelings of mattering and belonging to the college community (Schlossberg, 1989). Those who develop these connections also experience their sense of marginality only temporarily. However, students who gravitate toward and invest excessively in one aspect of college community that validates their existing identity to avoid one that marginalizes them are at risk of sabotaging their potential for full integration into college. Pre-curriculum college students, for example, who feel as though they matter within an affinity group and invest in these experiences as a way to avoid the feelings of marginalization generated by their remedial studies, compromise their opportunities for completing remediation. As well, students who remain continuously aware of their differences become overly sensitive, self-conscious, feel inferior, and may develop a chronic sense of not belonging and are more likely to exit college early (Schlossberg, 1989). This suggests that at-risk college students identified in a public way as academically inferior to their prepared peers are at

increased risk of perceiving themselves as marginalized, and depending on the length of time they are enrolled in pre-curriculum courses, they are also at increased risk of perceiving their marginalization as prolonged.

In order to adapt to their new contexts and make developmental progress, first-year college students must engage in the developmental task of letting go of their hangover identity, or the assumptions, roles, routines, relationships and habitual thinking and behaving they employed in their previous contexts, such as home and high school (Anderson et al., 2014; Thibodeaux, Deutsch, Kitsantas, & Winsler, 2016). Thibodeaux et al. (2017) found many freshman college students were not aware that their hangover identity and habits were hindering their ability to succeed in their new context. They also did not recognize the need to adapt for several weeks to up to one year after enrollment (Thibodeaux et al., 2017). Anderson et al. (2014) suggest that individuals often want to cling to old identities and will experience a sense of loss and grief when they realize that they must let go of them in order to be successful in college.

The activities and the feelings associated with letting go complicate and potentially hinder movement into, through, and out of a transition. As well, individuals who experience overwhelming strain in their new context and safety in their former one may choose to manage their strain by clinging to the old. Pre-curriculum college students who cling to hangover relationships may struggle with forming new ones or struggle communicating their needs to allocate their relationship time differently to meet the demands of college. And those who cling to their hangover routines and habits may have the unrealistic belief that the strategies that supported success in high school will support success in their college. Assumptions like these will usually prove to be unrealistic and sabotage some early academic successes. The sooner pre-curriculum college students recognize their need to adapt their assumptions, relationships,

routines, and roles, the sooner they will be able to abandon the hangover habits that compromise their academic success (Anderson et al., 2014). Those who retreat to their hangover identities to avoid confronting the strains of their new context are more likely to exit college early.

Commitment

Along with how pre-curriculum students perceive themselves or their identity within the context of their first-year of college, the commitments and values they bring to the situation also influence their willingness to persist and complete their remedial studies. Commitments reflect values, take many forms, and change over the course of a lifetime (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009; Fisk & Chiriboda, 1990). Fisk and Chirboda (1990) identified seven generalized commitment categories: work as achievement or competence; relationships and being in connection; ideology, or spiritual and philosophical beliefs; altruism, or service to others; personal comfort and security; pleasure, recreation or excitement; and personal growth or development, including creativity. While each of these areas may play a role in academically underprepared learners' willingness to persist through remediation, personal comfort and security, relationships, pleasure or recreation, and personal growth or development may be the most relevant.

Pre-curriculum college students who are committed to or value relationships and pleasure may prioritize building relationships and engaging in out-of-class activities over academics, at least initially. Students who value personal comfort and security may perceive identification as academically underprepared as heightening a sense of insecurity and exit college before completing their remediation to return to a more secure and comforting environment (Anderson et al., 2014; Fisk & Chirboda, 1990). Perceiving under-preparedness as potentially interfering with their ability to attain a comfortable and secure future will intensify the threat it poses and

the emotions they experience (Fisk & Chiriboda, 1990). However, those who value security and comfort and see a college degree as a means of achieving these conditions may be more motivated to complete remediation and earn full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Because most, but not all, first-year college students are absolute knowers who value extrinsic over intrinsic rewards, they may not fully appreciate the value of personal growth and development (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Pizzolatto, 2004; Strayhorn, 2014). However those who do or those who begin to value personal growth and learning will be able to find intrinsic value in pre-curriculum courses. When this occurs, they will find navigating these courses easier and less stressful (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Pizzolatto, 2004; Strayhorn, 2014). Similarly, when individuals perceive a transition as aligning with a commitment or value, they have the ability to generate motivation to persist through it. Individuals who have the ability to find a way to align a transition with a commitment or value will also be able to generate a reason for persisting. However, if a transition reinforces a feared assumption about self that an individual does not want to confront, it will generate a desire to retreat from it (Anderson et al., 2014; Fisk & Chiriboda, 1990). Pre-curriculum college students who see identification as academically underprepared as aligning with assumptions about themselves as not smart enough for college or as validating an existing desire to return to the safety of home will interpret it as a reason to exit college sooner rather than later.

Commitments may also be seen in terms of the imagined future possible self (Bak, 2015). Future possible selves represent the imagined self that individuals wish, hope for, or want to become. These hoped for possible selves may exist in tandem with a feared possible self that they also wish to avoid (Bak, 2015). For first-year college students, the desired self is usually one with a degree who is able to achieve financial security. The stronger an individual's

commitment to a future possible self, the more likely they will endure psychic pain in order to achieve it. The imagined self that individuals seek to avoid may be even more powerful than the one they seek to achieve (Anderson et al., 2014; Bak, 2015). The feared possible self that academically underprepared college students seek to avoid may reflect previous experiences with financial or housing insecurity or unsafe communities (Bak, 2015). Pre-curriculum college students that see a college degree as a means of escaping or avoiding uncomfortable conditions that they fear will have an increased commitment to earning a degree and are more likely to find a way to frame remediation as having some value (Anderson et al., 2014; Bak, 2015).

The more realistic and integrated the future possible self is with the existing self, the greater its value in promoting the self-regulation required to follow through with the steps necessary to achieve the hoped-for goal (Anderson et al., 2014; Bak, 2015). Pre-curriculum students who have, or develop, realistic images of a future possible self are better able to create and sustain the energy and resources necessary to persist through their remedial studies (Anderson et al., 2014; Bak, 2015; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Pre-curriculum college students' ability to find and sustain the energy to persist through the intense emotions, stigmatization, and marginalization related to placement in remedial courses will depend, in part, on the degree to which under-preparedness aligns or conflicts with their values and commitments, including their commitment to an imagined future possible self with a degree. These perceptions will also influence their outlook (Anderson et al., 2014).

Outlook

For this literature review, outlook is understood as an element of identity that emerges from disposition and processing style or mindset. Outlook is evident in individuals' habits of being and seeing in the world and is influenced by and interwoven with the psychological

resources of development and self-regulation (Anderson et al., 2014; Wolters & Hussain, 2015). Anderson et al. (2014) assert that outlook also reflects individuals' psychological resources of resilience, hardiness, stamina, grit, and self-efficacy and are reflective of self-regulatory resource assets (Anderson et al., 2014; Kobossa et al., 1982; Seligman, 2002; Wolters & Hussain, 2015). Experience with successful resolution of challenges, conflicts, and dilemmas tend to strengthen these resources and, thus, strengthen outlook (Anderson et al., 2014; Kobossa et al., 1982; Wolters & Hussain, 2015). Outlook has a powerful influence on a transition trajectory (Kobossa et al., 1982; Wolters & Hussain, 2015).

Stamina is a characteristic or trait that reflects one's ability to sustain adequate energy and resources to endure stress, engage in effective strategies that promote prolonged coping. It also supports the ability to simultaneously cope with multiple, concurrent stresses and is relevant to engaging in the multiple transitions first-year college students experience (Buck & Neff, 2012; Pellegrini et al., 2016). Resilience and grit support enduring pressure and strain and promote goal achievement and persistence in the midst of challenging situations. Flexibility, focus, and proactive engagement also contribute to grit and resilience and the development of self-efficacy (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 2001; Bussolari & Goodell, 2015; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Self-efficacy and outlook are addressed again in this chapter as they relate to moving through and out of a transition.

Rather than serving as a self-regulation resource, hardiness, an element of outlook, reflects one or more attitudes or dispositions, such as an attitude of commitment (Kobossa et al., 1982). Unlike specific commitments, such as a commitment to earn a college degree, Kobossa et al. (1982) contrast a disposition of commitment with a disposition of disengagement. Individuals who have an attitude of commitment tend to use approach-oriented strategies that actively

engage themselves in every experience, while those who have a disposition of disengagement use avoidance-oriented strategies that detach themselves from situations, events, or experiences (Elliot & Covington, 2001; Kobossa et al., 1982).

Kobossa et al. (1982) argue that individuals with a disposition of commitment tend to perceive themselves in control of their situations and describe themselves as having control over it, even when they do not. Individuals with a disposition of disengagement tend to feel helpless and threatened by their situations and often express a lack of control. Kobossa et al. (1982) add that individuals with an attitude of commitment embrace the novelty that change brings, view change as normal, and believe change promotes personal growth. Characteristics of resilience and stamina or a disposition of commitment promote students' persistence through pre-curriculum courses. Pre-curriculum college students who feel a sense of control over their under-preparedness, even when it is a false sense of control, are more likely to engage in the approach-oriented strategies that promote movement through their courses (Anderson et al., 2014). Those who feel a lack of control will be at greater risk of employing avoidance-strategies and find it harder to develop and sustain the energy required to persist.

Related to disposition of commitment and disengagement, processing styles and mindsets influence outlook and reflect the way in which individuals tend to see and process their world (Rattan, Good, & Dweck, 2012; Siram, 2014; Sylvester, 2012; Van der Meer, Jansen, & Torenbeek, 2010). Processing style is influenced by whether an individual tends to have a fixed or open mindset (Rattan et al., 2012; Siram, 2014; Sylvester, 2012; Van der Meer et al., 2010). Individuals with open mindsets are more comfortable with change and tend to be able to bear the strain of it better than individuals with fixed mindsets. These individuals do not welcome change and are less flexible in dynamic situations or when they are under pressure. They hold fast to

familiar roles, routines, relationships, and assumptions and resist exploring new ones (Rattan et al., 2012). In addition to openness to change, people with open mindsets demonstrate flexibility and tolerance for strain. These characteristics help individuals avoid resource and energy depletion as they navigate a transition and contribute to grit and resilience (Anderson et al., 2014; Buck & Neff, 2012).

Pre-curriculum students with fixed mindsets will resist adapting their resources and assumptions for longer periods than those who have open mindsets (Rattan et al., 2012; Sylvester, 2012). As well, they will experience the strains, stigma, and marginalization associated with these courses more intensely. But, mindsets can also be adapted. Pre-curriculum students who enroll with a fixed mindset, but experience interactions with trusted others that promote openness to change, may adapt their mindsets to become more open (Rattan et al., 2012; Sylvester, 2012; Van der Meer et al., 2010). Although initially resistant to adapting, pre-curriculum learners who develop a sense of mattering, feel validated, realize that their ability to learn is not predetermined, or recognize that they have the power to change their patterns of thinking will become more hopeful about their ability to complete their remediation (Anderson et al., 2014; Rattan et al., 2012; Sylvester, 2012).

Similar to mindsets, processing styles occur on a scale from optimistic to pessimistic. The patterns of processing that individuals habitually adopt influences how they make meaning out of the situations and events they encounter (Anderson et al., 2014). Optimistic processors find ways to look at their circumstances that enhance their perceptions of themselves or make themselves feel better about a being in a given situation. They tend to find a way of viewing situations from the perspective of having some control over them and create narratives that envision positive outcomes for a transition experience (Anderson et al., 2014; Chang, Asakawa, & Sanna, 2001).

Pessimistic processors tend to find ways to criticize, doubt, or blame themselves for negative circumstances, perceive a lack of control over them, and tend to develop narratives that downplay their potential for success (Anderson et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2001; Dembo, 2004; Edwards & Clark, 2013; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Processing style and the narratives individuals develop to make meaning of a transition also contribute to their willingness to persist through and complete them (Anderson et al., 2014).

Pre-curriculum students with open mindsets, optimistic outlooks and processing styles, or dispositions of hardiness will have greater access to resources that support generating and sustaining the energy needed to endure the multiple challenges of enrollment in pre-curriculum courses (Anderson et al., 2014; Buck & Neff, 2012). Those who enter with less open mindsets or a more pessimistic views of their situation, but experience interactions that give them hope for completing their remedial studies, will adapt their outlooks and create evaluative narratives that support engagement in self-regulating strategies and resolution of the threat that under-preparedness poses to identity (Anderson et al., 2014).

Self-Regulatory Resources

Self-regulation is the management and development of psychological resources and cognitive and behavioral strategies (DiBenedetto & Zimmerman, 2013). Functional self-regulation involves 1) metacognitive reflection, 2) exploring and monitoring strategy effectiveness, 3) planning and organizing, 4) goal-oriented effort regulation, and 5) developing a perceived sense of competency or self-efficacy (Anderson et al., 2014; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Individuals' collective psychological resources help them maintain a reserve of self-regulatory energy and give them the resilience to endure threats (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011; McMurray &

Sorrells, 2009; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Functional self-regulation within a transition or in response to any given situation depends upon the existence and development of psychological resources (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011).

Experiencing, processing, and regulating emotions are often the first self-regulatory challenge of moving into a transition. Anderson et al. (2014) assert that the acute phase of a transition causes intense emotions and psychic pain, including fear, anxiety, and doubt about being able to negotiate the changes and may include betrayal, anger and resentment toward any perceived internal or external cause for the transition. Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) found that college students who perceived their identity threatened or perceived an event or new information as conflicting with their existing assumptions, experienced fear, anger, and betrayal. Pre-curriculum college students experience fear and anxiety in response to the threat under-preparedness poses to their identity as a college student and their future identity as a financially secure, productive member of society. They also doubt whether they will be able to achieve their educational and career goals. Those who place blame on themselves or their previous instructors or schools feel anger and potentially betrayal. These intense emotions will contribute to a sense of disequilibrium, disorientation, and discomfort that is challenging to navigate (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2004/2008; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995).

Because first-year college students tend to have less experience with events or knowledge that test existing assumptions, they have limited self-regulatory resources available to moderate their emotions. When they encounter transition triggers, their emotional responses are intensified, yet their ability to manage them is limited. As a result their responses may appear disproportionate, awkward, or dysfunctional (Anderson et al., 2014; Hayes et al., 2013). Lack of

experience with regulating emotions is as a resource liability or deficit that can temporarily or permanently prevent movement through a transition (Anderson et al., 2014). Pre-curriculum college students' ability to regulate their emotions in the acute phase of the transition has implications for their remedial outcomes.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identify two types of coping to describe the self-regulatory strategies relevant to transitions, palliative and instrumental. The three goals of palliative coping are protecting self or ego from harm, moderating emotions, and preventing or removing stress (George & Siegler, 1981; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). These strategies tend to reflect denial- and avoidance-oriented self-regulation and often sabotage movement through a transition. Instrumental coping strategies tend to involve goal-oriented and approach-oriented self-regulation, such as managing time or effort, and promote movement through a transition. Because the initial phase of a transition tends to generate intense emotions and stress, individuals often employ denial- and avoidance oriented palliative coping to protect their psyches from harm and minimize their stress and strain (Anderson et al., 2014). Denial and avoidance-oriented self-regulatory strategies often reflect an absence of regulation, such as failing to effectively manage time or effort and support. They also contribute to the development and maintenance of the explanatory narratives that protect the ego from harm (George & Siegler, 1981; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

Individuals will not successfully move through a transition unless they shift from denial- and avoidance-oriented self-regulation to approach- and goal-oriented self-regulation (Anderson et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Hayes et al., 2013). The more threatening a transition trigger is to self-concept, or the more intense the emotions and stress it generates, the greater the

need to adopt short-term coping strategies that deny its relevance and avoid the pain it generates, at least temporarily. It is during this acute period that individuals have the greatest need to make a meaning out of a transition that moderates the threat, emotions, and stress (Anderson et al., 2014; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The meanings, explanations, or narratives individuals generate when they are experiencing high levels of distress tend to reflect denial, avoidance, and an unrealistic perspective (Anderson et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Taylor, 1989).

Meaning Making

Defining and making meaning of a situation is one of the first self-regulating actions that individuals engage in when they experience a transition. It involves the metacognitive processes of assessing and evaluating the potential impact of the transition on the current and future self (Anderson et al., 2014). Individuals make meaning of, assess, or frame a transition or its trigger to provide a manageable explanation for it (Anderson et al., 2014; Seli et al., 2009;). They construct these narratives to explain their situations to themselves and to others. These initial narratives are influenced by whether the transition is perceived as anticipated or unanticipated, as a loss or a gain, as positive, negative, or neutral, and by the potential threat or credit it poses to an existing identity or an imagined future possible self (Anderson et al., 2014). Interpretation of a situation is also determined by the individuals' past experience with similar transitions; their perception of its potential duration, impact, and available resources; and their processing styles (Anderson et al., 2014; Thompson, Schlehofer, Gonzalez, & Denison, 2011). These narratives reflect existing assumptions about self and initial assumptions about situation, and internal and external resources. They also tend to deny assumptions about self that generate anxiety about the capacity to successfully navigate the transition (Anderson et al., 2014).

It is during the initial, acute phase of the transition when individuals are most likely to create evaluative narratives to protect their egos and self-esteem, minimize their strain, and avoid or escape confronting the reality of their situation (Anderson et al., 2014). Individuals may consciously or unconsciously make meaning out of a situation, may keep their perceptions private, or they may make them public and share them with others to defer shame or embarrassment. Sharing their evaluative narratives with others reinforces the meaning they make out of the transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011). The greater the need to protect self from harm or minimize stress, the more unrealistic the initial evaluative narratives tend to be (Anderson et al., 2014). Depending upon how unrealistic an initial evaluative narrative is, it has the power to promote or hinder movement through a transition. Evaluative narratives fall into three categories, self-soothing, denial, and avoidance-oriented (Anderson et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

One narrative may simultaneously self-soothe, deny, and avoid and all evaluative narratives attempt to create an illusion of control over the threatening situation (Anderson et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individuals who adopt self-soothing narratives seek identification with others who are in similar situation, seek an alternative internal cause for the transition that allows them to escape the distress associated with it, and attempt to create an illusion of control over it (Anderson et al., 2014; Hayes et al., 2013). Pre-curriculum students may soothe themselves by seeing themselves as a member of a large group of freshman students who did not test out of the remedial studies. Or they may take comfort in blaming their enrollment on not putting the necessary effort into the placement test. These explanations protect them from admitting to their under-preparedness and thus moderate some of the pain. However, these narratives prevent pre-curriculum college students from recognizing their under-preparedness, their need to adapt, and

their need to take responsibility for learning the content that contributes to their remediation. As a result, these narratives can interfere with or delay movement through remediation (Anderson et al., 2014).

Avoidance- or denial-oriented narratives also moderate distress and enhance self by minimizing the relevance of the transition or the pain it generates (Anderson et al., 2014; Hayes et al., 2013; Pearling & Schooler, 1978; Wiebe & Korbel, 2003). The lower individuals' expectations for successfully completing a transition, or the more anxiety or fear they are experiencing, the more likely they are to adopt denial-oriented narratives (Thompson & Schlehofer, 2008; Wiebe & Korbel, 2003). These narratives may be strictly denial-oriented or they may adopt an optimistic denial-approach that selectively ignores pain-generating facts (Anderson et al., 2014). Denial-oriented narratives remove the threat to identity by externalizing its cause. This denies the need to actively engage in the transition and provides unrealistic self-enhancement (Anderson et al., 2014). Both externalizing and self-enhancing narratives are associated with not wanting to make changes in behavior (Anderson et al., 2014; Hsieh, Sullivan, & Gurra, 2007). Pre-curriculum students that blame their enrollment in remediation on placement testing conditions, or other external factors, are denying their need for remediation. These narratives protect their psyches and allow them to, at least temporarily, avoid internalizing any responsibility. This moderates strain, but does not promote adaption (Anderson et al., 2014).

Like other avoidance approaches, optimistic deniers unrealistically select painful facts to disregard (Anderson et al., 2014; Thompson & Schlehofer, 2008; Thomas & Ting, 2012). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) use the term magical thinking to describe the unrealistic quality of optimistic denial, or the creation of narratives that promise individuals successful movement into, through, and out of a transition. Like avoidance and denial, optimistic denial has also been

associated with a lack of desire to commit to changes in behavior, but in many situations, it renders positive outcomes (Thompson et al., 2011).

Individuals who believe that they have the resources necessary to complete a transition, even when they do not, are more likely to engage in the goal- or approach oriented strategies that promote persistence (Anderson et al., 2014). Suggesting that optimistic denial tends to be a function of an optimistic outlook, Taylor (1989) asserts that optimistic denial generates an illusion of control that allows individuals to have confidence in engaging in effective, proactive, self-regulatory strategies. When optimistic denial helps pre-curriculum students engage in goal-oriented self-regulation that promotes persistence, it increases their likelihood of completing their remedial studies (Taylor, 1989; Thompson et al., 2011). However, academically underprepared college students who engage in an optimistic denial approach that leads them to be over-confident, assume that they will pass the class regardless of effort, or assume that the strategies they employed in high school will be sufficient to achieve success in their remedial studies, will decrease their opportunities for completing their remediation. This type of optimistic denial will not render positive outcomes in pre-curriculum courses.

How first-year college students interpret a threatening experience has been shown to have more impact on whether they achieved their transitional goal than their personal motivation for goal attainment (Anderson et al., 2014; Zimmerman, 2002). This underscores the power of students' perceptions of self, situation, and their evaluative narratives to influence their remedial outcomes. Examining the impact of denial- and avoidance-oriented narratives to protect egos and self-worth in the acute phase of a transition contributed to an understanding of the participants' initial reactions to identification as academically underprepared and the narratives they developed to make meaning out of their experiences.

Avoidance Strategies

Research has found that most first-year and at-risk college students have less experience with navigating identity threatening conflicts or challenges, lack the metacognition skills required to make self-regulating decisions, and have limited coping or self-regulating strategy inventories compared to their older peers (Langley & Bart, 2008; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Misra et al., 2000; Thibodeaux et al., 2016; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Yusoff & Pa, 2011). In addition to employing avoidance- or denial-oriented narratives, first-year and at-risk college students often rely on avoidance- and denial-oriented self-regulatory strategies until they encounter an experience that causes them to become more realistic about their need to adapt. When they experience a threat, self-doubt, fear, or anxiety, they tend to rely on primitive impulses, emotions, narratives, and self-regulating strategies that protect self-concept and minimize stress (Gerhart et al., 2014; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Yusoff & Pa, 2011). Like avoidance-oriented narratives, avoidance-oriented self-regulation strategies minimize distress, protect the ego, and reinforce or publicize evaluative narratives (Anderson et al., 2014).

Absolute knowers who have a strong need for external validation will gravitate toward experiences that validate them over those that do not (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Pre-curriculum college students that feel disaffirmed by their experiences in their remedial courses may unconsciously prioritize other experiences that validate them, such as socializing, over investing in these classes. They will also engage in avoidance strategies such as: failing to check for digital updates; not starting, completing, or turning in assignments; disengaging in the classroom; and inconsistently attending class. Avoidance or denial strategies may also emerge in the form of anti-social behaviors similar to those Levin (1976) described in his study of men who moved to Canada. Pre-curriculum college students at lower levels of development, that have experienced

chronic stigmatization, or who experience the threat to identity intensely may opt to act out in the classroom to express their denial or unhappiness with enrollment in remedial studies (Anderson et al., 2014; Levin, 1976; Seli et al., 2009). These behaviors project a persona that either rejects the need for remediation or one that denounces the content of the courses as irrelevant (Anderson et al., 2014). They may also use the classroom to publicize their denial evaluative narratives and dismiss the value of the class. Students who engage in this acting out disrupt their classes, interfere with professors' ability to teach, and influence their classmates' perceptions of enrollment in remediation (Anderson et al., 2014).

Seli et al. (2009) suggest that college students also use avoidance strategies to provide a valid excuse for future failure, should it occur. Especially when they are public with their avoidance strategies, students are creating an explanation for their failure that does not admit to some personal weakness, such as academic under-preparedness, and protects them from a potential future pain (Seli et al., 2009). Even when they are genuinely anxious and concerned about completing their remediation, pre-curriculum students can use denial- and avoidance-oriented strategies to project a lack of concern about their status and denies the relevance of the situation (Seli et al., 2009).

Although college students adopt avoidance-oriented self-regulation strategies to moderate stress and strain, these strategies ultimately lead to higher levels of stress because they undermine success (Edwards & Clark, 2013). Edwards and Clark (2013) found that college students who employed avoidance-oriented strategies often experienced feelings of anger, resentment, or hostility; earned lower GPA's, and; were more likely to drop or stop out of college in the first year. Research has also found that college students who adopt avoidance-oriented strategies when they first enroll in college do not develop self-regulatory strategies at

all, or experienced delays in the development of these strategies (Seli et al., 2009; Zimmerman, 2002). The longer pre-curriculum college students engage in avoidance-oriented narratives and strategies, the greater their chances of dropping and stopping out of college before completing their remediation.

While Ben-Eliyahu and Linnenbrink-Gracia (2015) found that most avoidance- or denial-oriented strategies, such as failing to attend class or turn in assignments on time, tended to sabotage academic success, they also found that short-term palliative or avoidance narratives and strategies served to temporarily protect some students' sense of self-worth and self-esteem until they had gathered the cognitive, psychological, and self-regulatory resources and energy required to navigate a particularly challenging situation. By adopting short-term self-regulating narratives and strategies that temporarily minimize psychological harm and moderate stress and strain, individuals may be conserving their self-regulatory energy and resources (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009). The temporary suspension of the full impact of the strain provides individuals with energy to address lower stakes transitional tasks and preserves resources until they are better prepared to address the higher stakes threats more directly (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011).

The temporary suspension of the full reality of the situation also provides time for internally processing it, growing more comfortable with it, and finding a justification for engaging in it (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Individuals who employ these strategies for a short time can be creating dynamics that better prepare them to progress through a transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu &

Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). This suggests that when some academically underprepared college students are employing avoidance- and denial-oriented self-regulation during the acute phase, they are also preserving energy and internal resources that will support them in the reorganizational phase of their transition.

Adapting Resources in the Reorganizational Phase

As individuals move out of the acute phase of a transition and begin to move through the reorganizational and reintegration phases, they adapt their assumptions about themselves, their available resources, and their situations (Anderson et al., 2014). Schlossberg (1981/2016) suggests that there is an approximate pattern of adaptation in a transition, but admits that these patterns vary based on the phenomenon that triggers it, the characteristics of the individuals, and the conditions of the context where they are experiencing it. Willingness to adapt assumptions, she asserts, is directly related to individuals' internal resource asset-to-liability ratio, interactions with external resources, and is essential to moving through a transition and (Schlossberg, 1981/2016).

Questioning Assumptions, Reassessing the Situation, and Taking Stock

Schlossberg (1981/2016) argues that the metacognitive self-regulatory action of reassessing or evaluating a transition occurs multiple times as individuals move into, through, and out of it and reflects individuals' evolving resource adaptations (Anderson et al., 2014). At each point where individuals pause to reassess their resources, they potentially adapt their assumptions and then, adapt their resources, or strategies, in response (Bussolari & Goodell, 2006). The recursive process of assessment and reassessment of resources reinforces individuals

evolving perspective of themselves, their situations, their ability to navigate the transition, and promotes a non-linear, incremental adaptation in assumptions (Bussolari & Goodell, 2006).

When they initially enroll in college, pre-curriculum students may be overwhelmed by the strain of the threat to identity posed by academic under-preparedness and by the multiple concurrent transitions that enrollment in college entails. They do not have the energy and resources necessary to engage in developing a realistic assessment of their situation (Schlossberg, 2004; Buck & Neff, 2012). Instead they adopt assessments that reflect their need to deny the reality of their under-preparedness. Baxter Magolda (1992) suggests that absolute knowers are resistant to reassessing or reevaluating a situation once they make up their minds about it because they are not comfortable with uncertainty. She identifies events that prompt college students to confront a conflict between an existing assumption and some new information or expectation for them as crossroads events (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004).

Failures on assignments, tests, or in remedial courses may force pre-curriculum students to become at least somewhat more realistic about their situation. It may force them to recognize that the strategies they are employing are ineffective and that the assumptions about themselves and their situation are inaccurate or false. They may also experience interactions with external resources, such as professors, that validate their ability to complete the courses or help them become more open to questioning their assumptions (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004). These conditions may compel them to question their assumptions or contribute to a comfort with doing so (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004). Pre-curriculum college students that have experiences that force them to or make them comfortable with questioning their assumptions become more open to adapting. These adaptations in assumptions may lead them to choose to

leave college or they may lead them to adapt their resources and develop a willingness to persist and complete their remedial courses.

Experiences that cause pre-curriculum students to reassess the transition and their internal and external resources prompt them to question whether the rewards of completing remediation justify the cost of time, money, energy, emotional distress, and resource strain (Anderson et al., 2014). Schlossberg (1981/2016) calls this metacognitive self-regulatory assessment, taking stock, and suggests that it also involves questioning whether one has sufficient internal resources to endure it and access to sufficient external resources to support movement through it. Reassessing also involves questioning the validity of assumptions about existing roles, routines, relationships, and resources (Anderson et al., 2014).

Pre-curriculum college students who experience an event or crossroads that compels them to reassess their perspectives on enrollment in remediation will examine their unique cost to benefit considerations (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Anderson et al., 2014). They will question whether it is in their interest to continue spend money on courses that do not render credit toward graduation and GPA's and whether they can endure the stigmatization and marginalization that comes with enrollment in them. They will compare these costs with the benefits of abandoning their college degree goals (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1989). They may examine the benefits of alternative career options that do not require college degrees and compare these alternatives to their perceived value of a college degree (Anderson et al., 2014). They will consider the relevance of both their desired and their avoidance future possible selves and determine whether they have the internal and external resources to be resilient in the face of the stigma and marginalization (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1989). As they draw conclusions about how to move forward, they will also adapt their evaluative narratives to reflect

their changing assumptions (Anderson et al., 2014). Pre-curriculum college students who complete their remediation determine that the benefits of remediating outweigh the costs.

Developing Acceptance and Hope

As individuals weigh the costs to benefits and determine that it is in their best interest to persist, they begin to develop an acceptance of their situations and their need to adapt their resources to support movement through the transition. And as they take stock of their resources, and either determine that they have the resources or the ability to develop the resources they need to support movement through the transition, they will begin to develop a hope for completing it (Anderson et al., 2014). Acceptance and hopefulness are essential to successfully navigating a transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 2004). Acceptance is defined as adopting a “...positive, non-defensive, attitude,” and being open to “embrace” an experience (Wang, Zhou, Yu, Ran, Liu, & Chen, 2015, np). Hayes et al. (2013) argue that acceptance is a perspective on a situation or event that is characterized by realistic assessment, openness, flexibility and a willingness to take positive action and make changes in behavior.

Gum & Snyder (2002) define hope as the ability to visualize a path, or a series of steps, that will lead to desired outcomes. Hope and acceptance are linked as acceptance is the recognition of the need to adapt, and hope is the optimistic willingness to act on that need (Gum & Snyder, 2002; Hayes et al., 2013). Developing acceptance of and hope for moving through a transition promotes active, instrumental coping, and in turn, active coping leads to the development of additional acceptance and hopefulness (Anderson et al., 2014; Chi, 2007; Folkman, 2010; Hayes et al., 2013). Hope for navigating a transition may be realistic or unrealistic. When others affirm individuals’ ability to navigate a transition, they are supporting the development of both acceptance of the situation and hope for moving through it (Anderson et

al., 2014). While affirmation from family and peers contribute to hope, relationships with individuals who have knowledge of and experience with the specific transition can be instrumental in supporting individuals' ability to believe that they have the resources to manage it (Anderson et al., 2014).

For pre-curriculum college students, these interactions may include validation from family members, roommates, classmates, or include feedback, such as grades on assignments. However, research suggests that faculty have a particularly powerful impact on college students' willingness to see themselves as capable of achieving their academic goals (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Mendoza et al., 2002; Schlossburg, 1989; Sylvester, 2012). Affirmative interactions with faculty have been found to be critical in promoting retention of at-risk college students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pizzolato, 2003/2004/2005; McCoy, 2014; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Paulson & Armstrong, 2010; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007). This suggests that pre-curriculum college students who experience affirming interactions with empathetic instructors are more likely to persist to complete their remedial studies than those who do not have them or who have disaffirming ones. The role of affirming interactions is addressed further as it relates to moving through and out of the reorganizational phase.

Although individuals may initially adopt unrealistic evaluative narratives to minimize stress and psychic strain in the acute phase, as they begin to question their assumptions, reassess and accept their situations and develop hope for moving through them, they adapt their narratives to reflect these changes (Anderson et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Thompson & Schelhofer, 2008; Thomas & Ting, 2012). As individuals begin to let go of their avoidance- and denial-oriented narratives, they accommodate their growing acceptance and hope into their

perceptions of their situations (Anderson et al., 2014). They may employ positive self-talk, such as, “You can do this...” to encourage themselves when they encounter challenges or share their changing evaluative narratives with others (Anderson et al., 2014). The adaptation in evaluative narratives that occurs early in the reorganization phase tends to reflect pivoting from externalizing responsibility to internalizing it and reflects a more realistic view of their situation (Anderson, et al., 2014). Individuals who persist in a transition will continue to adapt and reframe their narratives to become more realistic and to reflect their evolving perspectives and assumptions (Anderson et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Thompson & Schlehofer, 2008; Thomas & Ting, 2012).

Adapting and Regulating Emotions

Depending upon their initial and evolving interpretation of their situations, individuals move through a sequence of emotional states that align with their progress through a transition. Although experiencing intense emotion is typical of the acute phase of a transition, the continued experience of intense emotions, or the inability to regulate these emotions, deprives individuals of the energy they need to engage in the goal-oriented strategies that promote movement through it (Anderson et al., 2014; Buck & Neff, 2012). Moving out of the acute phase usually reflects some moderation in the emotions associated with the initial transition trigger. In a study of men who lost their jobs, Schlossberg and Leibowitz (1980) observed that the men processed through 4 emotionally charged perspectives, moving from disbelief, through betrayal, disorientation, and anger, before achieving a peace about, or acceptance of, their problem of joblessness. Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) used these 4 emotional phases to assess how college students experienced change. They found that when college students experienced a conflict with their assumptions or a threat to their identity, they initially experienced disbelief, betrayal, and anger,

but as they developed their psychological resources and perceived themselves as having more control over their situation, their emotions were moderated (Chickering & Schlossberg 1995). Pre-curriculum students experience intense emotions in response to identification as academically under-prepared, but as they encounter experiences that prompt them to become more realistic about their situations, take stock of their resources, consider their options, and adapt their assumptions, they begin to engage in more successful emotional regulation (Anderson et al., 2014; Chickering & Schlossberg 1995).

As individuals move through the reorientation phase and adapt and strengthen their resources, they also begin to develop a sense of self-efficacy that further moderates emotions (Anderson et al., 2014; Chickering & Schlossberg 1995). Pre-curriculum college students' ability to regulate their emotions is central to coming to terms with and accepting the reality of their need to adapt assumptions and resources (Anderson et al., 2014).

Developing Self-Awareness, Adapting, and Admitting to Deficits

In tandem with accepting their situations, becoming more realistic about them, and regulating their emotions, individuals who persist through a transition begin to recognize that the discomfort, disillusionment, or disorientation they are experiencing signals the need to adapt their strategies and resources (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009). They become aware that the avoidance- or denial-oriented strategies that they have been using have not been effective (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009). This compels them to examine and reassess their resource asset-to liability ratio and develop an awareness of the resource deficits that are inhibiting their progress through the transition. This involves admitting to themselves that they have resource deficits. This can be a painful process because it involves recognizing the reality of the threat to existing and future possible selves and the possibility that they may not

have the skills and resources necessary to complete it (Anderson et al., 2014). Pre-curriculum college students who fear that identification as academically underprepared is a declaration of intellectual inferiority that can not be remediated may not be able to endure the pain of admitting their skill deficits and find exiting college before completing remediation favorable to potentially confirming their fears (Seli et al., 2009). Those who have the resources and energy available to take on this task, however, increase their likelihood of persisting through their remedial courses.

Pre-curriculum college students who admit to their need for remediation do so in response to feedback about their skill and knowledge deficits and how they can be minimized, compensated for, or remediated. This feedback may be the prompt that serves to compel them to come to terms with the reality of their situation and may contribute to their growing awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2004). Feedback typically available to pre-curriculum college students includes scores on tests and assignments, but may also include comparing their own work to that of other students, observing their patterns of experience in different classes, interacting with professors in class and one-on-one, and observing the behaviors of successful students. Reflecting and acting on this information promotes a more realistic perception of how they need to adapt (Anderson et al., 2014). In addition to developing a more realistic understanding of their resource deficits, pre-curriculum college students who assess their assets will be able to use them to compensate for areas of weakness (Anderson et al., 2014; Kitsantas & Chow, 2005). Developing a heightened awareness of their resource assets and deficits supports letting go of avoidance- and denial-oriented strategies (Anderson, et al., 2014).

In addition to admitting their weaknesses to themselves, pre-curriculum college students that overcome their fear of others' judgments of their weaknesses and become willing to admit

their deficits to others will have an additional advantage (Anderson et al., 2014; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Richman et al., 2015). These students will be comfortable seeking external assistance and support. This increases their opportunities to continue to develop their self-awareness and improve their opportunities for experiencing validation and a sense of mattering (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1989).

Developing an awareness of their resources also promotes an awareness of the need to adapt priorities (Anderson et al., 2014). Authentically adapting priorities is essential to sustaining movement through a transition. Individuals' ability to sustain a new set of priorities will be evident in their attempts to self-regulate (Anderson et al., 2014; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). Some pre-curriculum college students may be able to articulate knowledge of their need to adapt priorities, but continue to cling to elements of their hangover identity and fail to consistently follow through with their adapted priorities. They intellectually know what they need to do, but may not be prepared to engage in the discomfort, effort, and time regulation necessary to follow through with the behaviors that promote success in their remedial studies (Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012). Failure to follow through behaviorally with the priorities they articulate indicates that these priorities have not been internalized (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012). However, pre-curriculum college students who admit their skill deficits to themselves and those who can support them are also more likely to explore and experiment with strategies that support completion of their remedial studies (Schlossberg, 1989).

Exploring and Experimenting with New Strategies and Taking Charge

Experimenting with and exploring new self-regulatory and academic strategies creates a feedback loop (Anderson et al., 2014; Gorga Cukras, 2006; Zimmerman, 2008). When pre-

curriculum learners try a new approach, such as completing their homework and turning it in on time, they get feedback from their instructor, perhaps in the form of a grade or in the form of verbal acknowledgement, or both. Even if the grade is low, if the instructor affirms the completion of the work, the student receives positive feedback. A low grade also provides feedback on what the student does, or does not know, or needs to work on. If the students have the confidence to inquire further about how to approach the work more effectively, they receive additional feedback that further enhances their understanding of how to engage successfully in the material. The more feedback individuals seek and receive, the more elaborate their understanding of their resource development needs and the more likely they will continue to refine their strategies and strengthen their resources (Anderson et al., 2014; Gorga Cukras, 2006; Zimmerman, 2008).

As individuals accrue small successes in their exploration and experimentation with new strategies, they develop their resources and self-regulatory strategy inventories. And as these small successes continue to accumulate, they build self-confidence and self-efficacy, or develop a sense of control over their situations (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 1977; Gorga Cukras, 2006; Kitsantas & Chow, 2005; Komarraju & Nadler, 2016; Pascarella et al., 2004; Thibodeux, et al., 2017; Zimmerman, 2008). When their sense of control over their situations is realistic, individuals will again adapt their assumptions about themselves and their ability to navigate the transition. As individuals begin to perceive themselves in control, they also begin to experience less stress, their mood tends to improve, and they are better able to regulate their emotions and judgment and follow through with actions that reflect their priorities more consistently (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 1977; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shapiro et al., 1996). Pre-curriculum college students who explore and experiment with regulating their effort more

consistently, managing their time more effectively, seeking assistance and support, and engaging productively in class provide evidence of sustaining priorities that support movement through remediation. Becoming more realistic about resources, regulating emotions, adapting priorities, and exploring and experimenting with new strategies are actions that tend to occur in an overlapping, recursive manner with each action promoting the development of additional approach- and goal-oriented strategies that reflect taking charge (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goodall, 2009).

Although individuals continue to explore and experiment with new strategies and build their internal and external resources as they take charge of their situations, they do so with increased confidence and comfort (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Their ability to anticipate and monitor the effectiveness of these strategies improves and they are able to optimize their resource use and personal development (Anderson et al., 2014). Pre-curriculum college students who experience a sense of realistic control over their remediation will show evidence of taking responsibility for their learning. They will be able to avoid procrastinating more successfully, will proactively engage in the classroom, and seek assistance from their professors and other supports. They will also evidence changes in their roles, relationships, and routines (Anderson et al., 2014). These may include taking on leadership roles, studying instead of socializing with peers, or using time between classes to work on assignments instead of napping. If they accommodate these adaptations in assumptions and behaviors into their habits of being and seeing in the world, they will evidence adaptation in identity (Anderson et al., 2014).

Resources in the Reintegration Phase

Throughout a transition, as individuals have interactions with others and receive feedback that validate their abilities and support their sense of mattering, their belief in their ability and

sense of self-efficacy evolves and develops (Anderson, et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1989; Tovar et al., 2009). Experiences with additional challenges and successes and engagement in problem solving and goal-oriented self-regulating strategies further reinforce individuals' self-efficacy and their belief in their ability to achieve their desired outcomes (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 1977; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Misra et al., 2000; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Yusoff & Pa, 2011). As they move out of a transition and reflect on how they have integrated their new skills, roles, relationships, routines into their identities, their sense of control over the one situation is transferred to a perception of being able to handle futures challenges (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 1977; Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990; Levin, 1976; Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980).

As individuals complete a transition, they may experience full relief from the fear, stress, and anxiety of the identity threat that originally generated it and realize their capacity to successfully navigate a difficult challenge and their ability to adapt and build their resources when they are under pressure (Anderson et al., 2014). Resolving the threat prompts them to reassess their perceptions of their experience, reflect on how they have changed in response, and see value, not only in resolving the threat, but also in the building the resources and strategies the transition prompted them to develop (Anderson et al., 2014). They often adapt their perceptions from a negative perspective on the transition to a less negative, or even a positive perspective on it. Even when individuals do not reflect on or fully appreciate the ways in which they have adapted, the reintegration phase evidences a change in their situation and may reflect the integration of new ways of seeing and being into their identity, or identity adaptation (Anderson et al., 2014; Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990; Levin, 1976; Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980).

Schlossberg (2004) refers to the triadic psychological portfolio to describe successful reintegration. Successful transition, she argues, is manifested in individuals' engagement in

meaningful activities within the context; adapting existing and developing new relationships to accommodate changes in priorities; and integrating new assumptions about self and situation into identity. She asserts that individuals that do not fully adapt in each of these three areas do not experience the same degree of personal development or identity reintegration as those who do (Schlossberg, 2004). She suggests that individuals who embrace their new roles, routines, and relationships experience successful identity adaptation, achieve a sense of peace and contentment with their new situations, and often experience gratitude for the gains in resources generated by their transitional experience (Schlossberg, 2004). Pre-curriculum college students who embrace the ways in which they have changed, the new ways in which they engage in learning, and their new assumptions, routines, roles and relationships will experience the peace that Schlossberg (2004) describes. They will also recognize that they are prepared for future similar challenges (Anderson et al., 2014).

Individuals who do not fully embrace the ways in which they have adapted or do not integrate those adaptations into their identities may still be clinging to hangover identities, be distracted by concurrent stresses, or may not have a clearly defined reason for earning a degree (Anderson et al, 2014). As well, pre-curriculum college students that have not experienced a sustained sense of mattering, who continue to feel marginalized, or never come to terms with the stigma associated with academic under-preparedness may not experience a sense of full reintegration following completion of their remediation. They may not have access to the energy, commitment, and resources needed to sustain their adaptations and may experience some of the same struggles in their curriculum courses that they experienced in remediation (Anderson et al., 2014; Buck & Neff, 2012). A lack of full reintegration of their adaptations into their identity will be reflected in their continued struggle with managing emotions, time, priorities, or distractions

from relationships and concurrent stresses (Anderson et al., 2014). It may also be evidenced in a lack of awareness of their continued need to adapt their resources or a lack of proactive engagement in support resources (Anderson et al., 2014).

Successful identity reintegration following a transition also reflects interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development (Anderson et al., 2014). For students who enroll in college as absolute knowers, intrapersonal development reflects adapting roles and routines to support evolving interests and needs and movement from defining self based on the perceptions of others, to beginning to internally define self (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004/2008). Pre-curriculum college students who evidence intrapersonal development take on and master new roles, such as the role of college student or study partner, or engage in leadership activities, such as starting study groups or becoming team captains. They will also demonstrate improved ability to regulate their multiple interests, resources, and energy (Anderson et al., 2014; Buck & Neff, 2012). This will be manifested in exercising good judgment, such as getting ample sleep, tuning out suitemates' drama, and being able to plan ahead to allot time for large projects. Pre-curriculum learners who evidence intrapersonal growth will have less of a need for validation from others, begin to become comfortable disregarding what others think about their every activity, and take steps toward internally defining self, priorities, and goals (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008).

Intrapersonal and cognitive development may also be reflected in individuals' processing styles. Individuals who enter a transition with a fixed mindset or the habit of viewing their opportunities from a pessimistic perspective, but experience validation and feedback that affirms their ability, may adopt more open mindsets (Rattan et al., 2012; Sylvester, 2012). They may develop an awareness of their ability to change their ways of seeing and thinking about

circumstances, develop confidence in their abilities, and adopt a more optimistic processing style (Rattan et al., 2012; Sylvester, 2012). Pre-curriculum college students who experience changes in their mindsets, outlooks, or processing style as a result of moving through these courses may move from hating to go to class to having an enthusiasm for learning. In addition to adaptations in outlook, cognitive development for absolute knowers will reflect movement from relying on authorities to dispense knowledge to questioning the credibility of conflicting knowledge claims (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2012). They may move from expecting there to always a right or wrong answer to every question to recognizing that different perspectives and experiences influence the existence of variation in knowledge claims. They may also begin to recognize the role of self in knowledge construction and become more comfortable expressing and supporting their own views (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008).

Pre-curriculum college students who experience cognitive development will abandon passive learning strategies for active ones, recognize their own responsibility for learning material in their courses, and know when they have the internal resources to work independently of others and when they need seek assistance from an external resource (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). Individuals who move away from absolute knowing demonstrate an increasing comfort with adapting their resources and relationships to reflect and promote their evolving personal interests, values, and commitments and develop interpersonally (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004/2008). Because their sense of self, priorities, and goals are becoming internally defined, they tend to demonstrate greater control over their ability to regulate their resources when they are under pressure or experience resource use conflicts and tensions (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). For example, pre-curriculum learners who initially struggled with declining opportunities for socializing, but experience intra- and interpersonal growth will be able to better

balance the multiple, conflicting demands on their time based on their evolving interests, priorities, and commitments. They may create a routine that sets aside time for their various activities or find creative ways to blend interests, such as studying with friends rather than just socializing.

Reviewing literature related to the role of identity adaptation and cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development provided insights into the ways in which pre-curriculum learners adapt their assumptions and behaviors as they transitioned through their pre-curriculum courses. Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition model created a structure for understanding the incremental adaptations pre-curriculum college students engage in as they navigate the threat to identity, manage the strains on dimensions of their identity, and adapt their internal and external resources to support resolution of the threat. Reviewing the literature related to first-year and at-risk college student development contributed to understanding the experiences of the participants in this study.

Critique of Transition Theory

The primary criticism of Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition model is that it has been applied to practice without sufficient verification (Evans et al., 2010). It has also been criticized because it was originally designed as a model to counsel individuals in a transition (Evans et al., 2010). Others have argued that it is too open and flexible, that it disregards critical contextual or historic variables, and that it fails to fully address issues of power and power dynamics in the transition process (Burns, 2010). Burns agrees that these issues are not explicitly addressed in the Schlossberg's (1981/2016) model, but suggests that the model's flexibility and openness provide space for examining these issues and argues that the researcher using this model must take responsibility for consciously addressing the historical and situational power variables inherent

in the context of their study. Evans et al. (2010) advocate for additional research to explore the utility of the model and further validate it.

Application to Study

In the college student development literature, Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory framework is identified as analytical model for understanding how college students respond when they experience a threat to identity. It is used in this study to make sense of the threat academic under-preparedness posed to the participants' existing identities as college students and their imagined possible selves with degrees and financial security. As a transition model, it has been used as a framework for understanding how college students and adolescents experience the transitions and adapt over time (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Coney, 2012; Dean, 1987; DeVilbliss, 2014; Dela Cruz et al., 2013; Evans et al., 2010; Johnson, 1999; Keorin et al., 1990; Mims et al., 2009; Plummell et al, 2008; Schaefer, 2009; Tovar et al., 2006; Wheeler, 2012). This framework provided a way of examining the participants multiple perspectives and how they experienced fundamental developmental change over time (Evans et al., 2010). As an integrative framework, Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory flexes to adapt to different contexts and to application of supplemental theory to further inform it (Burns, 2010). In this study, supplemental theory related to at-risk, first-year, and college student development provided a deeper understanding of the participants, the phenomena of interest, and the context. It was applied to this study to understand the how vulnerable pre-curriculum college students defied the odds against completing their remedial studies, abandoned the strategies that denied and avoided the reality of their situations, received feedback that compelled them to become realistic about their need to change, adapted their resources, assumptions, and behaviors, and completed their remedial studies

Appropriateness to Study

Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory is appropriate to the study of college students' transition into, through, and out of pre-curriculum studies for several reasons. It is appropriate to this study because it has been identified as a psychosocial and integrative theory of college student development (Evans et al, 2010). Because it recognizes the role of self, context and the interactions between self and context as influencing the adaptation process, it is appropriate for understanding how pre-curriculum college students' interactions within their institution influenced their willingness to persist and complete their remediation. Integrating transition theory with research related to college student development is validated by Schlossberg collaboration with Chickering and Lynch (1995/2002) in *Getting the most out of college*. These authors integrated Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory with Chickering's model of college student development to attempt to understand college students' transition into college. Its appropriateness to this study is further validated by its application to a number of published studies designed to make meaning out of adolescents and college students' experiences in transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995/2002; Dean, 1987; Dela Cruz et al., 2013; Johnson, 1999; Keorin et al., 1990; Mims et al., 2009; Schaefer, 2009; Schlossberg, 1989; Tovar & Simon, 2006; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Wheeler, 2012). These studies evidence of the utility of Schlossberg's (1981/2016) conceptual framework in understanding how the participants in this study adapted their assumptions and behaviors and successfully completed their remedial studies.

Justification

Transition theory was suitable to the study of the pre-curriculum college students because, along with their transition into remedial studies, the participants in this study were in the midst of multiple other transitions. Most of the participants in this study were moving from homes and

schools that provided structure and multi-dimensional supports into new environments where they were compelled to become personally responsible for developing their own structure and adapting to new roles, routines, relationships, and responsibilities (Anderson et al., 2012). The participants in this study also experienced identification as academically underprepared as a threat to their existing identity and their imagined, future possible selves (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Richman et al., 2015). Transition theory is designed to examine individuals' response to an identity threat and how they adapt in response. It provided a framework for exploring how the participants in this study experienced this threat and provided a lens into understanding how they adapted their assumptions and behaviors to support completing their remediation, and fully enrolling in curriculum courses. Schlossberg's (1981/2016) framework and this review of the literature shaped the study design, data collection, analysis process, and the presentation of the study's findings.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature used to develop an understanding of the participants in this study and their experiences navigating the transition into, through, and out of pre-curriculum courses at a two-year MSI and into full enrollment in curriculum courses. The review centered on transition theory, the model that provided the framework for this study, but also addressed literature related to the internal and external resources that promote or hinder first-year, at-risk, and academically underprepared college students' academic progress and persistence. This chapter describes how the sources for the review were accessed, provides background information on the topic, and offers a rationale for the approach this study took to the review. This chapter reviews the literature describing transition theory, perspectives on adapting within a transition, and Schlossberg's (1981/2016) description of incremental adaptation across

three phases. It examines the role of external resources in promoting movement through a transition and describes in detail the role of internal resource adaptation in each of the three overarching phases. This chapter closes with a critique of transition theory, a description of its application and appropriateness to this study, and justifies adopting it as the framework for a study of academically underprepared college students who successfully navigate and complete remedial studies.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in pre-curriculum studies and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses. The study sought to understand how and why some academically under-prepared college students complete their pre-curriculum studies and transition to curriculum courses, when most do not. This research addresses the question:

How do academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI experience the successful transition from pre-curriculum studies to full enrollment in the curriculum courses?

To answer this question, this study engaged in a qualitative case study of 16 college students enrolled in a two-year MSI who had experienced academic under-preparedness and completed their remediation. The criterion for participant selection is addressed in this chapter in relationship to the sampling strategies. In-depth interviews served as the primary source of data for this study, but the study also employed member-checking interviews and archival records to support the reliability of the interpretation of the findings. This chapter provides a rationale for selecting a qualitative case study approach and explains the selection of the research sample and the study site. It offers an overview of the information needed and the study design and data collection methods. This chapter describes how the data was collected and the methods used to analyze and synthesize the data. It also addresses ethical considerations and the issues of trustworthiness, subjectivity, positionality, and the study's limitations.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

While quantitative research is often used to identify, track and describe trends, qualitative research is designed to uncover patterns in experiences that explain trends and conditions surrounding a complex problem in a specific context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam, 2009). This study was designed to develop an understanding of college students experiencing the national trend of academic under-preparedness in the specific context of a two-year MSI (Bailey, 2009; Bahr, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2010; Li, 2007; Gupton et al., 2009; McCabe, 2003). For this reason, this study employs a qualitative perspective and methodology.

Understanding the experiences of others calls for recognizing that all experiences are uniquely constructed in response to a complex social and cultural world and that these experiences can only be understood, or interpreted, through the lens of another socially constructed set of experiences (Denizen & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 2001; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers acknowledge that individuals' perceptions of their experiences are socially constructed and recognize the need to become immersed in their participants' natural environment to develop an in-depth understanding of the multiple interactions and variables that shape how they make sense of their world (Denizen & Lincoln, 2005; Guba, & Lincoln, 1982; Travers, 2001). Immersion also places the researcher in a position where she can understand the multiple perspectives of her participants in relation to their context and the phenomenon of interest they are experiencing (Creswell, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). In this study, immersion involved interacting with the participants in the environment of the college campus where they experienced the phenomena of pre-curriculum enrollment and completion and where they had achieved or were progressing toward full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Data analysis in qualitative research is primarily inductive, moving from a general understanding to a more specific and detailed understanding of the phenomena of interest, the participants, and their perceptions of their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative researchers employ an iterative process to achieve this increasingly deepening understanding. They access and analyze the data in a zigzagging or spiraling manner that involves gathering, analyzing, and reflecting on the data, then gathering new data or returning to the existing data for further analysis, and repeating this process until reaching a saturation point where no new findings are emerging (Baptiste, 2001; Bernard & Ryan, 2012; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2012). This study involved engaging in an iterative analysis of the data until the existing findings or interpretations were confirmed and corroborated and no new findings were emerging (Bernard & Ryan, 2012; 2012; Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2012).

Rationale for Case Study

Qualitative inquiry can be used to understand patterns of causation within a single context when the researcher establishes clear boundaries for the study (Bryne, 2009). Clear, well-delineated boundaries ensure that conclusions drawn about one context are not erroneously generalized to another (Bryne, 2009). A case study approach to qualitative inquiry addresses the problem of unique and diverse causation by bounding a study according to specific criteria. A case may be bounded by the subject of the study, such as a single individual, a group of individuals with a common experience, a community, a program, an issue, or a phenomena of interest (Cresswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011 Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Boundaries also serve to define a study when the experience of the phenomenon and the context are tightly interrelated and the phenomenon cannot be easily studied separately from the context (Yin,

2014). The phenomenon of interest in this study, the transition into, through, and out of pre-curriculum courses and into full enrollment in curriculum courses, is tied directly to the context, in this case the two-year MSI in which the participants were enrolled. The boundaries for this study were defined by: the phenomenon of interest, academic under-preparedness; the context, a two-year MSI, and; the unique, lived experiences of the 16 participants as they described them to the researcher.

Stake (2005) classifies case studies into two typologies, intrinsic and instrumental. Cases that are of interest solely based on their unique characteristics are termed intrinsic and examine the experiences of an individual or a group of individuals to understand their uniqueness (Cresswell & Maietta, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Stake 2005). An instrumental study, on the other hand, studies a small group of individuals to explore and develop an understanding of an issue or phenomenon that impacts multiple individuals. This study took the form of an instrumental case study as the 16 participants shared experiences with a phenomenon of interest that impacts over 50% of all college students in the United States (Bahr, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2010b; Gupton et al., 2009; McCabe, 2003). Case study research is also defined by the analysis of extensive data collected from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). This study collected data from in-depth interviews, member-checking interviews, and archival records. Although the member-checking interviews and the archival records provided some additional data, they were designed primarily to corroborate and triangulate the data produced in the in-depth interviews.

Approach

Qualitative case study research can be exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, theory-based or a combination of these depending on the function it serves (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Yin,

2014). This study blends exploratory and theory-based strategies to become what Yin (2014) calls a combination approach case study. An exploratory study is designed to generate understanding of a phenomenon and a theory-based study employs a theory or model to frame the study. The emphasis of this study is on exploring the phenomenon of college students' enrollment in remedial courses and their successful transition from these courses into full enrollment in curriculum courses and employs Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory to support this exploration. This framework provides a structure for systematically analyzing individuals' transition into, through, and out of an experience that threatens their identity. Because this case study is qualitative and exploratory in nature, it is also defined as interpretive (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014).

Research Sample

Qualitative inquiry uses purposive sampling to ensure study participants have experience relevant to the phenomenon of interest (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Gay et al., 2006). In contrast to random sampling which is designed to develop a generalized understanding of a population from a sampling of individuals, purposive sampling is designed to develop an in-depth understanding of a unique set of individuals in their specific context who are experiencing a given phenomena.

Sampling Criteria

The researcher's purpose for the study informed the criteria for selecting the study participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2006; Merriam, 2009). This study used criterion-based, purposive sampling to ensure that all participants had experience with the phenomenon of interests at the center of this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014). The participant criteria for this study were directly related to the purpose of the research: to explore the experiences of academically under-prepared college students at a two-year MSI who

enrolled in pre-curriculum studies and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses. The goals were to understand; 1) how students with multiple factors for risk of exiting college early experienced identification as academically underprepared; 2) how they perceived their experiences as they transitioned into, through, and moved out of remedial courses; and 3) how they adapted their assumptions and behaviors to promote persistence and completion of these courses.

To generate this data, the study established minimum participant selection criteria to include that each participant: a) had enrolled in a minimum of two pre-curriculum courses; and b) had completed at least one pre-curriculum course. The aspirational participant criteria sought participants who: c) had completed all pre-curriculum courses; and d) and was fully enrolled in curriculum courses. The criteria did not specify a maximum number of pre-curriculum course enrollments or reenrollments. All of the participants met the minimal participant criteria and 13 of the participants met the aspirational criteria. Although the researcher included former students in a pilot study, no data from the pilot were included in the study, and the researcher's former or current students were not eligible to participate in the study.

Sampling Strategies

No attempt was made to engage individuals who had extreme or deviant experiences with academic under-preparedness, but there was an attempt to ensure that there were enough participants to generate data that represented multiple perspectives on the experience of transitioning into through and out of pre-curriculum courses. Multiple perspectives increase the opportunity for developing an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and for understanding the patterns of these experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014). Based on the qualitative case study literature, the researcher anticipated needing between 5 and 15

participants to create a sample that would render sufficient data to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomena at the center of this study (Yin, 2014).

Rather than attempt to reach potential participants via databases that identified them as meeting the criteria, the researcher advertised the study to all enrolled students and allowed them to self-identify as meeting the criteria (Merriam, 2009). The institution that served as the context for the study granted the researcher permission to inform all enrolled students about the opportunity to participate in this study using the institution's email and by posting flyers in strategic locations (Appendix A and B). Both communication formats announced the opportunity to participate in a study, identified who was qualified to participate, and described how to learn more about the study. All individuals who responded self-selected based on their perception of the criteria for the study. Those who did not meet the minimum criteria were offered an opportunity to join a waiting list.

Students who responded electronically were encouraged to visit the researcher's office for additional information and to make an appointment for the in-depth interviews. During this time, potential participants were provided with a copy of a study information guide (Appendix C), advanced copies of the participant consent form and letter (Appendix D), and a form describing their rights as participants in a research study (Appendix E). In anticipation of potentially failing to reach a sufficient number of participants via advertisement, the researcher also engaged in a snowballing sampling process whereby current participants were asked to refer additional participants who they believed met the criteria (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Cresswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1996). At the conclusion of each in-depth interview, the researcher sought additional candidates by asking the participants if they knew of other students who met the criteria and who might also be interested in participating in the study.

Some of the participants offered contact information while others encouraged their peers to inquire about participation by contacting the researcher directly. In response to the study advertisement and participant's referrals, 16 individuals volunteered for and completed the study.

Site Selection

A qualitative researcher selects a study site for its potential for producing information-rich data (Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2006; Merriam, 2009). The problem of post-secondary academic under-preparedness affects two-year colleges in the United States at higher rates than four-year colleges, and disproportionately affects minority and first-generation students, and students with low socioeconomic status (Bailey, 2009; Bahr, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2010b; Li, 2007; Gupton et al., 2009; McCabe, 2003). To attempt to understand how academically underprepared students with one or more additional risk factors were able to defy the trend, complete pre-curriculum studies, and transition to full enrollment in curriculum studies, the researcher selected a two-year MSI where many students present with risk for stopping or dropping out of college early, including minority, low socioeconomic, and first-generation status.

Given the characteristics of the college and the students enrolled therein, an exploration the participants' experiences offered an opportunity to collect rich data on academic underprepared college students in a two-year college setting who were vulnerable to stopping or dropping out of college early because of their multiple risk factors.

Trends in the Site Selected that Reflected National Trends

Between 1984 and 2004, college enrollment increased 161% nationally (Gasmon & Conrad, 2014; Harmon, 2012; Li, 2007). During the increase, majority enrollment increased 15% and minority enrollment increased 146% (Gasmon & Conrad, 2014; Harmon, 2012; Li, 2007).

This resulted in an increase in the number of minority-serving colleges (Gasmon & Conrad, 2014; Harmon, 2012; Li, 2007). Some of these were new colleges, but many were existing colleges whose increasing minority enrollment changed their demographic mix, including some that adapted from a primarily white institute (PWI) to an MSI (Li, 2007). Most of the growth in minority enrollment during this time period has been attributed to the increase in African American and Hispanic enrollment in colleges (Gasmon & Conrad, 2014; Harmon, 2012; Li, 2007).

The site selected for this study experienced this trend in minority enrollment. Formerly a PWI, the 2015-2016 cohort had a 76% combined minority enrollment compared to a 24% majority enrollment (IPEDS, 2015- 2016). Like the rest of the nation, this college experienced increases in enrollment of academically underprepared students and increasing attrition rates in pre-curriculum courses (Bahr, 2012; 2010; Jenkins & Zeidenberg, 2007; NCES, 2009/2012/2013; Zavarella & Ignash, 2009). In recent years, over half of the institutions' first-time enrolling students placed in at least one pre-curriculum course during their first semester, and many enrolled in two or three. This institutional trend also parallels the national trends and underscores the site's suitability for a study of academically underprepared college students.

Description of Context

The site selected for the study is a Title IV, private, two-year college that enrolls 1200 hundred or fewer students (IPEDS, 2017). Colleges that have contracted with the federal government to distribute federal grants and loans to students are designated a Title IV institution when their enrollment of minority students exceeds 25% (Li, 2007). According to Title IV definitions of minority serving, this college is defined as an African American serving, non-Historically Black College or University (HBCU), non-Tribal Community School (TCU) (Li,

2007). Based on the broad definition of traditional age as 24 or less, this college serves primarily traditional-aged college students (NCES, nd). Enrollment data for academic years 2014-15 and 2015-16 indicated that 99% of students were 24 years old and younger (IPEDS). In the fall of 2016, 59% percent of students identified as African American, 24% identified as white, 8% identified as Hispanic, 4% identified as two or more races or unknown, and 2% identified as Asian, American or Alaskan Native (IPEDS, 2016-2017). Thirty-seven percent were female, and 63% were male (IPEDS, 2016-2017). Seventy-six percent of the enrolled students were Pell eligible in 2015-2016 and received additional federal grant funds; 74% received state financial aid or grants; and 87% percent were in receipt of a federally sponsored loan to either student or parent (IPEDS).

Characteristics of Context

Over 75% of students at the college demonstrated some financial need, and at least 72% of students reported identification with a minority ethnicity (IPEDS, 2015-2016). Minority and low socioeconomic status have been identified as factors that negatively influence student persistence to degree completion (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Harper & Quay, 2009; Misra et al., 2000; Pizzolato, 2004; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007; Siram, 2014). Moreover, the existence of one risk factor also increases the likelihood of the presence of additional risk factors (Harper & Quay, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As a result of choosing this context for the research, the 16 participants in this study presented with three or more factors for risk, not only for stopping or dropping out of college early, but also for failing to complete their pre-curriculum courses. Yet, they persisted, providing an opportunity to explore the experiences of high-risk students who persist in spite of their vulnerabilities to exit college before completing

remediation. It was also an opportunity to develop an understanding of how they may be similar to and different from the majority who do not persist (Bahr, 2010; Fowler & Boylan, 2010).

At the time of data collection, the college in which the participants were enrolled offered three different Associate Degrees: a Liberal Arts in General College (AA); a Science in General Science (ASGS); and a Science in Business Studies (ASBS) (IPEDS, 2015-2016). Most graduates report transferring to four-year colleges, but some move directly into the work force or enroll in technical programs that offer certificates and degrees. According to the Benchmark Score Report for the Community College (2015) Survey of Support, students in this context favorably ranked frequency of student-to-faculty interaction in multiple categories at rates that were consistently above average when compared with data from other two-year institutions.

Remediation Policy and Process

At the institution chosen for this study, students take placement tests after they are accepted and before they register for classes. These tests determine their academic readiness in each of the three areas of math, reading and writing. Students who do not achieve the cut-off scores for a given subject are placed into the designated pre-curriculum course. Students enrolled in AA degrees may place into up to three pre-curriculum courses and students enrolled in ASGS and ASBS degrees may place into up to four. To complete remediation in a given pre-curriculum course, participants in this study had to enroll in and complete the course with at least a C to be eligible to take a comprehensive exit exam. Achieving a designated score or competency on each exit exam determined whether students successfully remediated in the given subject area. Students were given one opportunity to take the exit exam at the conclusion of the Reading and Writing courses and up to three opportunities at the conclusion of the pre-curriculum Math courses.

Each of the pre-curriculum courses is designed to remediate students in a single semester. Students that do not satisfy the readiness requirements in the first semester in any of the pre-curriculum courses must repeat the same course until they achieve readiness, not to exceed three attempts. Students who do not complete a given pre-curriculum course by their third attempt are placed on developmental suspension and are not allowed to reenroll the following semester unless they write a letter of appeal. If the appeal is approved, they are readmitted on the condition that they must complete the pre-curriculum course in the semester they are readmitted.

This format offers students a compromise between the approach to academic remediation, which allows students to move through pre-curriculum courses more rapidly to save time and money, and the multiple-tiered approach that compels students with lower placement tests scores to endure longer course sequences (Jaggers, Hodora, Cho, & Xi, 2014). Research suggests that multiple course sequences better target the educational needs of diverse students, but because they increase the time and cost of completing academic readiness requirements, they contribute to the high attrition rates in pre-curriculum courses (Edgecombe, Cormier, Bickerstaff, & Barragan, 2013; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). In contrast to a multi-tiered approach to remediation, offering a single class to remediate all levels of academic under preparedness serves as a form of acceleration for the students who are able to complete remediation in one semester. However, because student readiness can vary from very low performing to one point away from testing out of the course, instructors in these courses must address a wide spectrum of academic needs and may not have the opportunity to differentiate instruction to meet students' diverse needs (Edgecombe et al, 2013; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Jaggers et al., 2014). In addition, a single course does not provide formal recognition of progress, such that repeating a course may send the message that the student is not progressing, when, in fact, they may be making progress.

Overview of Information Needed

To answer this study's research question and to develop a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences with academic under-preparedness, it was necessary to access contextual, demographic, perceptual, and theoretical information. Individual experience is socially constructed based on past and on-going interactions with their environment (Bussolari & Goodell, 2006; Hoare, 2009; Merriam & Clark, 2006; Yin, 2014). Qualitative case study requires developing an in-depth understanding of the participants and the specific context in which they are experiencing the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2014). Contextual information may include data related to trends, history, and background related to the phenomenon of interest and the context's working climate, organizational structure, or the physical environment (Yin, 2014). The contextual information relevant to this study included the institution's policies regarding pre-curriculum placement and completion and the availability of institutional and other external resource assets or liabilities that supported or impeded the participants' progress through pre-curriculum courses.

For this study, some of the participants' personal and demographic characteristics were seen as both perceptual and contextual resource assets and liabilities. Socioeconomic, minority, disability, and first-generation status fell into this category because they represent external resources that influence experience and the development of personal perspectives (Bussolari & Goodell, 2006; Hoare, 2009; Merriam & Clark, 2006). But they were also seen as internal resource assets and liabilities when they contributed to individuals' perceptions of themselves in their situation. When these characteristics are discussed in terms of influence, they represent contextual information or external resources. When they are discussed in terms of the participants' views of their experience, they represent perceptual information or internal

resources. Collecting perceptual information is central to qualitative inquiry and was the primary source of information for this study (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Boomborg & Volpe, 2012). To develop an understanding of the participants' experiences in this study, it was essential to gather perceptual information related to: 1) their identification as academically underprepared; 2) their enrollment in and movement through pre-curriculum courses; 3) the interactions that promoted or hindered their willingness to persist and complete remediation; 4) the ways in which they adapted their assumptions and behaviors; and 5) their perceptions of themselves following completion of remediation and movement into full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Table 4. Summary of Information Needed

Transition Phases	Information Needed
Identification as Academically Underprepared and Moving into Pre-Curriculum Enrollment	How Individuals and College Students Initially: Experience a Threat to Existing and/or Future Possible Selves Assess a Threat or Conflict Assess their Internal and External Resource Assets/Liabilities Manage Stress, Strain, and Discomfort
Movement Through Pre-Curriculum Enrollment	How Individuals and College Students: Recognize The Need to Become More Realistic Experience Adaptations in Internal and External Resources
Movement Out of Pre-Curriculum Courses	How Individuals and College Students: Experience Resolution of an Identity Threat Integrate Adaptations into Identity Evidence Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Cognitive Development

The theoretical information necessary to conduct this study included an examination of the literature related to qualitative research to develop an effective methodology for conducting this study. It was also necessary to examine literature related to the phenomenon of interest to ensure a thorough understanding of the existing research on trends in college student remediation. The theoretical information needed for this study also included a review of the

literature related to the conceptual framework, transition theory, and the experiences of at-risk, first-year, and academically underprepared college students. This review of literature is located in Chapter Two. This study was designed to gather demographic, contextual, theoretical, and perceptual information. Organized by the overarching phases of a transition, a summary of this information is represented in Table 4.

Overview of Study Design

In advance of conducting this study, the researcher engaged in a review of the literature related to adult and college student development with special attention to transition theory, the conceptual framework for exploring individual development in response to an identity threat (Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Following approval to conduct the proposed study from the advising committee, the Internal Review Board, and the administration at the site selected for the study, the researcher used criterion and snowballing strategies to select participants. Sixteen participants who met the criteria for the study engaged in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Data from the in-depth interviews was analyzed using an open-coding approach to give the participants' voices the opportunity to emerge. These findings went through several iterations of coding and condensing of codes into preliminary findings. These were expressed in direct or paraphrased quotes from the participants and presented to each of the participants in the member-checking interviews to give them the opportunity to verify the reliability of the interpretation and provide additional data and feedback. Data provided from the member-checking interviews were integrated into the data collected in the in-depth interviews. The researcher went through an iterative analysis and synthesis of this data until achieving a saturation point at which no new codes or themes were emerging (Cresswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Overview of Data Collection Methods

Rather than engage a larger participant pool and develop a broader understanding of participant experience, this study was designed to invest time with a small number of participants and achieve a thorough understanding of their experiences in transitioning from academically underprepared for college curriculum courses to fully enrolled therein (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The researcher determined that the best way to gather data would be through direct interaction with participants, using in-depth interviews with questions that would evoke meaningful, rich narratives. She also engaged in member-checking interviews and accessed archival records to check the researcher's interpretation of the data and to corroborate the findings. This study logged an estimated 29 contact hours with the 16 participants.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews create opportunities for participants to reflect on their experiences and offer narratives with rich and meaningful detail (Cresswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The study's in-depth interviews were designed to elicit narratives that described the participants' experiences with enrolling in, moving through, and transitioning out of pre-curriculum studies into full enrollment in curriculum courses. Interviews, in general, range from highly structured, having little to no flexibility in prompts or follow-up questions, to loosely structured, having wide variability in prompts and follow-up questions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The in-depth interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews also occur on a spectrum, but are usually characterized by moderate flexibility in prompts and even greater flexibility in follow-up questions (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The in-depth interviews in this study fell on the less structured end of the semi-structured spectrum. They took the form of a

guided or topical interview designed to allow the emic, or participant perspective, to emerge rather than the etic, or researcher's perspective (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

The interview prompts were similar across all of the in-depth interviews with participants, but the probes were customized based on the emerging narratives the participants provided (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The researcher used this form of interview strategy to express value for, and a genuine interest in, the participants' unique experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The prompts and probes were designed to generate narratives that reflected the participants' perspectives on who they were when they enrolled in college, what resource assets and liabilities they brought to their new situations, and how they took stock and took charge of their resources assets, altered their asset to liability ratio, and adapted to successfully transition from pre-curriculum studies to full-enrollment in curriculum courses (Anderson et al., 2012).

The in-depth interviews were also designed to build rapport and develop trust with the participants. Rapport and trust encourage participants to disclose authentic narratives that reveal detail and depth (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The interview script began with information regarding the participants' rights, especially their right to withdraw at any time from the study. It also affirmed of the value of the participants' perspectives, and expressed appreciation of their participation. The interviews began with lower stakes questions to support students' comfort in the interview setting and moved toward the higher stakes questions as they progressed. Along with promoting participants' comfort, assuring them of their right to withdraw and validating the value of their expertise allowed the researcher to establish a sense of safety in the exchange of information and for the participants to perceive equity in the relationship develop trust in the researcher. Most of the in-depth interviews lasted approximately one hour.

Member-checking Interviews

Member-checking interviews, also known as respondent or participant verification interviews, provide an opportunity to return the data results to the participants to allow them to assess the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Doyle, 2007). The participants' responses in the member-checking interviews further informed the research, fine tuned the interpretation of the data, filled in voids in the data, and most importantly, corrected any misinterpretations (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participant assessment of the data serves to ensure that the research results are trustworthy and reliable (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The member-checking interviews for this study were designed to acknowledge the changing nature of the understanding of an experience, encourage participants to continue to reflect on their experiences in their pre-curriculum courses, and to compare and contrast their own experiences with the data presented by other participants. In addition to establishing rigor and verifying the trustworthiness of the data, the member-checking interviews also provided new data that further enriched the study results (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The member-checking interviews gave the participants an additional opportunity to shape the interpretation of the data by redirecting the researcher's attention, focus, or perspective on the presented themes or topics (Cresswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Archival Records and Documents

Archival records and documents were used to inform the research process, to develop an understanding of the context, and to validate or triangulate the data collected by other methods (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Electronically stored institutional enrollment data served to further develop participant profiles and validate the participants'

narratives. The data that was used to confirm the findings included transcript and financial aid status. These documents verified and clarified the participants' narratives, the number of pre-curriculum courses they attempted, the number of curriculum courses they enrolled in following completion of their remedial studies, their graduation and socioeconomic status, their cumulative GPA's, and supplied their transfer course data. The researcher also accessed institutional Academic Advising Handbooks and College Catalogues to retrieve data related to pre-curriculum course programming and policy. To confirm data related to the participants' reports of interaction with institutional personnel, the researcher also accessed the results of the nationally standardized Survey of Support from the Benchmark Score Report for Community Colleges (2015). The college website also provided data that contributed to developing a detailed understanding of the context.

Data Collection

Data collection began with accessing archival records and documents to develop and confirm an understanding of the context. Accessing records and documents was on-going and included accessing data, such as transcripts, in conjunction with and following, completion of the two sets of interviews. Data collection proceeded with the scheduled meetings for the in-depth interviews with the 16 participants. The researcher provided potential participants with a copy of the consent form and letter and read it aloud to them (Appendix D). She also read aloud the interview guide script (Appendix F) which described the purpose and plan for the research. Potential participants who decided to engage in the in-depth interviews were asked to sign the consent form. At this point, the researcher began recording the interviews. This data was transcribed and was used to develop a preliminary interpretation of the data. The open-coding

process used to develop this preliminary interpretation is described more fully in the discussion of data analysis later in this chapter.

Data collection continued in the member-checking interviews where the researcher read a script reminding the participants of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time, to request that their data not be included in the study, and describing how the interview would be conducted (Appendix G). The researcher described the data presentation format and their options for responding. The preliminary data was presented to the participants in the form of quotes or paraphrases of quotes from the initial in-depth interviews. The quotes were clustered into topics or themes and presented in the form of a hard copy of a series of PowerPoint slides. Each slide presented multiple quotes representing different perspectives on preliminary topics or themes.

Each participant had a personal copy of the complete document and was encouraged to express their agreement, disagreement, or alternative perspectives on the data, verbally or by writing or drawing on the PowerPoint slides. The researcher announced each topic or theme and then read the quotes aloud to the participants, giving them time to reflect, react, and respond. Most participants chose to indicate agreement by circling, starring, or underlining the quotes with which they agreed and marking through or leaving unmarked those that did not reflect their experience. Presenting multiple perspectives on each topic or theme gave participants the opportunity to share specific feedback. The member-checking interviews were audiotaped and, at their conclusion, participants were presented with their gift card. The participants' notes and comments were captured on their copies of the PowerPoint slides and on the audiotapes. The hard copy notes and the audio responses were transcribed and were later transferred to a document that integrated the member-checking interview data with the data from the in-depth interviews.

Data Management and Audit Trail

To manage, store, create an audit trail for the quantity and variety of data that was generated by this study, the researcher used hard copy, electronic, and digital files (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Yin, 2014). The researcher also kept a journal for reflecting on the process as it unfolded to contribute toward researcher self-awareness. The researcher used a central electronic file for recording the location of notes, transcripts, and files. This document also included the dates of data collection, sequenced the data analysis process and indicated where and how electronic, digital, and archival documents were located or filed. A hard copy and a digital file were established for each participant and tagged based on the participant's pseudonym. Participant-related hard copy files included the signed consent forms, all notes taken during the in-depth and follow up interviews, a hard copy of the original interview transcript without any marginal notes or memos, and a copy of participants' degree audits and financial aid status. These files were also used to store any hard copies of transcribed interviews with highlights, margin notes and memos. Original copies of each of the transcripts of the interviews were also kept in a password protected electronic file.

A copy of each of the interview transcripts was merged into a digital matrix organized by question. This matrix formed a foundational document for creating additional matrices organized by coding approach. Notes documenting each wave of the analysis process were kept in password protected electronic files and tagged based on approach and sequence in analysis.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

The research question for this study focused on exploring the experiences of academically underprepared students' transition into, through, and out of pre-curriculum enrollment. Most of the thematic data related to the experiences of the participants' transitions

emerged from the in-depth interviews, but data from member-checking interviews and archival records contributed to an understanding of the participants and their lived experiences, and the context. This data was also used to corroborate the findings from the in-depth interviews.

Although the literature review and the conceptual framework informed the data analysis, it was primarily inductive and emergent and focused on the data produced by the participants' narratives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Iterative and Immersive Approach

As discussed previously, the overall approach to the analysis was iterative and immersive (Baptiste, 2001; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The purpose of immersion is to develop an understanding of the multiple perspectives of the participants in relation to their context and the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2006; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). In this study, immersion involved interacting with the participants in the environment of the college campus where they experienced the phenomena of pre-curriculum enrollment and completion and where they had achieved or were progressing toward full enrollment in curriculum courses. Specifically, the researcher interacted directly with participants at a minimum of 3 contact points. The researcher also became immersed in the data through use of an iterative process of analysis (Baptiste, 2001; Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This iterative approach is discussed as it evolved across the four stages of data analysis and synthesis.

Stage One

The researcher began to analyze the data produced by the in-depth interviews even in the collection and transcription process, documenting initial impressions in a data journal. Because the conceptual framework was deeply embedded in the inquiry process, it was not possible to

avoid its influence in the analysis process. However, the researcher attempted to conduct an initial analysis of the in-depth interviews from an emergent coding perspective, without consideration of the conceptual framework of Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory. The purpose was to attempt to develop raw impressions of the data that reflected "...the views of participants in a traditional qualitative way" (Creswell, 2007, p. 152). The researcher wanted to allow any understandings of the data to emerge that might be otherwise be masked, hidden, or overlooked if the "pre-figured" categories or codes from the conceptual framework were applied exclusively (Creswell, 2007, p. 152). The researcher listened to the audiotaped interviews while reading the transcribed interviews multiple times, color coding and highlighted content, making marginal notes, and recording responses in the data journal.

Following multiple reviews of the in-depth interview narratives, the researcher collected these impressions and began to cluster them in search of commonalities. The early rounds of analysis of the in-depth interviews produced clusters of impressions that suggested too many codes and relationships and as such were not entirely clear. The impressions of the data prompted additional questions and a need to reexamine the interview data to compare, contrast, and corroborate the emerging impressions. This forced the researcher to return to the in-depth narratives, but instead of moving through the data in a linear fashion, this wave of analysis involved moving through the data in a lateral manner, focusing on the impressions as they were expressed in the different narratives. This produced additional evidence to support adapting and refining the impressions into preliminary codes. The researcher sought additional evidence to support these codes and searched for relationships between them that led to clustering them into categories and condensing them. The researcher again returned to the data to find evidence for

these emerging codes. She used direct quotes and paraphrases from the participants to support for these codes and began to find preliminary relationships between them.

The researcher used these emerging codes to create the document presented to the participants in the member-checking interviews. Each emerging code was represented as a topic or theme organized on PowerPoint slides with direct or paraphrased quotes recorded beneath them. As mentioned previously, most of the participants circled the quotes and paraphrases with which they agreed and provided written and verbal comments as they moved through the document. These interviews were designed to draw out responses to the preliminary findings to learn where they resonated with the participants' and where they did not. Although primitive in contrast to the final analytical product, using the participants' own language to represent the preliminary data analysis was effective at eliciting authentic feedback. When the participants recognized a comment that reflected their own experience or a phrase they had heard before, they offered comments such as, "Oh, I've definitely heard that before." They were also quick to respond if they disagreed. While having access to the responses of others prompted some new data, the member-checking interviews verified where the emerging interpretation of the data was on target and increased the reliability of the data analysis (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Stage Two

Following the member-checking interviews and integration of this data into the data files and data matrix, the researcher initiated a second stage in the analysis process using the conceptual framework. Using a template approach to the coding, the researcher applied a priori themes from transition theory and organized these codes according to the phases of adaptation that are described in the literature, moving in, moving through, and moving out of a transition (Baptiste, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). This involved engaging

with the data in a linear fashion to identify evidence that supported the codes. The researcher reviewed the data seeking relationships with the a priori codes. She clustered the codes into categories that reflected the participants' experiences then engaged in a lateral review of the data, applying these categories and seeking evidence to support them. She set this set of data aside and applied this same approach two more times, but instead of organizing by phase, she organized the next review of the data by the categories of roles, routines, relationships, and assumptions and the third time, by the a priori themes of self, situation, strategies, and support. Each review of the data led to a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and prompted the researcher to make notes on how the participants experiences seemed to deviate from the a priori codes and to document patterns of experience that were not explained by them.

The researcher attempted to integrate the several sets of priori codes into a comprehensive set of codes. She began to cluster the codes from the different a priori analyses into categories and identify and discern underlying connections. A rough set of themes and sub-themes began to emerge and another review of the data produced evidence to support them. These themes underwent multiple waves of analysis and reconfiguration based on continued review of and a deepening understanding of the data. However, integrating the sets of a priori codes also created some conflict in themes and organization. Specifically, the a priori codes related to Schlossberg's (1981/2016) coping did not fully capture the participants' experiences with adapting and the resources of self bled into, or conflicted with, those related to situation, strategies, and support. The researcher returned to the preliminary data analysis for insights.

Stage Three

Stage Three of the data analysis process involved returning to the emergent data analysis product to develop insights into the problem of overlapping codes found in the a priori analysis.

Based on her experiences with the a priori codes, she looked for solutions to the problems in emergent data from its more raw perspective. The researcher integrated the a priori data with the emergent data. The codes were blended, resorted, renamed and reframed to create and more meaningful understanding of the participants' experiences. The researcher also made value judgments about overlapping or redundant themes that led to a deeper understanding of the relationship between codes that promoted a more unified understanding of the participants' patterns of experiences. The researcher began to understand that it would be more effective to examine coping and adaptation from the perspective of self-regulation and psychological resources. Viewing the resources that promote or hinder persistence through a transition as either internal or external also resolved the overlap in the resources of self, support, strategies, and situation. These changes in coding gave the researcher language that better explained the participants' experiences, the tools to more clearly express the way in which they adapted their resources, and allowed more substantial and reliable themes and sub-themes to emerge from the data analysis.

Stage Four

The final phase of the interview data analysis bore similarity to the preceding phases in that it emphasized a continued refinement of the understanding of the data. But it differed from the previous waves of analyses in that the researcher was seeking to confirm the emerging themes and dominant patterns and was making choices about which evidence best supported the findings. She was also attempting to determine how to prioritize the findings for presentation. As the analysis deepened, and evidence supporting themes mounted, the analysis moved toward confirmation of themes and findings and approached a saturation point where no new themes or patterns were emerging (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

All aspects of the relationship between a researcher and a participant have an ethical component to them. These include issues related to standards for the study of human subjects, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, potential risks or discomforts, and reciprocity. Upon completion of the proposal process and before collecting any data, the researcher sought and received Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from North Carolina State University to conduct the study. This approval ensured that the study protocols adhered to all standards related to the study of human subjects. As well, the researcher sought and received approval to conduct the study at the selected site from a team of college personnel, including the Chief Academic Officer, Division Chairs, and the Registrar.

Informed Consent

For this study, informed participant consent was achieved and maintained through multiple interactions with participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). First, participants were provided a copy of a letter describing the research, the research process, their role in the research and a copy of the informed consent form before the first interview was scheduled. The letter informed them that they had the option to withdraw from the research at any time for any reason, with no penalty. Participants were given the same letter of consent at the beginning of the first scheduled meeting for the in-depth interviews. To ensure that they clearly understood the consent form, this letter was read aloud to the participants. Those who agreed to take part in the study were asked to sign the informed consent form. They were reminded that the signature in no way bound them to follow through with the research and no data was gathered without a signed informed consent form. (Hess-Biber, & Leavy, 2011). At the outset of the follow-up interview,

the participants were again read a script reminding them that they could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason with no penalty.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher protected the anonymity of the participants by assigning pseudonyms to each and by withholding from publication any information that could lead to identifying an individual in the study (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). The researcher also protected the identity of the context for the study to further ensure the maintenance of participant anonymity (Creswell, 2007). The initial email to the participants, the advanced copy of the consent form, the initial interview guide script, and the member-checking interview guide scripts all addressed the researcher's intention and duty to maintain the confidentiality of participants' identities (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In addition, in case study research, the researcher uses "...the case studies of individuals to create a composite picture rather than an individual picture" (Creswell, 2007, p.141). This further reinforces individual confidentiality. In the unlikely event that a participant revealed information related to harming self or others, the informed consent form and the interview guide scripts also addressed the researcher's legal requirements to disclose this type of information. No information related to harming self or others was revealed during the interactions between the participants and researcher.

Discomforts or Risks to Participants

No risk to participants was anticipated, but because in-depth interviews delve into individuals' personal experiences, they can unintentionally approach a topic that is sensitive for a participant (Cresswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The researcher was prepared should a participant become disturbed or uncomfortable during the initial or member-checking interviews. She kept a copy of the business card and telephone number of the campus counseling office for

referral. If necessary, she was also prepared to walk a student over to a counselor's office or request other assistance.

Reciprocity

The discussion of reciprocity builds on several threads related to the participant-researcher dynamic. The researcher comes to the relationship with a desire to learn about the lived experiences of the participants (Denizen & Lincoln, 2001; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). The letter and interview guide script addressed reciprocity by admitting the researcher's interest, identifying the participant as an expert in the researcher's area of interest, and by inviting the participant to consider the time spent with the researcher as a partnership in knowledge production (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These comments were intended to express value for the participants' knowledge and experience. Validating participants' experiences reinforces rapport and contributes to building a judgment-free, safe environment (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The letters to the participants also committed to provide a gift card to thank them for sharing their valuable time. The gift cards were distributed to participants following the member-checking interviews.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To establish the trustworthiness of qualitative research, the researcher must demonstrate that the data collection and analysis is credible and reliable (Denizen & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Before and during the research process, the researcher discussed the steps for conducting the research with her committee and as it was unfolding, she sought feedback from her advisor, her colleagues, and other professionals to validate the process. Credibility for this research project was also confirmed by the member-checking interviews with the participants

which provided them the opportunity share their perspectives on researcher's preliminary interpretations of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1992). The results of the member-checking interviews and the use of archival data to corroborate and triangulate the data also contributed to the validity of the research product. When the different sources of data support or reproduce similar results, the sources verify each other or demonstrate reliability (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014).

Dependability

To further support trustworthiness and to ensure the dependability of qualitative research product, the researcher kept a log of the activities during the process of data collection and analysis (Yin, 2014). The log for this research included times, dates, and types of contact with individuals related to the research process. This study also employed protocols to systematically document the "chain of evidence" (Yin, 2014, p.127). These protocols were described in the audit trail section of this chapter. The audit trail detailed the steps related to collecting, storing and analyzing the data. Yin (2014) suggests that systematically documenting the data storing, collecting, and analysis process contributes to validating the research.

Transferability

Qualitative studies attempt to create a deep understanding about a particular problem or issue in a specific context and, as such, their findings cannot be directly transferred to other contexts or individuals who share experience with the phenomenon of interest (Bryne, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Denizen & Lincoln, 2001) However, qualitative studies that describe the central problem or issue, the context, and the experiences of the participants in rich detail provide readers with the opportunity to discern the similarities and differences between the context of the study and other contexts that share similar issues (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 2009). This rich description promotes a transferability of results to different contexts

based on the reader's ability to compare and contrast characteristics and to understand how the findings may or may not be useful beyond the source context (Bryne, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Denizen & Lincoln, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). In addition to thorough description, to ensure that this qualitative case study research was transferable, valid and reliable, this study followed systematic protocols for documenting the data collection and analysis process and used multiple sources to triangulate the data (Crotty, 1998; Denizen & Lincoln, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Yin, 2014).

Subjectivity, Positionality, and Assumptions

Subjectivity

Individuals' subjectivity, or identity and experience, influence and inform their perceptions and worldview (Brisco, 2005). Subjectivity forms in response to individuals' physical, political, and historical experiences and shapes them cognitively and psychosocially (Williams & Vogt, 2011). A researcher's subjectivity will be present to some degree in her research process or product and, therefore, must be acknowledged (Williams & Vogt, 2011). This researcher's subjectivity arises out of her experience as a white female who experienced public school segregation, integration, and bussing, and her career working with individuals with minority, first-generation, low socioeconomic, and disability status in multiple contexts. These experiences have contributed a belief that educators have a responsibility to respect the dignity of every human being and that education plays a significant role in creating social mobility and equity. Her bias is also evidenced in her investment in efforts to dismantle barriers to social equity and mobility. Denizen & Lincoln (2001) argue that qualitative research must "provide foundations for social criticism and social action" (p. ix-x). The underlying motive for this study is the promotion of social equity through improved educational outcomes.

Positionality

Positionality refers to the researcher's position with regard to that of the participants and can include race, gender, age, and sexual orientation, as well as, closeness or distance to participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Insider status refers to sharing characteristics with, or an understanding of, a group of individuals, while outsider status refers to not understanding or sharing common characteristics with a group (Merriam, 2009). All 16 participants were under the age of 24. Fourteen or 86% of the 16 the participants in this study identified as a minority and 10 or 62% of the participants were male. The researcher differed from, or had outsider status with all participants in terms of age, with all but two participants in terms of ethnicity, and with 10 of the participants in terms of gender. A researcher who has a lack of experience with participants' differences may misunderstand or misinterpret their language and narratives (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Participant perceptions of differences may also interfere with a researcher's attempts to build trust and establish an environment in which they feel safe enough to share their experiences. A participant who is not comfortable with a researcher may not disclose authentic, in-depth responses, interfering with collecting quality data (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). To minimize these problems, the researcher engaged participants in ways that encouraged the development a sense of relationship, safety, and mutual trust.

While differences may create barriers, differences can also be used to draw attention to underlying meanings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). For example, a word in common usage among a cultural, age, or ethnic group may go unnoticed or unanalyzed by a member with insider status, but one who is not familiar with the term's use may ask for an interpretation of the term and uncover rich description or explanation that reveals hidden truths or meanings (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

Although the researcher was an outsider to the participant group, she was an insider to the organizational context and brought experiences working with diverse pre-curriculum learners in multiple contexts to the research study. Experience with academically underprepared college students in several contexts, including the site selected for the study, provided the researcher with a degree of insider status (Yin, 2014). Individuals that work within the context of their study have more opportunities to build rapport with participants and have access to experiences that deepen understanding of the data and contribute to more accurate interpretations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Yin, 2014). Insider status can also refer to creating conditions for asking deeper questions that render more meaningful responses (Merriam, 2009). To achieve these goals, the researcher stressed the value of the participants' contribution to and role in the research at the outset and conclusion of each point of contact and emphasized the theme, "Your perspective is important" in all of the study communications.

The researcher also validated the participants' experiences by offering them a guideline on participant rights and affirming their rights at each point of contact. Participants were also given clear descriptions about what to expect at each point of contact and all interactions opened and closed with language and gestures that were intended to create an equitable, judgment-free, and safe environment. Although the researcher did not have insider status in terms of age, and most often in terms of gender and ethnicity, she attempted to establish a form of insider status by creating an environment that encouraged participants to feel valued and comfortable sharing their deeper, more meaningful experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Assumptions

The researcher's experiences with pre-curriculum students and the literature review of adult and college student development and college student academic under-preparedness have

informed her biases and the set of assumptions she brings to the study. First, she assumes that most students who enroll in college want to earn a post-secondary degree. This assumption is based on the understanding that the students are making the significant investment of time and money to go to college. The second assumption is that academically underprepared college students either do not know that they are underprepared for college or do not expect their underpreparedness to be a barrier to degree completion. This assumption is based on the understanding that academically under-prepared college students have graduated high school and perceive their past experience with successful educational attainment as predicting future educational success. It is also based the understanding that they are taking on the expense of college when they might otherwise be earning wages. Moreover, it seems unlikely that individuals would make the costly investment in going to college if they perceived themselves as incapable of completing degrees because of academic under-preparedness.

A third assumption of the researcher is that college student academic under-preparedness is a function of a complex mix of factors that extends beyond cognitive abilities and includes students' personal and educational background and their internal and external resources. This assumption is based on the research that documents the external factors that correlate with and contribute to the risk of stopping out of college before completing a degree, such as socioeconomic, first-generation, and minority status (Cole et al., 2000; Diaz, 2010; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Pascarella & Terezini, 1991; Paulson & Armstrong, 2010). It is also influenced by the research on the internal resource deficits or liabilities that contribute to attrition in college including developmental or self-regulation deficits or liabilities related to outlook and processing (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992; DiBenedetto & Zimmerman, 2013; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Zimmerman, 2008).

Fourth, the researcher assumed that students who persist through and complete pre-curriculum studies develop more than just academically, that their development is holistic and unique. This assumption is based on college student developmental theory that suggests that when students experience and resolve a threat to identity, they will experience personal development (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2004; Chickering, & Schlossberg, 1995/2002; Evans et al., 2010; Perry, 1978). Fifth, the researcher assumes that academically underprepared students who persist and complete pre-curriculum studies and go on to full enrollment in curriculum courses interact differently with their environment than their peers who do not persist and that these differences result in different outcomes. This assumption is based on the research that has found that over 50% of all academically underprepared college students do not complete their pre-curriculum courses (Bahr, 2012; Bailey, 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Collins, 2010; Grubb, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Limitations of the Study

Researcher as Primary Instrument

Because researchers serves as the primary research tool in a qualitative studies, the researcher's subjectivity, positionality and biases influence their choices of approach and interpretations of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007). The researcher addressed these concerns by describing her positionality, disclosing her outsider status as relates to the participants, and her insider status as relates to experience with academically underprepared college students and work within the context of the study site. She also provided a subjectivity statement and admitted her assumptions. Admission of assumptions, subjectivity, and positionality provide a transparency about biases that may have influenced the study and

allows the reader to discern the influence of these perspectives or biases on the final research product (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007).

Size

The study was also limited by its size; it is small in scope. This allows the researcher to develop a deep understanding of the participants' perceptions, but limits the potential for generalizing the results to other contexts experiencing similar phenomena (Yin, 2014). However, the context, the participants, the findings, and the researcher's subjectivity are all described in detail to ensure that readers will be able to discern or measure how the findings can be appropriately transferred or applied to other contexts, given the differences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Perceived Power

The participants in this study were able to identify the researcher as a faculty member, or authority figure, in the context where they were students. An awareness of a power differential can influence participants' responses in to a study in a variety of ways (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). On the one hand, participants may be reluctant to open up to an authority figure or, on the other hand, they may attempt to please the authority figure by offering responses they imagine meet her expectations (Bernard & Ryan, 2011; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The researcher attempted to mediate these issues by recognizing the participants as experts in the subject the researcher was investigating, validating their contribution to the study, and viewing them as partners in the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). As well, the researcher attempted to use language and behaviors that created a sense of equity in the relationship, such as ensuring that the participants and the researcher sat at the same eye-level during the in-depth and member-

checking interviews. She also designed the interview setting to ensure that the researcher and the participant would be sitting in similar chairs with no intervening desks to suggest difference or distance (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed the study design and methodology selected for the exploration of academically underprepared college students who experienced enrollment in and completion of pre-curriculum courses at a two-year MSI. It provides a rationale for employing a qualitative methodology to complete the research and justifies the selection of case study approach. It describes the research sample, the sampling strategies, the site selection, and aspects of the context relevant to the study of academically under-prepared college students. This chapter provides an overview of the information needed to complete the study and overviews of the study design and the data collection methods. It includes a description of the use of in-depth and member-checking interviews and archival records and provides a description of the methods for data analysis and synthesis. It concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations, trustworthiness, subjectivity and positionality, and the study's limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in and completed pre-curriculum courses and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses. The research question at the center of this study was the following:

How do academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI experience the transition into, through, and out from pre-curriculum studies to earn full enrollment in the curriculum courses?

This chapter provides the findings of the in-depth and member-checking interviews with the 16 participants in the study. It summarizes the participants' personal characteristics and introduces the patterns of adaptation and the 10 themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. It describes these themes as they relate to the three overarching phases of adaptation as described by Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory and demonstrates how the participants' adapted their assumptions and behaviors incrementally over time. This chapter also offers a brief summary of the participants' explanations for their academic under-preparedness and their theories on the high rates of attrition in college remediation.

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Sixteen individuals participated in the study. Ten or 63% of the participants were male and six or 37% were female. Thirteen or 81% of the participants were African American, 13% were European American, and 1 or 6% of the participants were Latin American. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 22. Only two of the participants, Michelle and Derrick, enrolled and

continued to remain at the on-time age necessary to meet the full criteria to be defined as a traditional college student (NCES, nd). The remaining 14 participants experienced delayed progress as a result of enrollment in pre-curriculum courses or as a result of a combination of variables, such as delayed entry or delayed progress in their K-12 years.

Table 5. Summary of Participant Profiles

Partici- pants	SES	Ethnicity	Household	Enroll- ments	Final GPA	Final Outcomes
Joseph	Low	Af/Am	Two Parents	2	1.87	Stopped Out
Sabrina	Low	Af/Am	Single Mom	3	2.0	Stopped Out
Tony	Low	Af/Am	Single Mom	6	2.2	Stopped Out
Grant	Low	Af/Am	No Parents	3	2.23	Grad/Trans
Leah	Low	Af/Am	Two Parents	3	2.38	Grad/Trans
Zachery	Low	Eu/Am	Two Parents	4	2.4	Transferred
Derrick	Low	Af/Am	Single Mom	4	2.65	Grad/Trans
Caroline	Unknown	Eu/Am	Two Parents	4	2.73	Grad/Trans
Andre	Low	Af/Am	Single Mom	6	2.76	Grad/Trans
Cory	Low	Af/Am	Single Mom	7	2.78	Grad/Trans
Jonathan	Low	Af/Am	Aunt	7	2.80	Grad/Trans
Kayla	Unknown	Af/Am	Single Mom	6	2.89	Grad/Trans
Darius	Low	Af/Am	Single Mom	5	3.02	Grad/Trans
Michelle	Low	Af/Am	Single Mom	3	3.07	Walk/Trans
Sarah	Low	Hisp	Two Parents	4	3.36	Grad/Trans
James	Low	Af/Am	Single Mom	4	3.38	Grad/Trans
Totals	14 Low SES 87.5% 2 Unknown 12.5%	14 Minority 87.5% 2 Majority 12.5%	4 Two Parent 31% 9 Single Parent 56% 2 No Parent 13%	71 Total Average 4.4 per student	Average GPA - 2.66 12 (75%) Grad/Walk – 2.83 GPA 1 (6%) Transfer – 2.4 GPA 3 (19%) Stopped Out – 2.02 GPA Total 13 Transfers	

All of the participants experienced a failure and had to repeat at least on pre-curriculum course. After at least four semesters of enrollment, 11 participants completed Associate Degrees and transferred to four-year colleges, two transferred, and three stopped out. Additional data related to the participants' characteristics are available in Table 5 and in Appendix H. Data related to their pre-curriculum placements and completions are available in Appendix I.

Patterns in Adaptation

In their interviews, the participants in this study described their experiences with identification as academically underprepared, movement through pre-curriculum courses, completing their remedial studies, and moving into full enrollment in curriculum courses. They described experiences, perceptions, and behaviors that interfered with their willingness to actively engage in their pre-curriculum courses and others that encouraged them to proactively engage in and complete them. As the codes that emerged from the analysis of their collective narratives began to collapse into themes, ten transition-oriented themes emerged from the data. They tended to align with Schlossberg's (1989/2016) three over-arching phases of adaptation, moving in, moving through, and moving out of a transition. This alignment suggests a progressive and sequential, linear pattern of transition. However, the participants' movement through these themes often was non-sequential. Because adaptation in one resource promotes adaptation in others, the participants' narratives reflected an overlapping, zigzagging pattern of movement through the transitional themes.

The participants sometimes evidenced behaviors or thinking that suggested that they were engaged in two or more different transitional themes at the same time and all of them moved through the transitional themes at different rates based on their personal sets of internal and external resources. While the transitional themes suggested a trajectory similar to Schlossberg's

(1989/2016) conceptual framework, they also evidenced deviation from the generalized patterns based on the participants' unique characteristics, the context of the study, and the specific threat to identity that academic under-preparedness posed to the participants' identities. Table 6 presents the ten themes that emerged in this study in tandem with Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transitional patterns of experience.

Table 6. Phases and Themes of Transition

Phases	Study Themes	Schlossberg's Patterns of Experience
Phase 1: The Acute Phase (Moving In)	Theme 1: Experiencing the Threat, Stigma, Marginalization, and a Lack of Control	Experiencing Threat to Identity
	Theme 2: Initial Assessment and Assumptions	Assessing the Situation
	Theme 3: Engaging in Avoidance- and Denial-oriented Self-Regulation	Managing Stress and Strain with Short-term Coping Strategies
Phase 2: The Reorganizational Phase (Moving Through)	Theme 4: Recognizing the Need to Be More Realistic	Reassessing the Situation
	Theme 5: Movement Toward Acceptance and Hopefulness	Adapting Assumptions
	Theme 6: Taking Stock	Taking Stock
	Theme 7: Exploring and Experimenting	Taking Charge
	Theme 8: Taking Charge and Developing a Sense of Control	Developing Self-efficacy
Phase 3: The Reintegration Phase	Theme 9: Evolving Assessment of Experience	Reassessing Identity Threat and Situation
	Theme 10: Adapting Identity and Constructing Knowledge	Evidencing Personal Development and Preparing for Future Transitions

Transition theme one reflects Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transitional experience of the threat to identity, but also addresses the participants perceived stigmatization and lack of control over their situations as these sub-themes were closely associated with identification as

academically underprepared. Theme two ties the participants' initial assumptions about their situation with their assessment of it to recognize how their existing assumptions contributed to their initial assessment. This also establishes a baseline for understanding how the participants adapted their assumptions over time. Transition theme three uses the specific terms of avoidance- and denial-oriented self-regulation to clearly define what Schlossberg (1981/2016) identifies as short-term coping strategies. This more accurately captures the experiences of the participants in this study employed when they initially enrolled in pre-curriculum courses. The codes for these three initial themes also connected to the intense emotions and perceptions, such as anger, shame, embarrassment, fear, and anxiety that the participants experienced and most often emerged when the participants were discussing their initial experiences in their pre-curriculum courses. To capture the stress and strain associated with these transitional themes and their connection to moving into the transition, this study identifies this first phase as the acute phase.

Theme four, recognizing the need to be more realistic, and transition theme five, moving toward acceptance and hopefulness differ from Schlossberg's (1981/2016) reassessing the situation and adapting assumptions by recognizing the importance of becoming realistic about their situations was to their ability to reassess them and change them. Transitional theme six aligns with Schlossberg's (1981/2016) taking stock. But transition theme seven, exploring and experimenting, resembles the third stage of adaptation that Levin (1976) observed in the transition of draft dodgers into their new homes in Canada. Transitional theme eight, taking charge and developing a sense of control echoes Schlossberg's (1981/2014) taking charge and developing self-efficacy. Although self-efficacy and taking control are somewhat interchangeable, the idea of being in control better reflects how the experience was reflected in their outlook. The participants' narratives suggested that transitional themes four through seven

were tightly interconnected and often overlapped and that themes four through eight reflected the participants' attempts to engage in the activities and experiences associated with reorganizing identity (Anderson, et al., 2014). For this reason, the study identifies this phase as reorganizational.

Transition theme nine, evolving assessment of experience and transition theme ten, adapting identity and constructing knowledge capture the participants' reflections on how they changed over time as a result of enrolling in pre-curriculum courses. They are similar to Schlossberg's (1981/2016) last two activities in that they reflect identity adaptation, but differ in that they integrate college student development theory to understand how the participants perceived their adaptations. This study applies the term reintegration to this third phase to recognize that adaptations that are not integrated into identity are temporary, but those that are integrated into identity are internalized and evidence interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development. Each of the ten transitional themes describes an experience that prompted adaptation or the adaptation that was prompted by an experience. Each served in some way to promote the participants' willingness to persist through and complete their pre-curriculum courses and contributed to their personal development. The ten themes that emerged from this study are described in detail as they relate to the three phases of adaptation.

The Acute Phase of the Transition

For the participants in this study, the acute phase of the transition into, through, out of pre-curriculum courses involved experiencing the threat to identity, the stigmatization associated with pre-curriculum enrollment, and a perceived lack of control over their remedial outcomes in at least one course. In this first phase, the participants employed avoidance- and denial-oriented

strategies to regulate their emotions and to moderate the stress and strain the situation placed on their roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions.

Theme One: Experiencing Threat, Stigma, Marginalization, and Lack of Control

All 16 of the participants shared perceiving identification as academically underprepared as a threat to their identity as a college student, to their imagined future possible selves with a college degree, or to their sense of competency. They tied these perceptions of threat to intense emotions. Eight of the participants attached anger to the experiences. For example, Sabrina shared her initial response, “That made me really mad...that it could also hinder me from graduating on time.” Similarly, Leah said she experienced, “Anger, because I would be held back an extra semester.” Eight of the participants experienced fear or anxiety in response to identification as academically underprepared. Jonathan reported, “And once I found out I had to take these courses, I was afraid I wasn't going to graduate.” Grant expressed the same apprehension, “I was afraid I wasn't going to graduate. I knew I wasn't going to graduate on time.” Like Grant, several participants viewed pre-curriculum enrollment as a threat to achieving their degree attainment goals on their envisioned time schedule. Thirteen of the participants expressed disappointment or discouragement as a result of placement in pre-curriculum courses. Derrick said, “Uhh, I felt bad. I was disappointed ‘cause I have to take, like, three non-credit [courses] and I have to pass them. It might keep me from graduating on time.” Sarah took a practical view. She said, “I felt bad. I am going to lose time and money and they [the courses] are going to count as nothing.”

Fourteen of the participants described how identification as academically underprepared and being segregated from their prepared peers led them to feel marginalized, isolated, and rejected and contributed to the perception that under-preparedness threatened their current and

future possible selves. They began to question whether they belonged in college. James described how he felt when he first found out that he had placed into pre-curriculum courses, “Oh, I hated it, absolutely hated it. I was really hoping to take normal college courses. The one thing that I hated was, I spent my whole life trying to be normal, to be accepted by others.” He was expressing how his desire to be “in normal classes” was accompanied by feelings of marginalization. Three additional participants reported that being segregated from the “prepared” students further reinforced their perceived marginalization and left them feeling rejected from the mainstream. Leah framed it as, “Instead of just jumping in on a college level, I pretty much had to be put back a little bit, from everybody else.” Caroline observed,

Well, I saw that all the students did not take them. You go in there knowing that’s a low class. You were separated. I have never liked separation. I understand why, but...I’ve never liked that feeling at school.

Jonathan expressed a similar view, “Ya’ know, I was fresh out of high school and I just wanted to be with everybody else.”

Stigma

All 16 of the participants described associating enrollment in pre-curriculum courses or academic under-preparedness with a stigma. They each described feeling or hearing other students convey the message that students enrolled in pre-curriculum courses are inferior to their prepared peers or do not measuring up to an established standard. For Darius, placement in pre-curriculum courses meant he failed “...to reach some level that was good enough for the school.” Cory interpreted it as, “...basically saying that you are not smart enough, or knowledgeable enough, to go into the next level of classes.” Andre also viewed identification with pre-curriculum courses in terms of intellectual inferiority. He said students in these classes, “...feel

like they are dumber than most or they're not as smart as the others.” Zachery concurred, “If you took developmental classes, you're probably not as smart.” Sara reported, “I hear some people say, they are taking these classes because they are dumb, because they don't know what they're doing. Like me, at first I thought that too.” Kayla said taking the pre-curriculum courses makes students, “feel dumb.” Michelle indicated that students often say the pre-curriculum courses are “for the slow people.” In the follow-up interviews, 11 of the 16 participants indicated that the view of these courses as “for the low or dumb” students was commonly held. Sabrina added, “I agree, that’s how I felt.”

Six of the participants described interactions with pre-curriculum teachers that reinforced the stigma and made them feel as though they were not worthy of respect or membership in the college community. When asked what did not work well for him in his pre-curriculum courses, Zachery said,

Teachers who treated us like we were dumb... A lot of those teachers treat you like you are dumb, some of them, not all of them. I had two [pre-curriculum teachers] that didn't care... And I don't know if my first Math teacher, if she was fired or quit. You could tell she wasn't going to be there anymore. I could tell 'cause she was horrible. She was really, really strict. She wouldn't go over stuff, not even twice.

Sarah described her perceptions of her interactions with one of her pre-curriculum instructors,

He was sometimes rude to students. Sometimes I cried about that class because he made me feel so stupid. I still went to the class and I still tried, but he made me feel horrible he kept asking me, ‘Why are you here?’

Caroline recalled that one of her instructors told her, “I didn't belong here in college.” Joseph also experienced pre-curriculum “...teachers who treated us like we were dumb.” But he

believed that this treatment was “unintentional.” He explained, “None of the [pre-curriculum] teachers can see what you are going through. They hear it, but they don’t necessarily understand.” Michelle agreed that some of the teachers made students feel “dumb” because they were not sensitive to their situations. Addressing pre-curriculum teachers directly, she recommended to them,

So, don’t look at this class as, you know, “Ya’ll [students] should’ve known this material, or you should know this or you should know that already, you should have known this in high school.” Just look at it like, “Students here just really don’t know math like that. I should be enjoying teaching them, making math look like fun because they are just newbies in the math world, like they really don’t know what to do.”

Like Joseph, Michelle suggested that pre-curriculum teachers often are not aware that they are sending messages that reinforce the stigma or cause students to feel rejected, isolated, or marginalized. Zachery and Cory called for teachers to develop an awareness of the impact of their behaviors and to take responsibility for moderating students’ experiences of rejection by offering more encouragement. Zachery said, “I wish [the pre-curriculum instructors] would say encouraging things.” Cory added, students need more “...encouragement in [theses] classes.”

Six of the participants described experiencing the stigma and marginalization in teasing or jokes from peers. Zachery described being the continuous object of jokes by his teammates as long as he was in the pre-curriculum courses. He said, “If you are in those classes, you are definitely stereotyped. I mean you can just tell. It’s just brought up in joking.” Joseph also said that some of his “peers made jokes about” his pre-curriculum enrollment and in the member-checking interviews, four additional participants said they had each experienced “people giving me a hard time about being in these classes.” Three of the participants shared feeling that the

course titles and materials reinforced their feelings of not belonging to the academically prepared community. Referring to the use of the course titles, Sarah explained, “The names that they had also made you feel bad.” Leah and her mother also expressed a similar thought, Leah related,

Because my Mom, she didn’t really approve of me starting off in the developmental classes. She be like, “Girl, how can they give it such a name so bad like that?” The names of the classes, it was such a bad name, so, how could I start out in that?”

Because the curriculum in the reading course seemed designed for young readers, Andre felt it reinforced the stigma. He shared,

The books, the course books were very...they explained stuff to you, but they were very, how can I say it? Really, they felt like reading a book from the 5th grade, the wording, and like they had a lot of pictures and stuff. They had a bunch of children’s stories in them.

Lack of Control

All 16 of the participants described feeling a lack of control or a sense of uncertainty with regard to the length of time they would be in pre-curriculum courses, over the outcomes of these courses, or over other aspects of identification as academically underprepared. The participants needed to pass the pre-curriculum courses to earn the opportunity to take the pre-curriculum course exit exams, however the exit exam score was the exclusive determinant of whether they passed the course. All 16 of the participants reported passing at least one class, but not being able to complete the course because they did not achieve the cut-off score on the exit. They described feeling a lack of control over the “exit exams,” or “the way you can be passing a class, but fail because you do not pass the exit exam,” or because “...one point on a test can mean that you have to repeat the whole class.” Ten of the participants described feeling a lack of control over their ability to complete the courses. Jonathan shared, “I was afraid I was never going to get past

those courses.” James admitted, “Work wise, I was kinda scared. I wasn’t sure if I could do it.” James went on to describe a more long-term uncertainty,

What I thought about was if I can’t pass these courses, and I can’t do them, how am I going to keep a job? If I can’t write a report to corporate about inventory, I’m going to get fired. And if I get fired, how the hell am I going to take care of myself?

Caroline said she felt, “anxiety” and was concerned “...that I wouldn't be able to handle it because I was on my own and I wouldn't have my mom to be on my case anymore.” Kayla explained how she and other pre-curriculum students’ fears were manifested, “And they feel like, if they can’t do a developmental class, then they can’t do a normal class.” Grant described not feeling engaged or in control when he first enrolled in the pre-curriculum courses, “But school-wise, I used to always just sit back and wait.” Tony described a sense of paralysis when he first enrolled, “I felt like I was just watching everything move in front of me.” About his pre-curriculum Reading course, he admitted, “I didn’t understand a word of what was going on...”

Theme Two: Initial Assessment and Assumptions

The psychological strains of the threat to identity, the stigma, and the perceived lack of control over their outcomes in their courses, contributed to the participants’ generally negative initial assessment of their situations. Thirteen of the participants initially assessed their situations disappointing and/or discouraging and 14 of the participants used the terms shame or embarrassment, or both to describe their initial assessment of their enrollment in pre-curriculum courses. Andre used both to describe his response to his placement test scores and added, “I seen it wasn’t high. It wasn’t high at all. Wow. It’s like I got to get started all the way at the bottom.” He added, “I just felt like, I felt like it kinda belittled you.” Regarding his enrollment in pre-curriculum courses, Tony admitted, “I was ashamed of it.” James described finding out the he

needed to take pre-curriculum courses, “Emotionally, it was a huge blow. It was embarrassing.” Zachery echoed this sentiment, “It was embarrassing. I should’ve known the stuff that I thought I did, but I didn’t.” Likewise, Leah said, “It was embarrassing.” Cory described how the classes were conducted, “It was done as if this is stuff you should already know. They did make it seem like they, like these classes, don’t really mean nothing.” Although Michelle did not personally express feeling shame, she expressed sympathy for those who did, “I feel like...some people get discouraged, automatically because they are going to be placed in that class.”

All of the participants described themselves or their peers as struggling to find the value in the courses initially. Six described the frustration they or other students experienced because the pre-curriculum courses carried no credit toward graduation and did not contribute to their GPA’s. Joseph suggested the perceived lack of value contributed to why many students think, “they ought not have to” take these courses. Because she initially struggled to find value in the remedial courses, Leah said that she initially felt, “Like I’m doing all this work for nothing.” Sabrina echoed this frustration, “You have to pay for these courses and they don’t count for anything.” Michelle said she initially viewed her pre-curriculum courses as less important than her curriculum ones. She said she put her pre-curriculum Math course “on the back burner...because I had another [curriculum] class that I was worried about.” Zachery recalled, “I found out...those courses didn't affect my GPA. Every other class that did affect my GPA, I made sure I passed it.” He suggested that because the courses “...don’t count for anything... You know, that’s just wasting money.”

Initial Assumptions

All of the participants described bringing assumptions to their experiences that initially interfered with their ability to accurately assess their situations. They attributed these

assumptions to their hangover identities and a lack of acculturation to the college context. Fifteen of the participants described engaging in optimistic denial about the difference between the demands of college and high school and assumed that their previous or hangover habits, would render positive outcomes. The sixteenth participant, Darius, had just transferred from a college at which he experienced failure and recognized that he needed to work much harder to be successful. Eight of the participants admitted that the assumptions and behaviors they brought with them from their high school interfered with their ability to succeed in their pre-curriculum courses. Andre described his initial assessment of the pre-curriculum courses and his assumptions about teachers. He said,

At first, I had a bad attitude. It probably had more had to do with how I felt about teachers. I thought it would be like high school where I really had a hard time getting along with teachers, like I thought that I was going to be frowned upon, or people were going to push me to the side.

Leah suggested that her initial assumptions in pre-curriculum courses were influenced by her high school experience because it promoted,

...slacking in a way. It was, like, taken as a game, as a joke. But I really did think when I came to college, we just gonna party, party and do just enough to get by because that is what I was used to. High school, that was all it was.

As a result, when she first enrolled, she said, "I wasn't taking college serious. I think I was more weaker in getting used to college 'cause I was coming straight out of high school." Based on the culture of his high school, Jonathan described his expectations for placement in college classes,

When I was about to take my placement test, I'm thinking that I still had that high school mentality, that if I do bad on this placement test, the professors or whoever is still going to put me at a higher level.

Jonathan described the superficial, compliance-oriented strategies that had been effective in high school and his assumptions about the effectiveness of these strategies in his college classes,

I actually thought that all I had to do was go to the class and just sit there and just ask questions because when I first got here, into college, I thought I just needed to mentally and physically interact with the professor and I thought that would be enough.

When Jonathan's comment was paraphrased in the member checking interviews, "Realized that it was not just about being on time to class," seven additional participants agreed that the superficial behaviors that reflect compliance were sufficient to make passing grades in high school, but not in college. Jonathan went on to say,

I realized when I first came to college I still had a high school mentality. It was...I thought that, you know, college was going to, you know, babysit me through the whole way.

Again when Jonathan was paraphrased in the member checking interviews, 12 other participants claimed that one of their initial weaknesses in pre-curriculum courses was their "high school mindset."

In either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, nine participants suggested that they struggled with adapting to the demands of pre-curriculum courses because they "did not understand how college works." Kayla said that her lack of knowledge about pre-curriculum course process and policies influenced her initial strategies. She explained, "I didn't know too

much about how you do it.” She said she would have sought help if she had known, “...if you fail the class, you take it over.” Grant described a lack of understanding as contributing to his initial approaches. In addition to not turning in all of his homework, he said, “I didn't take the [pre-curriculum writing] final seriously.” He admitted, “I didn't know that it would affect my grade like that.” Referring to pre-curriculum courses, Zachery suggested, “not really knowing how it works...and not really knowing what hard work is in school,” influenced his initial choices of strategies. Michelle also attributed some of her initial strategies to a lack of acculturation to the demands of college. “You don't really know how it operates...It is really different in high school, like my high school was way different.”

Theme Three: Engaging in Avoidance- and Denial-oriented Self-regulation

All of the participants described how they or their classmates employed denial- and avoidance-oriented self-regulatory strategies, including developing evaluative narratives that attempted to separate themselves from identification with academic under-preparedness, hide their academic skill gaps, and deny the relevance or value of the pre-curriculum courses. They described struggling with time and effort regulation and seeking assistance when they needed it because they had a lack of experience and resources in these areas and felt shame about their personal and academic skill gaps. These avoidance- and denial-oriented strategies reflected self-regulatory deficits and liabilities that interfered with their ability to be successful in at least one pre-curriculum course and their ability to integrate into the college context.

Evaluative Narratives and Attribution

Attribution of the cause for their enrollment in pre-curriculum courses was central to the evaluative narratives that the participants developed in response to their identification with academic under-preparedness. Externalizing cause provided some relief from the strain, stigma,

and threat, at least temporarily. Attributing the cause for their placement to external factors which they did not have control over minimized the threat under-preparedness posed to their identity and allowed them to deny their need for remediation. All 16 of the participants shared how they or their classmates initially attempted to frame their placement in remediation as a mistake. Ten of the participants initially created evaluative narratives that attributed their enrollment in pre-curriculum courses to undesirable placement testing conditions that prevented them from performing at their best. Even though the participants were notified that they would be taking a placement test when they came to their summer orientation event, eight of the 16 said they did not know there would be a test. Derrick reported being caught "...off guard. We were just sitting there, and it was like, 'You gotta go take a test.' It was just out of nowhere. I didn't know nothin about it."

Sarah said if she had known there was going to be a test, she would have "...studied for it." Seven of the participants also reported being "tired" before they took the placement test because they stayed up late the night before getting to know their roommates or teammates or they were tired from the "10 hour drive" required to visit the college. Sabrina said she was tired and hungry because she had been "walking around in the heat all day...and being hungry 'cause [the placement test] was right before lunch." All of the participants gave partial attribution to their enrollment in remediation to the more palatable internal cause of "not taking it seriously" or "not really trying." Tony explained, "They say they didn't try on the [placement] test." Leah excused her initial placement by claiming, "I didn't take my time. It was summer and it was hot, and I'm just ready to go." She said she "knew" she was not giving her best and added, "I just didn't want to do it." Sabrina said of the placement test, "I wasn't really trying." She theorized that most students do not "really try" and that is why many of them are enrolled into the pre-curriculum

courses. Fifteen of the participants also attributed their placement, exit scores, or their lack of progress in a course on “not being good at test-taking.”

All of the participants shared that they or their classmates developed evaluative narratives that attempted to deny their need for remediation. Zachery explained, “Everybody in the [pre-curriculum] classes are always saying, they ‘shouldn’t be in here.’” Derrick and Sarah also said they frequently overheard their classmates claim they, “...shouldn’t be” in these courses. Andre described hearing students say, “I don't know why I am in here. I already know this stuff. I’m going to see if I can get my class changed.” Referring to the pre-curriculum courses in the member-checking interviews, 13 of the 16 participants said they frequently heard pre-curriculum students claim, “I already know this” and 14 of 16 said they often heard other students claim, “I don't belong in here.” Six of the 16 reported that they often heard students declare, “We’re better than this.” Sabrina said that it was not uncommon for pre-curriculum students to interrupt their teachers when they were presenting specific content and announce that they “learned that in middle school or high school.” Nine of the 16 participants said that it was common to hear students tell others, “The [pre-curriculum] classes are easy.” These pronouncements served to protect students’ egos and their public image.

The participants also reported denying the relevance the classes or overhearing their classmates do so as a way to disassociate with the stigma. Grant shared that his pre-curriculum course classmates were “always talking bad about the class.” Cory agreed and suggested that those who complained about being in the classes were also “always trying to down the classes.” About her pre-curriculum Writing class, Sarah reported, “Everybody said it was a waste of time.” Leah asserted, “Most students say, ‘It’s a waste of time.’ And when I was in those classes, that’s how I felt.” All of the participants identified, in either their initial in-depth interview or in

their member-checking interview, that the phrase, “These classes are a waste of time” was a common, frequently overheard, description of pre-curriculum courses. In the in-depth interview, Kayla maintained that these classes are “pointless” and believed her assessment was consistent with the majority of students. These narratives, perceptions, and pronouncements allowed the participants to deny their under-preparedness, distance themselves from the stigma, protect their self-esteem, and moderate their stress.

Acting Out

The participants all shared how they or their classmates engaged in behaviors that served as extensions of their evaluative narratives and evidenced the need to avoid or deny the truth about their under-preparedness. These behaviors disrupted pre-curriculum classes and generated peer pressure. While they used these behaviors to moderate their own strain, they exacerbated the strain that others experienced by reinforcing the stigma and shame associated with remediation.. Five of the participants admitted to succumbing to peer pressure and “cutting-up” or expressing their displeasure inappropriately in at least one of their pre-curriculum courses. Admitting that she was among the disruptive students, Leah explained why students act out, “They gotta make a rep. They act like that so that no one knows the truth, that they don’t know the material.” When quoted in the member-checking interviews, eight of the participants concurred with her assessment.

Tony confessed that shame about his disability and a desire to draw attention away from his lack of skill in his pre-curriculum courses drove him to “cut-up” in classes. Referring to himself by his nickname, he continued, “Ohhh, the Bank is funny and all this, but mainly, that’s not why I’m doing this. Basically, it [cutting up in class] was a cry for help.” In the member-

checking interviews, nine of the participants reported that the students who vocalized their displeasure with the courses also “cut up in class” and another nine agreed with the comment,

It’s not cool to have to take these courses, and if being cool is more important to you than getting a degree, then you have to make yourself cool in another way, like cutting up or being a thug.

Cory observed that students with a negative view of the courses didn’t just “down the class,” they also “...downed the people in the class.” Caroline said students’ negative complaints and comments about the courses reinforced the message that she was “not smart.” She explained, the ones who are “...always saying ‘I already know this.’ It’s like they out smart you a lot.” Alluding to the peer pressure, Grant explained “That negativity coming from students, it is easy to get drawn into the vibe of the class. Everybody else kinda drew into the vibe.” In the member checking interviews, seven of the participants acknowledged that the complaining, disruptive students in the pre-curriculum courses influenced, “other students to think similarly.”

In his in-depth interview, Grant elaborated on how those who complained and were disruptive and interfered with the learning. He said, “The class clowns [are] always interrupting the class, interrupting the teacher, stuff like that.” As a result, he said, “Students who want to learn, can’t hear.” In the member-checking interviews, 12 additional participants agreed with Grant that the students who act out, “...make it so that the students who are trying to learn are distracted or can’t hear the teacher.” Grant also reported, “It also affected the behavior of the teacher and how she might teach. She might get upset. She might be upset.” He explained that there were times,

...when the professor could not get through a lesson because there was too much talking by students, and ended up going through the lesson quick. She might not go through every detail like she was planning. She could just say it and make you do the work.

He concluded, “The students just wanted to get under her skin.” In the member-checking interviews, 12 additional participants admitted that disruptive students also, “...make it hard for the teachers to teach and sometimes, they make them mad.” Zachery admitted his pre-curriculum Writing instructor, “...could not handle the class.” Caroline emphasized how the disruptions took time away from instruction “It was always a big interruption.” To avoid the disruptions, she suggested that pre-curriculum teachers should be, “...more strict. They need to handle it [the discipline problems] the first time it happens, set a tone.” Andre also felt that the teachers “were too lenient” and said they should be “stricter.” Eight of the participants suggested that teachers needed to establish “better classroom environments, so the teacher and those who want to learn can focus.”

Using the third person to describe a denial-oriented strategy he used in the classroom, James confessed, “Sometimes, I feel like people fake that they know something because they are too embarrassed to admit that they don’t.” Leah admitted to engaging in similar behaviors to disguise her academic deficits. She explained, “My [pre-curriculum] Writing and Math classes, if you sat in that class with me and I am yelling out answers you would think I wasn’t struggling.” She also described how she attempted to deny the relevance of the courses,

I might get back a failing grade and be struggling. You might look at me. You might think I don’t care about that failing grade. It’s the way I come off on the outside, like I don’t care. But really in the back of my mind...I do care.”

Michelle suggested, “I feel like a lot of people are embarrassed, that they didn’t want them, their friends and their peers, to find out.” As a result, she said some “students would lie” to hide their pre-curriculum status, “and say they are in [curriculum] Math, when I really see them coming out of the [pre-curriculum] class.” Tony also suggested that students hid the truth about their pre-curriculum status. He said, “A lot of them like to lie.”

Feelings of shame and the desire to keep their academic weaknesses hidden contributed to the participants’ initial attempts to regulate their effort, time, and seek help in their pre-curriculum courses. James described why he was initially inclined to hide his academic under-preparedness and how it interfered with seeking help.

When you are ashamed of having to work on things, when you’re ashamed of saying, “I don’t know what a pronoun is.” It’s kinda hard. It’s kind of difficult. People don’t like to admit that they simply don’t know. It’s a gut check, telling someone your deep, dark secrets of what you don’t do well. It’s tough.

Grant also described avoiding seeking help when he took his first pre-curriculum course because it was an admission of a lack of knowledge. He explained, “I wanted help, but at the same time, I didn’t want to look stupid.” Tony shared a similar feeling and speculated that others did not feel comfortable seeking help, “I feel like they don’t want to get help, like they feel it’s bad to get help. But everybody needs help. I figured that out the hard way.”

All 16 of the participants said their performance in their initial pre-curriculum courses would have been improved if they had either sought “more time” or “more one-on-one” with a pre-curriculum teacher. Four of the participants described seeking and receiving help during their initial pre-curriculum courses, but after failing to complete at least one pre-curriculum course, they realized they needed “...to get more help.” Joseph said he occasionally went to the Math

Lab during his first pre-curriculum Math course, but admitted that he avoided getting the help he needed because, “I prided myself on doing the work myself.” He was not alone in this desire. When wanting to “do it all on my own” was presented in the member checking interviews, seven additional participants presented this as a justification for avoiding asking for help when they initially enrolled in pre-curriculum courses. Cory added that he was also reluctant to seek the amount of help he needed in his initial pre-curriculum courses because, “I know for me, at times, I did not want to ask, I didn’t want to bother someone.”

Sabrina described her reluctance to seek help initially, “I knew I had a problem, but I never went and talked to my teachers about what I could do to make it better. I just rolled with it.” Tony admitted that he did not, “...take advantage of anything, like taking advantage of the writing center or the reading lab, [not] taking the time when the teachers were available to me...or whenever their office hours were.” He said he did sometimes ask his peers for assistance, but he said, “I should have just gone to the main source. She teaches it, so why didn’t I ask her? If I had been more proactive, I feel like I could’ve gotten more help and I wouldn’t have been struggling in that one class.” In the member-checking interviews, 12 of the participants said they would have performed better in their initial pre-curriculum courses, if they “had actually gone for help,” been “more proactive,” and/or “taken responsibility sooner.”

Five of the participants described their reluctance to communicate their needs or asking questions in their classes. Sarah characterized herself as “quiet” in her first pre-curriculum courses, “I didn’t want to speak up. I did what I had to do, but I wasn’t the one who would speak up.” She said, “Like sometimes in class, I needed to ask some questions, and I just, ‘No, I am going to be quiet until we are done with class, then I’ll ask.’” Michelle spoke of her first attempt in pre-curriculum Math, “There were certain things that I didn’t know that I needed to ask

questions about and didn't." Sabrina related, "I did not really ask questions when I took the first Math class." She admitted, "If I had raised my hand, spoke up, it would have been better." Tony reflected on his unwillingness to communicate with his instructors about his dyslexia, "I should've spoke to them about how I am and actually been open with them about it." Grant also admitted "I wasn't really big on asking questions. I was really kinda shy on that." Darius, on the other hand, said that he was determined to be proactive in his pre-curriculum and other courses after failing at his previous college. He said, "I find out things, what I need to do. I'll actually ask somebody."

Time and Effort Regulation Deficits

The participants also described struggling with regulating their time and effort, not only because they did not have the experience with these strategies, but also because they prioritized other activities over their academic engagement. Nine of the participants attributed their initial struggles with regulating their time to prioritizing other interests over their pre-curriculum courses. Five admitted their sport was initially a higher priority for them than their performance in remediation. Eight admitted that their focus was on socializing or partying or an intimate relationship. Sabrina explained, "I would always be hanging out with my friends when I first got here. I used to stay up late socializing and hanging out." She admitted that the result of these late hours led her to "...end up sleeping in and often missing classes." Tony admitted that when he first enrolled, "I really did not have the time management skills down pat." He said his social life was his initial priority. He said, "When I got here, I said 'Well, it's time to have fun.'" He described the "connection" he felt with his teammates and how he spent most of his time "...talking to them."

Likewise, Andre said his lack of time management “was something that really didn't benefit me.” He admitted that instead of doing his schoolwork, “I used to socialize all throughout the day.” Derrick also said that initially, he lost valuable time to socializing, “I really was just with my friends. So that took away a lot of my time.” Kayla described putting off homework to “just hang out” or to “stay up late at night [and] just watch TV or play games on my phone.” She also admitted, “I was more so focused on [my boyfriend] than myself or my work...and too involved in [campus] activities...my freshman year.” Of his initial priorities, Grant said,

First semester, it was like I didn't focus on what I needed to focus on. I was focusing on things I thought were really important, but they wasn't. Things like, um...alright, I'm going to put it out there. You know relationships outside of school? I was focusing more on that than on things I needed to focus on. We spent so much time going out, it was like we weren't even in school. You'd swear we weren't going to school at the time.

While these participants were experiencing the discomfort of stigmatization and marginalization in their pre-curriculum courses, they were experiencing comfort and validation from socializing and engaging in their relationships. These experiences may have compensated for some of the pain associated with academic under-preparedness and contributed to their willingness to endure the initial acute phase of the transition.

The participants also described how their initial effort regulation attempts influenced their progress in their pre-curriculum courses. Some admitted to a failing to apply effort, others recognized the effort they were applying was not effective and did not lead to learning the content. Ten of the participants admitted that they failed to complete all of their assignments when they initially enrolled in remedial courses. Derrick said

I could of did better in the classroom, like doing everything, like the [reading homework] and everything. My [pre-curriculum Reading] teacher told me that I did just enough to take the test.”

During her first pre-curriculum Math course, Michelle confessed, “I didn’t do the work. And I felt like my first semester here, like, I didn’t really focus as I should have focused...I was not doing what I was supposed to be doing. James admitted, “I didn't do my homework like I should have done.” Leah said that during her first pre-curriculum courses, “I was just not applying myself, like I knew that I could. I was more so, slacking in a way.” Referring to her initial challenges with passing the pre-curriculum Math, Sabrina said, “I didn't prepare for class like I should have.” Grant said, “First semester, if I got an assignment, I wouldn't do it and I did not do a lot of the assignments, even though I knew most of the stuff.” In the member checking interviews, 14 of the 16 participants, admitted that they “did not do the homework,” “did just enough to get by,” or that they should have taken their pre-curriculum courses “...more seriously the first time.” Caroline admitted that the reason she did not commit the “extra time” she needed to learn the material in in her first pre-curriculum Math course because “It was a subject that I did not care for.” Sabrina admitted that she did not invest in her pre-curriculum Math course the first time was because, “I don’t like to challenge myself. I give up easily, especially when it comes to Math.”

Six of the participants, however, described a commitment to completing all of their homework during their first enrollment in pre-curriculum courses, but recognized that these efforts only contributed to a superficial learning that was insufficient to complete at least one of their pre-curriculum courses. Darius described being “on top of things” in his pre-curriculum courses in his first semester, but after failing the pre-curriculum Reading course, he said realized

that he needed to “take it more seriously.” Likewise, in reference to his first attempt at pre-curriculum Math course, Joseph described completing and earning “...100’s on the homework.” However, after failing to complete the course on his first attempt, he said, “I could’ve done more.” Caroline described her experience, “I did what I needed to do, homework wise...” But she confessed, “I was not interested in putting in the extra time, my own, on my own time.” Cory said he realized, “I needed to go further, really seeing how I needed to do things.” Although Jonathan perceived himself as a hard worker initially, upon reflection, he lamented,

I wish I would’ve spent more time, I wish I would have studied a little bit harder at the beginning. Maybe I wouldn’t have to take the Math class twice or maybe I wouldn’t have to be in the [pre-curriculum Reading] class four times.”

Reflecting a combination of weak time and effort management, 10 of the 16 participants admitted that they procrastinated on assignments when they were first enrolled in pre-curriculum courses. Joseph suggested that he had a pattern of “procrastinating” on assignments. Leah shared, “I was a last minute girl. I would wait until the morning before the class...” to start an assignment. She described a specific situation, “I just, like was determined, I wasn’t gonna do that paper.” As a result of putting it off until the last minute, she admitted, “I rushed that paper and I got a bad grade on it.” Darius, was the only participant who asserted, “I don’t procrastinate.”

Although 10 of the 16 participants described consistently attending their pre-curriculum courses, the other six admitted their class attendance in at least one pre-curriculum course was spotty. Derrick admitted that his initial attendance “...could’ve been better.” Zachery described himself as a student who generally attended class on a regular basis. However, after receiving a series of low test grades in his pre-curriculum Math course, he felt discouraged, “I found out I

bombed another [test]. And that just bummed me out. And I started missing classes.” Leah admitted to a pattern of skipping classes when she was discouraged. After earning a “bad grade” on a pre-curriculum assignment, she said, “I just really felt like I wanted to give up on the whole class, so I started taking days off from the class and stopped going like I was supposed to go.” James admitted that it took him several semesters to “...start going to class to class like I needed to, and getting there on time.”

Sabrina confessed, “I like to miss class a lot.” As a result of missing classes, she said, she often did “not know what assignments were due.” She described going to only half of her pre-curriculum Math classes during her second attempt and explained, “I went to class twice per week and that was on Monday and Wednesdays. I didn’t go Tuesdays and Thursdays.” Grant described his attendance in his first pre-curriculum Writing course, “I didn’t come to class a lot...” He recalled,

I had perfect attendance all through my whole high school career, so when I missed the first day, I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know how to handle it. So I missed a day, and I thought, it kinda feels good not to go to class, even though it was my first time of not going to class. Then I missed another one; then I missed another one. And, then you know I had missed about 5 classes and I missed a lot of material.

Tony made the observation that the students who expressed negative views toward the courses tended to be less consistent in their attendance, “They don’t come to class as much...”

Experiences in the Reorganizational Phase

The participants in this study reflected on their experiences of transitioning into, through, and out of pre-curriculum studies and reported having one or more experiences that prompted them to become more realistic about their situation. This awakening triggered a chain of

metacognitive reflections and adaptations in assumptions that led them to accept their identification as academically underprepared, become willingness to adapt their assessment of enrollment in remediation. As they adapted their assumptions, they recognized the need to take stock of their situations and their personal resource assets and liabilities, to explore and experiment with new strategies, and to develop an understanding of the role of remediation in their journeys toward realizing their future possible selves. As they experienced small successes in response to exploring and experimenting with new strategies, the participants began to develop a sense of control over their situations and the confidence to take charge of them. Although these themes are presented in a sequential manner, they tended to occur in an overlapping, non-linear fashion.

Theme Four: Recognizing the Need to Be More Realistic

The participants experienced at least one event, but often several reinforcing events, that awakened them from their denial and compelled them to confront the reality of their situations. These events tended to be related to failure, rigor, honest feedback, and institutional support and prompted the participants to move out of the acute phase and begin to engage in the goal-oriented activities associated with the reorganizational phase.

Failure and Rigor

All of the participants experienced failure in at least one pre-curriculum course and described recognizing that the self-regulation or learning strategies they were using were not effective. This failure and failures on assignments in their pre-curriculum courses compelled the participants to question their existing assumptions about their situation. Sabrina, for example, said she expected to be successful in her pre curriculum Writing course with little effort,

I like to write. English is my best subject. Any of my teachers from high school and middle school would say I excelled in English. I just knew if I write it like I usually did, it would be right.

However, after failing to achieve a passing grade on multiple assignments, she “realized” she needed to do something differently. She went to the instructor for advice, “She explained how to do it...It took me a couple of times, but I got the hang of it.” Darius’ experience with failure at his previous college served to trigger the bulk of his perspective and behavioral changes.

However, after he failed the pre-curriculum Reading course the first time, he said, “Failing, actually failing, made me realize that I have to pass, that I have to get out of it.” He said, after that, he began “...actually focusing in on [the class], studying and reading more, finding stuff that interests me, so that I am reading and getting better at it. Gotta read, gotta practice.”

After she was unsuccessful in her first attempts in the pre-curriculum Math and Reading courses, Kayla said she recognized, “I needed to cut some of my bad habits.” Michelle said she experienced a “turning point” when she was “sitting in that same [pre-curriculum Math] class again.” After that, she said, “I was too determined, too motivated to not take that class again.” Cory referenced recognizing the need change his approach to his studies after failing “the first test going in the second [pre-curriculum] Math class. That got my attention.”

Grant recalled experiencing a change in perspective following his first, failed attempt in pre-curriculum Writing, “After that first semester, I knew I messed up a lot.” He said he started putting in more effort and for the exit exam the second time, he said, “I studied and studied... then she gave me that prompt and I turned it up!” Jonathan said he realized that he needed to find a new approach his academics after he had, “...failed the [pre-curriculum] Reading twice.” At

that point he said he realized, “It was about doing your homework, going to study groups and stuff like that and passing everything, passing every test that the teacher gives you.”

A number of the participants equated failure with high expectations for learning and performance and academic rigor. Sarah described needing to adapt her perspective in response to pre-curriculum course rigor,

And the reading, it was really hard sometimes. I didn’t expect it to be this hard. And also the writing was really hard...you have to do the work to pass the classes and you have to understand what you are doing.

Jonathan compared his pre-curriculum instructors’ expectations to those of his high school instructors, “The [pre-curriculum] teachers, the professors were not going to do the whole thing for me. They were not going to give you, not going to change a grade for you.” Contrasting the expectations for academic performance in college with those of high school, Grant said, “Unlike high school, [the pre-curriculum instructors] push you and make sure you earn the grades you get... You don't just get grades here; you earn them.” When a variation on his comment was presented in the member checking interviews, “You have to earn the grades, they don’t give them away,” 12 additional participants agreed with Grant’s assessment. Leah explained,

And what you put in, that is what your grade is. If you know how to manage your time, you're good to go. I mean they give you plenty of time to do the work and it’s your responsibility to complete it. Or you can be slack and not complete it.

When Leah was paraphrased in the member checking interviews, “The work is hard, but not overwhelming if you learn how to manage your time,” 11 additional participants agreed with her. Michelle reported, “If you stay on top of things, you don’t have nothing to worry about, but if you just slack off, you’re gonna have a lot to worry about.” Joseph, on the other hand, inverted

the phrase to describe his experience, “The work is overwhelming if you don’t know how to manage your time.” Even after four semesters, Joseph admitted, “I don’t feel like I know how to manage my time.”

Zachery described believing that he had adequate language skills when he came to college, but after completing his pre-curriculum Reading and Writing courses, he described changing his assumptions, “I learned I was not as good a writer as I thought and...not as good of a reader as I thought.” Even though she had consistently had bad experiences with Math in high school and did not think that she was capable of doing well in it, after taking the pre-curriculum Math, Sarah said she discovered, “I like solving problems. I knew I loved math. I knew what I wanted after that and I changed my major to Business because of that, too.” Tony recalled experiencing a change in his assumptions after passing his pre-curriculum Writing exit exam on his second attempt. He said, “When I actually passed it, I started working harder. Maybe I am not as dumb as they think I am.” Cory had a similar experience. After he passed his pre-curriculum Reading exit exam on his fourth attempt, he said, “I passed that test and I passed all my classes and that was a big accomplishment for me as far as academics.” He said that he was finally “...actually seeing the hard work” render the outcomes he desired.

Empathetic Instructors

Although not all of the participants had empathetic or supportive instructors in all of their pre-curriculum courses, all 16 of the participants identified a source of learning support that contributed to a change in their assumptions regarding their ability to be successful in at least one pre-curriculum course. They suggested that these faculty members played a role in their willingness to persist in their pre-curriculum courses and their ability to learn the material. All of the participants attributed a portion of their change in their assumptions about their pre-

curriculum courses to receiving individualized instruction. Although two of the participants described receiving individualized instruction in class, most described them as out-of-class experiences. These experiences occurred after class, during faculty office hours, or in a lab setting. James described his pre-curriculum Writing instructor's classroom approach as attempting to both meet the needs of the class and those of the individual,

It seemed that each of the students in the class had different issues and different reasons why they were there. She had to teach a broad lesson to the whole class, but in some cases, she had to individually help a student because one student might be wrong with grammar and one student might be wrong with, I don't know, syntax, or maybe organization in a paper or something. When she was able to give me individual attention. It made a difference.

James also found his pre-curriculum Writing and Math instructors' individualized feedback helpful.

Also, the feedback I received on the paper was most key because it was a tool to identify what I need to focus on. 'This is not a problem. This is.' As I got feedback from the [Math] course, I realized what I was doing wrong and what I was doing right.

Sabrina also appreciated the individualized instruction she received from her pre-curriculum Math instructor on her second attempt. Her teacher was flexible with her and instead of dropping her for a missing too many classes, Sabrina said that when she did come to class, the teacher, "would come over and give me six challenge problems and if I completed them and got them all right, I could leave class early."

All of the participants suggested that some of the pre-curriculum faculty members were willing to provide content learning support outside of class and encouraged students to meet with

them for extra help. They described how this availability and encouragement promoted adaptation in their assumptions about their ability to succeed in remediation. Regarding his pre-curriculum Math and Writing instructors, Grant said, “And they make themselves available to you, anytime you need help. If you mess up, that’s a good thing, to help you get into it.” He said his pre-curriculum Writing instructor, “met with me a few times... a few times, on papers, to help me get started, showing me how to get started.” About his pre-curriculum Math instructors, he said,

If I was struggling, if I felt like I was doing everything right, but still getting the wrong answers, lots of times, they helped me...I met with her during office hours. She showed me how to get the right formulas...and how to get the right answers.

Regarding his pre-curriculum Writing instructor, Tony said, “She could tell I was trying. It just really wasn’t clicking. She put in the extra time to help me out.” Leah described her pre-curriculum Math instructor, “She took time after class to help me understand it. She was really good with helping me.” Caroline described a strategy that one of her pre-curriculum instructors used to boost her confidence. She recalled,

When a student came in not knowing how to do a, I guess it was a formula. She made me show them how to do it. I will never forget that...but she wanted to prove to me that I knew the material, knew it well enough to teach it, that the self-doubt that was just in my head and that was what was really keeping me from succeeding on the tests.

In the member checking interviews, all of the participants, said that “meeting one-on-one with professors” and/or “meeting with professors after class” contributed to their willingness to persist in and complete their pre-curriculum courses.

Twelve of the participants found the individualized instruction available in the Writing Lab contributed to their adaptations in assumptions about their ability to succeed. Darius claimed, “The writing center helped me with a lot of papers.” Cory said there were “...a few teachers, people, who helped me a lot, like the writing center.” James reported,

I really took every time I could to go to the Writing Lab and get in there and get extra help...that’s when I had a ton of learning. It was actually outside of the classroom, but it had a direct impact on the classroom performance. The [instructor in there] is amazing...I learned more about grammar and how to write sentences than I ever did from any classes.

Grant also reported that the faculty in “...the Writing Center, they helped me.” Andre said that he did not seek out assistance until after a key experience with a pre-curriculum course instructor. He said, after this experience, “I found out a lot about the Math Lab, the Reading Lab, the Writing Lab.” Sarah said she was introduced to the Writing Lab when she was in her pre-curriculum courses and that it was so helpful, she continued to use this resource throughout her four semesters. She said, “In the Writing Center, they know me by name. They know me by now and they know what I need help on, too.”

Ten of the 16 participants reported that the individualized instruction available in the Math Lab was instrumental to their pre-curriculum Math course successes. Joseph explained why he valued the individualized instruction in the Math Lab, He said, “You think you had it in class. You get to your homework. ‘I can’t believe I forgot that.’ So what the Math Lab does is it really kinda helps it sink in and it really jogs your memory.” He also said “working one-on-one with an instructor” in the Math Lab was critical to his success on his second attempt because he preferred the teaching style of his first Math instructor over that of his second who “...helped some, but

what helped me more was the Math Lab because [his first instructor] would actually be in the Math Lab to help me with whatever work I had in there.” Recalling his second attempt at the pre-curriculum Math, Jonathan said, “I went to the Math Lab a lot of times.” When he took the pre-curriculum Math course the second time, Zachery said,

I used to go see [a specific instructor]. She wasn't even my teacher, but she helped me more out of class than my real teacher...I was going to the Math Lab, on and off, and I was making a B the whole year and come final time, I failed the first final...by like 25 points. So I went to the Math Lab and she was in there and I went in there 3 days straight. And I ended pulling out a 77. She was really good help. I mean I've got her now [for curriculum Math]. That is why I requested her. She was really good help.

In the same way that she frequented the Writing Lab, Sarah also sought assistance in the Math Lab during and following her pre-curriculum Math course. She said, “And in the Math Lab, they knew me, too.”

Twelve of the participants attributed a portion of their adaptation in their assumptions regarding pre-curriculum enrollment to at least one of their instructors' teaching methods. Tony gave his pre-curriculum Writing instructor's instructional approach credit for a part of his success in this course, “I guess 'cause she just broke it down for me. I'm the type of person that you don't really need all the smart words for me. You just break it down for me so that I can understand.” Leah described a similar experience with her pre-curriculum Math instructor,

She helped me understand my Math. Not only did she move slowly in class, to make sure that we had time...she took me step by step...The way the way teacher broke it down, that helped me a lot.

Grant said the same of his pre-curriculum Math instructor, “She didn’t fly through each chapter. She broke it down, chapter by chapter.” Of his second pre-curriculum Writing instructor, Grant said, “She did pretty much the same thing. She broke it down. They both broke it down. Both of them helped me tremendously.” Grant also described another aspect of his pre-curriculum Math instructor’s approach that he found helpful, “She gave us a lot assignments based on what she said in the class, that you had to do hands on, for yourself....so being real hands-on really helped me.” Support from empathetic instructors also contributed to the participants’ willingness to accept their need for remediation and to develop a hope for completing it.

Theme Five: Movement Toward Acceptance and Hopefulness

The participants’ experiences with the rigor of the pre-curriculum courses, failures in them, and individualized attention from a faculty members promoted an adaptation in their assumptions that led them to have a more realistic understanding of the expectations for performance in their pre-curriculum courses and helped them begin to accept their need to adapt. Experiencing support, validation, and small successes also gave them a hope for completing remediation successfully and promoted their persistence through remediation.

The Role of Admission in Acceptance

All of the participants in the study appeared to come to terms with their need for remediation, but they did so at different points in their transition into, through and out of pre-curriculum courses and to different degrees. They also recognized that acceptance did not occur until they came out to themselves about their academic deficits and admitted their need for remediation. Eleven of the participants found that identifying and admitting their deficits to themselves was essential to transitioning through and out of pre-curriculum courses. James asserted,

You have to admit that you don't know it, and that takes, that's hard, coming to accept the fact that I needed help. Once I got over the ego of it, and was able to ask for help, I was good.

James recognized that denying his academic under-preparedness had served to protect his psyche, but that it had also served to sabotage his potential to resolve the threat under-preparedness posed to his imagined future possible self with a college degree. When James' words were paraphrased in the member-checking interviews, "You have to admit that you don't know it, and that's hard," 10 additional participants agreed with his assessment. Tony described the psychic pain of going public about his academic deficits, "It is sort of hard to raise your hand and say, I don't get it... You have to humble yourself." Darius affirmed that he also struggled with admitting his academic deficits to himself and others, "I have done this, not admitting...but not anymore. I don't want everyone knowing, but it is part of growing up."

Although most of the participants did not come to terms with their academic under-preparedness until their second semester, Cory and Sarah both described recognizing their need for remediation to some degree during their first semester. Sarah said she began to admit to herself that she needed the remediation, "...because there was stuff I learned, things that I did not know before I was in the courses." Although "disappointed" by his enrollment in the pre-curriculum courses, Cory described accepting his need to engage in remediation "It was also like, well, you have to do it. I mean I just took it for what it was and just went ahead." Zachary said he began recognize and his need for academic remediation after he had completed the pre-curriculum Reading and Writing because "I learned to read faster and my writing skills really improved and actually, it helped me a lot."

Like many of the participants, Grant adamantly denied his need for his pre-curriculum writing during his first attempt, but following his failure in this course he accepted that he had to “buckle down...so I could move on.” James, who attempted the pre-curriculum Math multiple times before completing it, said that he had to process through a series of strong emotions over several semesters and “...confront his fears” before accepting the truth about his academic under-preparedness. He described having to accept that “...Math was not my enemy, that I was not fighting the teacher. I was really fighting myself. I had to get over the fact that I had to pay my dues for what was required.” Like James, Cory and Jonathan described having to accept their need to adapt their approaches to the pre-curriculum courses multiple times, after each course failure.

All 16 of the participants were compelled to accept the reality that the strategies that earned them passing grades in high school were not sufficient to earn passing grades in their pre-curriculum courses. All acknowledged they had self-advocacy skill deficits, 15 acknowledged that they had time management skill deficits, 14 acknowledged that they needed to make changes in their relationships, 12 identified needing to adapt their priorities, and all of them acknowledged that they needed to invest additional effort to create success in their pre-curriculum courses. Accepting these realities occurred and reoccurred as they experimented with new approaches and sometimes “fell back” into old habits. As the participants began experience movement away from hiding their need for assistance, they also came out to others about their academic weaknesses and began to become comfortable seeking support. All 16 of the participants sought some form of support after failing their first pre-curriculum course. Seeking support required overcoming their fear of exposing their vulnerabilities and reflected publicly coming out about their academic deficits, weaknesses.

The Role of Validation and Mattering

In addition to admitting their academic weaknesses and vulnerabilities to themselves, all 16 of the participants in this study described coming out to one or more of their professors about their weaknesses. They described how a relationship with at least one faculty member validated them and helped them feel as though they mattered and were capable of completing their pre-curriculum courses. In addition to contributing to their adaptation in assumptions, feeling as though they mattered, motivated them to also adapt their resources and helped them develop the knowledge and goal-oriented strategies they needed to complete remediation. In either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, when asked what made a difference in their pre-curriculum success, all of the participants said, “when the professors cared” or described forming an influential, affirming relationship with a professor. Thirteen of the participants reported having a relationship with an instructor that promoted their pre-curriculum persistence. Zachery recalled, “I had a really good [pre-curriculum] writing teacher. I formed a really good connection with her and she worked with me.” About his pre-curriculum Writing instructor, James said, “What worked well, was [the teacher] was approachable.” Caroline said, “...the constant reminding [from her pre-curriculum instructor] that I did know the information, even when I was in high doubt...” helped her overcome her “self-doubt.” Jonathan described arriving at a low point after he took the pre-curriculum Reading for a his third time,

I thought that I had passed the [pre-curriculum Reading] class cause I had tried my hardest in it, but my professor emailed me and told me that I had, unfortunately, failed the course. I wanted to transfer schools and not come back to school.

But he did not transfer out because, “I had a faculty member...I talked to, that told me to ‘Keep trying and come back next semester and work your hardest, work even harder than you did

before.” He continued, “I think that the support worked well for me...because if it wasn’t for the people who’d tell me, you have to keep going, you can’t give up, I probably would have.” He also described his relationship with his pre-curriculum Math instructor, “She was always there for support.” He said, “She saw the potential in me in the beginning. She knew I was a hard worker.” James described a similar view. Referring to multiple pre-curriculum and curriculum faculty, James admitted,

Because other people did not give up on me, I did not give up on myself. Because professors were willing to put in the time to invest in me, that gave me the hope to keep going. Now I want to sit here and tell you that I was just naturally gifted and that I just never gave up, and there is some truth to that. But I think, the real answer is, along the way, a teacher or a staff member saw that I had ability and talent. And when I was ready to give up, [they] said, “Hey, don't give up. Let’s look at this...”

James added,

‘Cause that’s the other thing about teachers, it’s not just that they know some knowledge, they’re mentors. They are so much more than fact givers. If being a teacher was just about the facts, then why would we need people? We could just use computers.

Andre, who shared that he brought a negative opinion of teachers to his pre-curriculum classes, based on his high school experiences, described a single experience, “...probably about half way through these [pre-curriculum] courses” that altered his perspective. He explained,

I remember one time, while I was in class, I really wasn’t trying to give the teacher a chance and I remember him saying, “I really care. I am really being sincere about this.” It made me want to give my best effort and to work with and not against him.

He continued, “Now I realize they really have your best interest at heart.” Tony also recounted a single experience that triggered a change in his outlook on and approach to his pre-curriculum courses and academics, in general.

A lot of teachers didn’t know that I had dyslexia. [My pre-curriculum Reading instructor] figured it out. She figured it out...One time when I was reading, she noticed it. ‘Yeah, you definitely have it. Yeah, that sounds about right.’”

He said he realized,

She cares, so I gotta care a bit more. The thing with me, like if you show me you care enough, I actually will work even harder. She made me work harder because I did not want to disappoint her.

When Tony was paraphrased in the member-checking interviews, 12 additional participants said they also put in additional effort to ensure that they “did not let their professors down.” James added, “I applied myself more because I wanted to do well for certain professors and I owed it to them to do well.” Even though all of the participants said that at least one caring or supportive professor made a difference in their willingness to persist and complete pre-curriculum courses, as mentioned previously, not all pre-curriculum professors came across as caring or available to assist students. Sabrina said, “Some professors care, some do not.” And Sarah reported, “Some teachers will help, others are too busy.”

Theme Six: Taking Stock

In concert with recognizing and accepting their need for remediation, the participants in this study took stock of their situations and their resources to determine whether they would be capable of completing remediation and to justify investing the time, energy, required to do so. Taking stock involved engaging in the metacognitive self-regulatory strategies of assessing their

internal and external resources. It also involved comparing the costs and benefits of persisting through remediation with the costs and benefits of exiting college or engaging in alternative career paths. Assessing and weighing costs to benefits occurred and reoccurred throughout their transition as the participants accommodated new experiences into their assumptions. But it represents a key activity in promoting movement into and through the reorganizational phase. It also tended to occur in response to the feedback and experiences that prompted the participants to become more realistic about their need for remediation and simultaneous with developing acceptance and hope for completing.

As the participants in this study weighed the costs to benefits of persisting in remediation, they reflected on their hoped for future they sought and the future they wished to avoid. They also reflected on the underlying commitments that motivated them to seek a college degree. All sixteen participants imagined their future possible selves with a college degree and the benefits that it would render them in terms of job and financial security. As they experienced validation of their internal resources from faculty and developed hope for completing remediation, they perceived these benefits as outweighing the psychic pain associated with enrollment in remediation and determined it was worth the risk of investing time, energy, and effort in persisting through the pre-curriculum courses to achieve their imagined future possible selves with degrees, yet they tended to focus on their avoidance goals, or the future they wished to avoid, over the one they sought to bring into existence.

Avoiding Feared Future Possible Selves

Although the approach-oriented image of a desired future self with a college degree was central to the participants' willingness to persist, 13 of the participants emphasized that the benefits of avoiding a feared imagined future possible self heavily influenced their willingness to

persist through the strains of pre-curriculum enrollment. They described comparing the costs of persisting in pre-curriculum courses to being stuck in the lifestyles they experienced growing up. They concluded that the short-term psychic pain of enduring and repeating at least one pre-curriculum course was better than enduring the long-term pain of returning to communities which had little to offer to their future possible selves. Leah described her perceived alternative,

I saw there was really nothing where I was and I started to get on the ball. Ok I want to get away from this place. Living where I was living at...you have basically two options, having a baby or being somebody. Like all my cousins...I didn't want to be like them because everybody else that was like older than me, they just dropped out of high school and started having kids. I wanted to go down a different road, explore and say, I want to be able to tell my kids I went to college, even if I didn't like it.

Sabrina described what her life would be if she did not persist in college, “At home, I don't have nothin. I feel like a bum. School is all I have.” She added,

Where I come from, there is nothing there...College is the only way out. I want to have something better, to not have to worry about having a job, or keeping a job, or getting a job...

Having suffered from housing insecurity as a child, Michelle said she was willing to persist through pre-curriculum courses to escape the conditions that had plagued her Mother. She said she wanted a “good job” to ensure she had a “stable place” to live and not have to move “...from place to place.” Andre said he was determined to persist through the pre-curriculum courses after working retail following graduation from high school. He said, “I kinda seen how some people who didn't get to college, how their life was. I knew I wanted something more. I don't wanna' go back there [to that job].” Tony said that he was also motivated to persist through his pre-

curriculum courses because he did not want to go back “to certain things, drugs and things, gun fights, and gang stuff...getting caught in the crossfire. A lot of my cousins are in that life.” In the member-checking interviews, nine of the participants identified with the comment, “Gotta’ get out of there, that job, that lifestyle, that town,” as reflective of their experience. As James continued to attempt to persist through the pre-curriculum Math, he said, “I realized that I have no choice, I have to succeed because I have no safety net.” Darius also considered the alternatives to persisting through the pre-curriculum reading for the third time, “The world out there is very scary. And I’m not out there yet, but I will be someday, so, I’m just preparing myself...”

Underlying Commitments

The participants also described taking stock of their commitments as they weighed the long-term benefits of a college degree with other alternatives. They decided fulfilling a personal commitment out-weighed short-term psychic pain of persisting through remediation. In either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, 12 of the participants described having the desire “to prove” they could successfully complete their pre-curriculum courses. Ten of the participants were motivated to successfully complete their pre-curriculum courses because they saw earning a degree as a way “to prove someone wrong.” Eight of these participants wanted to prove a former teacher, principal, or school counselor wrong who said they were not “college material” or predicted they would not “make it” in college. Caroline described her need to also prove that she was “...just as smart as the person in the honors class.” And, referring largely to peers from home, Michelle said, “I’m proving a lot of people wrong.”

As they weighed their options, many of the participants considered the effects stopping out of college would have on their families. They saw exiting college as negatively affecting

their families and persisting as positively impacting them. Thirteen of the participants perceived their status as the “first in the family to enroll in college or complete a degree” as a responsibility to advance their entire family financially or as a means of promoting social mobility. Nine of the participants saw their degree as a way to contribute to their families’ future financial stability.

Sarah, who initially chose to try college for just a year to please her mother, began to understand why her mother wanted to her to have a degree. After her first semester and a trip to visit her grandparents where she witnessed them working seven days a week to survive, she realized,

I really want to help my Mom and Dad in the future. I don't want to see them working... really hard...everyday [like her grandparents]...And I really want to help my grandparents”

She perceived her degree as advancing her entire family. Caroline, a first generation college student, described her commitment to earning a degree as a shared dream, “It was just something my parents always wanted for me...It was something I always wanted. I wanted to be here.”

Nine of the participants also saw their enrollment in college as modeling goal attainment for their younger siblings and cousins. For these participants, failure to persist through pre-curriculum courses would be not just a personal loss, but also a loss for their families.

Theme Seven: Exploring and Experimenting

As the participants began to recognize the value of persisting through the pre-curriculum courses, they also took stock of their internal and external resources. Again this activity occurred in sync with and reinforced other adaptations in assumptions and behaviors. They described moving from a lack of awareness of their self-regulatory resources to recognizing a need to let go of the avoidance and denial strategies that were not working for them and the need to adopt strategies that would be more effective at moving them through their remediation. Because they

had a lack of experience with self-regulating, all of the participants engaged in a trial and error process that involved the metacognitive activity of assessing priorities, exploring goal- and approach-oriented self-regulation, monitoring these strategies for effectiveness, and slowly building resource and strategy inventories in response to feedback.

For most, the process involved assessing weaknesses and engaging in the metacognitive activity of adapting priorities. In the member-checking interviews, 14 of the participants reported reassessing their situations and resources and “developing different priorities” or “putting existing priorities into practice.” After failing to complete his pre-curriculum Math course the first time, Joseph described creating a list of his priorities. “I gave myself a list of things that are important and the order when I should do them.” As a result, he said, “I have less [stress] than when I did not have my priorities.” Andre said he started, “Really seeing what my priorities are, what I want to do and what I need to do, what would really help me be successful.” Once he recognized that his approach to his pre-curriculum Reading was not effective, Jonathan said he started prioritizing studying for this class, “I started changing my habits, such as I knew that Reading was my tough class, so when I got finished with classes every day, that would be the first homework that I would do.” James described a similar process after failing pre-curriculum Math. He said, “I started organizing myself around what I had to do. I started prioritizing assignments because if you have two assignments due...you have to start making choices.”

In the either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, all of the participants described recognizing that they were not effectively regulating their time and effort. After failing a pre-curriculum Reading courses and having to re-enroll in it, Derrick said, “I started doing all my homework, turning all my homework in on time, and not missing any class periods.” Kayla said, she “...started doing the homework as soon as I got it.” The second time she was enrolled

in the pre-curriculum Math, Michelle described her “homework being done like the day [the teacher] would assign it.” Although Sabrina testified to missing up to 50% of the classes during her second attempt at her pre-curriculum Math, she said that she did become more responsible in terms of proving that she knew the material and “completing all of the homework.” Grant, describing his effort following his failed attempt in the pre-curriculum Writing, said, “Studying was involved, school work, planning, organization, all that was involved in it.” After failing the pre-curriculum Math, Leah said, “Instead of doing just enough to get by, I try to put...my best foot forward.” Zachery described his investment in his second attempt in the pre-curriculum Math, “I actually put the effort in. I did all my [homework] on time.” As he worked through his three attempts at the pre-curriculum Math, James said he was able to begin to let go of his “old behavior and habits.” He added, “I started going to class early instead of late.”

Theme Eight: Taking Charge and Developing a Sense of Control

Adapting priorities and exploring and experimenting with self-regulatory strategies, such as regulating time and effort, created opportunities for the participants to experience small successes in their pre-curriculum courses and contributed to a growing sense of competence. Especially when they experienced validation from institutional personnel, the participants described becoming progressively more comfortable seeking assistance and increasingly more proactive in engaging goal- and approach-oriented self-regulation. These incremental adaptations in assumptions and behaviors led to additional successes and gave the participants an increasing sense of control over their situations and helped them feel more certain about their ability to integrate into the college setting and achieve their imagined future possible selves. This growing self-efficacy was reflected in the participants’ confidence with taking charge of adapting assumptions and behaviors.

Taking Charge of Advocating for Self

In either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, all of the participants, except, Joseph and Darius, described “speaking up in class more” or “asking more questions” as they perceived themselves as more competent and capable of completing their remediation. They also recognized that these activities promoted increased understanding of the material and therefore success. Sabrina said she began to become “more comfortable speaking up in class.” And recognized, “That really helps.” Michelle said the second time through her pre-curriculum Math, she was eager to ask questions and speak up. She explained that when the teacher asked a question, “...my hand was raised automatically.” Grant admitted, “I don’t like speaking up...” but said that he began “speaking up more in class” when he reenrolled in pre-curriculum Writing for the second time. Referring to her second attempt in the pre-curriculum Reading, Sarah reported, “It changed me because I had to ask for more help when I didn’t know what to do.” In the follow up interviews, six of the participants also identified growing increasingly more comfortable “asking questions” as they realized how effective it was in learning course content. Grant also identified another strategy he developed for securing information. He said he started “looking on the portal to see what kind of assignments was on there.” The proactive engagement these participants described reflects a recognition of the responsibility of the learner in learning.

In either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, all 16 participants said they began to recognize the value of “getting help” or “getting more help” as they moved through their pre-curriculum courses and most made proactively engaging in seeking assistance a part of their routine. Caroline said she was forced out of her comfort zone when she had to retake the pre-curriculum Math, “I, for the first time, I had to go out and seek my own help.” Cory said, he recognized the value of “actually going to Math Lab and actually going in there, meeting with

people that can help.” He said he would tell himself, “Oh just go get it. Just go get help. Do what you can.” Andre said, “I really took every time I could to go to the Writing Lab and get in there and get extra help.” Darius reported changing after failing the pre-curriculum Reading the first time, “If I don't really know something...I'll ask, I'll actually ask somebody.” As he was progressing through his 3 attempts in pre-curriculum Math, James said he began participating in study groups. He said that the study groups helped him “...learn these subjects, much better.” Michelle agreed and said “Going to study group...helped me out.”

Taking Charge of Time and Effort

All of the participants also identified changing their routines and managing their time in response to their changes in assumptions about their ability to navigate the pre-curriculum courses. When she first started her second attempt at pre-curriculum Math, even though she did not attend all of the classes, Sabrina said, “I would go from class right back to my room to study or do my homework, and not going to hang out with my friends.” In her second attempt at pre-curriculum Math, Leah said there was, “no more procrastinating.” She said that was the “big” change. Tony described learning to develop a plan to ensure that he completed all of his work on time, “So like we have to write something due Wednesday, I will probably do it that Sunday, then read over it on Monday, so I won't have to pressure myself or procrastinate to do it.” Derrick contrasted his new approach to his former, “I used to do all the homework at one time, really, at night. Now, it's like right after class.” He described his system, “If I leave...one class and I have time to do homework, then I do homework before my next class.” Darius described his approach to time management, “Being as if I have a Monday class and I know [an assignment] is due on Wednesday, I will try to do it Tuesday night or Monday night to try to get things done and stay on top of that.”

When he realized he would need to take the pre-curriculum Reading a third time, Jonathan said he developed “a routine...to do each and every day...what needs to be done what I need to do first, what I need to do second, and last. I need to be organized...” Following his third reenrollment in pre-curriculum Reading, Cory realized that he needed to continue to make changes. He developed a routine which he described in detail, from “waking up early in the morning” through his entire day. He said he would, “go over material...between classes....then go back over it again. Then once I get in to class again, if I had any questions, I’ll ask.” Andre also described a highly detailed routine that varied by day, but included waking up “at 7:30 every day” and “going over yesterday’s notes” and making sure, “I’ve got all my work done and ready to turn in.” He described his routine throughout the day, drawing attention to using time between classes to “look over the notes and get ready for...classes.” As he continued his attempts the pre-curriculum Math, James said he made an important connection. He explained,

Student skills and time management are interconnected...I started writing down schedules from five am to midnight, Monday to Sunday. And I started blocking them, and then I started scheduling them.

Taking Charge of Learning and Thinking

Ten of the participants said that coming to terms with their need for remediation led them to take a different perspective on the resources that were available to them. In the member checking interviews, they each identified “starting to appreciate the help that was available.” Eight of the participants also described changing their approach to engaging in the pre-curriculum courses by “starting to take charge instead of just letting things happen.” A ninth participant, Kayla, said she realized she “had to take charge” if she was going to be successful.

All of the participants described realizing that they needed to change how they learned after failing a pre-curriculum course. After failing two pre-curriculum courses, Tony described taking more responsibility for his own learning and becoming more independent. He explained,

Like with the writing, I would correct my writing before anybody else would. I would read a little bit more better, more clearer. After reading to myself, I actually knew more words. I'm actually looking at the dictionary, just to look up words to see what it means to see that I use it right.

Cory also recognized the value of learning the material for himself by “knocking it out myself without anyone else helping me.” Andre described how he adapted his classroom learning,

I took more of an effort to get the most out of each class, each day, trying to write the notes to the best of my ability, trying to keep up with everything the best that I can, and trying to really take in what the teacher said, really grasp what the whole subject is and really grasp the matter.

He said he was attempting to put “...all my focus on the instructor.” To do this required “...listening differently, really zoning out everything else going on.” He added, “It took me a while to adapt to listening like this.” After repeating the pre-curriculum Math, Leah described studying differently,

...not to just remember the information for now, but to be able to retrieve it. I suck so bad at Math that even when I didn't have homework, I would review cause I just knew I wanted to pass it and get it over with.

Sarah explained that in these classes “...you have to understand what you are doing.” She said, “I used to take notes and that was how I reviewed. But now, I really have to take notes, then I have to review at home, then I have to review again. Then they will always come back to you.”

In the member-checking interviews, 14 participants either said they “realized that it was not just doing the work; it was about understanding the material that was important” or that they “needed to learn, not memorize material” in order to be successful in their pre-curriculum courses.

Taking Charge of Relationships

As they took charge of their routines, and regulated their time and effort, 14 of the 16 participants found that their relationships also changed. Only Sarah and Joseph did not mention any change in relationships. About his experience, Joseph said, “My relationships didn’t really change. They didn’t really change.” Some of the participants found that their friends were not happy with the adaptations they were making, but others found that their friends evolved and adapted with them. The 14 participants who identified the need to make changes in their relationships to support their continued progress in pre-curriculum courses either adapted their existing relationship dynamics, gravitated toward new relationships, or developed new roles within the existing relationships.

Adapting Existing Relationships

Those who adapted their existing relationships described regulating their socializing and learning to manage conflict. Four said they modified their relationships by reducing their physical time in social settings. Instead of socializing all day long, Andre said, “Now, I socialize on weekends when I have break.” After failing her first attempt at the pre-curriculum Math, Sabrina said that she started putting academics before “going to hang out with my friends.” After failing to complete the pre-curriculum Reading course the first time, Derrick said he prioritized studying over socializing, “I just started staying in my room really, not really coming out.” Kayla suggested that she also socialized less. She said, “Well, if I hung out, I made sure my work was

done first.” Grant said he decided to prioritize his academics above his sport and relationships “...so I can be a better college student. Whereas, at the beginning, none of that was there.”

Eight participants described how changes in their routines created conflict in their relationships. Sabrina reported that studying more and socializing less, “took a toll for the worse on my friendships. A couple of my friends got mad at me and said I was being ‘fake.’” Michelle explained that when she reenrolled in pre-curriculum Math, “I spoke to people, but I did not hang out as much as I did. I didn’t, like, you know, go places that much.” As a result, she said, “I lost two friends for that because they felt like, you know, I was different, acting different from me, but it was not because of that.” Darius also reported, “They [friends] got mad at me because I was studying instead of hanging out.” When he was quoted in the follow up interviews, Leah and Andre reported “friends got mad at me because I was studying instead of hanging out.” James said that his friends did not get mad with him when he made changes to his routine, but said, his girlfriend did, “all the freakin time.” He added, “I tried to study with the girlfriend, but that never worked out.” Cory described how his peers tried to persuade him to put off his studies for later. He said they would come to him and assert, “It’s like, ‘Man, you can get that done anytime.’” But he said he would respond, “No, I got to get this done, now.” He continued, “It was like we did not have the same thing going on, or we was just on two different levels...you know, we’re still friends, but I think I out grew some of my peers.”

Selecting Peers with Similar Goals

After recognizing the need to do things differently in order to achieve success in pre-curriculum courses, 14 of the participants said they made a conscious change in who they chose to spend time with. Andre said he started gravitating toward peers who have,

...the same goals or want to get the same thing out of life. I'm more toward people focused on school, who try to do more, or have a set goal about going to school. They are not here because their parents think it's best."

James reported,

I stopped interacting with the students with the 'stinking thinking' and started interacting with people who were more like myself, who were excited to go to class. And I feel like their excitement bled over to me, too.

James said once he started participating in study groups, "I also had better relationships with people because of them. The study groups led to friendships, deeper friendships, the kind I wanted to keep." Jonathan recounted intentionally developing a relationship. He said, "Me and my suitemate started becoming more closer. He was a student with at least a 3.5 or a 4.0 each semester. I knew I needed to buckle down, so I actually got closer with him." Kayla said she developed a similar relationship after failing her pre-curriculum Reading the first time. She said, "It made me closer with my old roommate. It's kinda like we motivate each other. If she saw me doing my work, she would do her work. If I saw her doing her work, I would do mine." Michelle also referenced developing a motivating relationship. She remembered, "We used to get together and study our Math and do our Math XL together. That is what really helped me out." She continued, "Ya know, we motivated each other." In the member checking interviews, 11 of the participants described, "starting to hang out with people who did their homework." And 11 others identified with the phrase, "I just wanted to be around people who had the same goals."

Change of Roles in Relationships

Eight of the participants said that they maintained some of the same relationships after recognizing the need to invest more in their studies, but acknowledged that the nature of their

relationships changed. In the member-checking interviews, seven described how their relationships changed, “instead of just hanging out, we started doing homework together.” Referring to his relationship with his girlfriend, Grant said, “Actually I was kinda surprised...we can do school work together, stuff like that. We can study together.” Grant also described an ancillary effect of his implementation of change in thinking and behavior on some of his relationships. He said,

After I decided to make this turn around...I started doing my best and tried to encourage others to do their best as well. And when I did that I became team leader...one of the captains for the team.

Cory described a similar experience. He said,

I started to see myself as a leader. I don't like to take credit for a lot of things, but I started paying attention to, to what others were going through, being around certain people, ‘Hey, you got this.’ And then Coach made me a captain.”

James said that as a result of participating in and then leading study groups in the pre-curriculum courses, “I transitioned from the quiet kid in the class to taking leadership roles” and began to “...mentor other students.” Darius also described attempting to be a mentor to his roommate the semester after he failed to successfully complete his first pre-curriculum Reading course. He said, he was trying to be “a brother” to him. He recalled, “If he's lacking in anything in schoolwork, I get on him. I would not do his homework, but I would start my homework to help him, to motivate him. I would wake him up for class”

Adapting Assumptions and Evaluative Narratives

All of the of the participants described adapting their assumptions about themselves and their internal and external resources as they moved through and out of the reorganizational

phase. These adapted assumptions influenced them to also adapt their evaluative narratives. As they participants became more hopeful about their potential to complete pre-curriculum courses, instead of finding ways deny the reality or their need for remediation, they reframed their evaluative narratives to support approach- and goal-oriented self-regulation. Their evaluative narratives reflected a movement away from feelings of marginalization, stigmatization, inferiority, and self-doubt to reflecting self-efficacy, optimism for completing remediation, and a sense of mattering.

Sabrina and Joseph moved away from seeing themselves as marginalized and stigmatized by drawing comfort from seeing themselves as part of community sharing the same experience. Sabrina recalled, “Well you know, it was good to know you’re not alone in dealing with the class.” Joseph found comfort in recognizing that he had company in his struggles, “Other students had their own struggles and challenges in the class.” Joseph also chose to place his previous pre-curriculum failure in the background and his perception of himself as “a work in progress” in the foreground of his evaluative narrative. Darius chose not to see failure in his second pre-curriculum Reading course as a foreclosure on opportunity. He compared it to his multiple failures and academic expulsion from his previous college and converted his potential grief and loss into appreciation, “At least you get to take something and get better at it instead of not taking anything at all. So, I look at it as good practice [for] when I do go the next level course.” These evaluative narratives suggest that these participants are adapting their assumptions to be more optimistic about their situations.

When she had to retake the pre-curriculum Math course, Michelle described consciously regulating her thoughts and emotions to create an adaptation in her assumptions, “I changed from being more aggressive to more assertive. What I mean by that...I wanted to be so angry and so

mad that I had to take that class over, but I didn't." She added, "I feel like the only way [the class] is going to affect me is if I let it affect me. And it didn't affect me; it just motivated me..." Like Darius, Michelle converted her evaluative narrative from a focus on failure to a focus on opportunity, giving her a reason to persist. She described starting to view her second enrollment as an opportunity to learn "more than what you were supposed to the first time." Like Joseph and Sabrina, she also comforted herself, by saying, "I felt like everybody, you know, is gonna go through something." She also described consciously encouraging herself. She explained, "And some people might need that encouragement from other people. I feel like, I encourage myself when nobody else encourages me." Like Michelle, Cory, who took the pre-curriculum Reading four times and the Math twice before completing them, also described taking charge of his emotions and assumptions by encouraging himself,

I mean, you can't just sit there and [let it] overwhelm yourself. I mean, I have been through things, so I know at times, you got to just sit back and say, 'C'mon Let's Go! Let's keep going!'

He also reported that when other students tried to devalue the class or the students therein, he was able to tune those messages out, "That never really bothered me none." These participants were describing adapting their assumptions to reflect an optimism that contributed to their ability to generate self-regulatory energy, motivational drive, and a perception of control over their situations.

Experiences in the Reintegration Phase

When the participants completed their pre-curriculum courses, they ostensibly resolved the threat to their identity and gave them the opportunity to experience relief from the stress, strain, uncertainty, inferiority, stigma and marginalization associated with it. As they

moved into full enrollment in curriculum courses and advanced toward graduation, most of them described developing a changed perspective on the value of their experiences in pre-curriculum courses and continued to maintain their resource adaptations. Those who recognized the value of the adaptations they made and assimilated them into their roles, routines, relationships, and assumptions experienced greater identity reintegration than those who did not fully embrace their adaptations or sustain them in their curriculum courses. The participants who integrated their new assumptions and behaviors into their identities demonstrated changing views on the role of the individual in learning and evidenced interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development.

Theme 9: Evolving Assessment of Experience

Analysis of the data suggested that the participants' assessment of their experience in pre-curriculum courses was not fixed, but fluid and subject to continued change as they moved through the experience, resolved the threat it posed to their existing and future possible selves, and as they reflected on it. As the participants resolved the threat to identity that academic underpreparedness posed to them, they began to find value in their pre-curriculum enrollment and assessed the courses differently. Reflecting on their experiences during the study may have also contributed to their evolving perspective. Kayla, for example who passed all of her curriculum courses, but failed to achieve a passing score on the pre-curriculum Reading exit exam until her fourth attempt, maintained that the courses were "pointless" through the in-depth interview, but described a change in perspective in the member-checking interview after engaging with the perspectives of the other participants. She said, "I realize that [they are] important, now. Somebody needs to tell students how important it is, probably a teacher, an authority." In the member-checking interviews, all of the participants acknowledged that initially they were "upset" about placement into these courses, but as they recognized the value of the experiences,

they realized, “it was for the better.” Four of the participants shared that they “started seeing the classes as useful instead of feeling bad about them.” Grant admitted that when he was first enrolled, “I felt it was kinda stupid for me to even be there.” He confessed, “The reason I didn't do good the first time, in the writing [class] is, I was, I guess I felt like I was too good for that class.” However, he shared how his view changed.

And after being in these other [curriculum] classes and seeing how other classes are, I see how that class helped. It helped out a lot. I'm glad I had to take it... That was a life lesson, right there.

Andre was initially overwhelmed by the length of time it might take him to complete pre-curriculum courses and “having to start at the very bottom,” but as he looked back on his experience, he reflected, “I guess it's just a little bit extra added in.” He reframed his assessment, recognizing the role the courses played in his academic journey and began to see the courses as “a stepping stone...one of the ingredients in the cake of success.” When Andre was paraphrased in the member checking interviews, five additional participants also described assimilating these courses into their academic journey and made them part of their story, identifying them as a “step toward accomplishing my goals.” Sarah, who recognized the value of the pre-curriculum courses even in the first semester, said that her appreciation for them grew after taking her curriculum courses. She said they “really help with college courses.” In the member checking interviews, 13 additional participants affirmed that the pre-curriculum courses “prepared me for the curriculum classes” or “made the regular classes go better.”

Theme 10: Adapting Identity and Constructing Knowledge

All of the participants described adapting their understanding of themselves and their situations as unfolding over time in response to their experiences. Their narratives demonstrated

how growth in one resource prompted concurrent or subsequent adaptations in other internal and external resources as they moved through their pre-curriculum courses. Michelle put this cascading effect into words,

I feel like that I changed more and that made me more mature in a lot of areas and I feel like that's reflected in my work because, like, the more that I began to transition to change, my work got to looking better, my friends got better, things like that.

Tapping Into and Developing Resources

As they took stock of their resources and situations, decided that the benefits of persisting in their pre-curriculum courses exceeded the costs, and made the choice to invest in them, all 16 of the participants described tapping into or developing their tenacity and determination and building a tolerance for strain. In the member checking interviews, 13 of the participants said that one of their strengths was their "determined mindset." The other 3, said, they "never quit." Tony described his determination to complete the pre-curriculum courses, "You just have to stick to it or not even try. I have that drive. I just have that drive. I never, I never thought I wouldn't finish them." Zachary attributed a portion of his persistence through the pre-curriculum course as his "stick-to-it-iveness." Andre said, "I just told myself, I would not quit." Cory explained, "The strength that I bring to this experience is not giving up." Kayla said determination is part of her character, "I don't give up." Grant also saw determination as part of his identity, "I don't like to give up. I don't like to lose. I always get myself up again and keep going."

All 16 of the participants also described tapping into or developing the ability to find meaning in persisting and to focus thereon. In either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, all of the participants cited keeping their focus on the "big picture," their "future goals," or wanting "to graduate" as a strategy to motivate themselves to persist through the pre-

curriculum courses to achieve their visions for their imagined future selves. Darius described moving from purposeless and visionless at his previous institution to developing a tangible vision of and purpose for the future,

I think I'm determined to [complete pre-curriculum courses] because there is just so much that I want to do, that I want to do for my family and myself. I just think that I am motivated and I have a purpose.

Although Grant said he needed time to adapt his perspective toward pre-curriculum courses and contemplated stopping out or transferring to another college, he said that he persisted because,

I was determined to get me an associate's degree from here 'cause I know how big that is when it comes to the work place... "No matter what," I said, "I'm gonna get it. No matter how hard it is, I'm gonna get it." I told myself, "I am not a quitter. I am not a quitter."

That's how I am. And it's kinda like, I'm not going to start today.

Although he also flirted with stopping out or transferring when he needed to re-enroll in the pre-curriculum Reading the fourth time, Jonathan said,

I wanted to graduate real bad. I said, "I'll work my hardest, now. So why give up? I have to finish, not just the class, I have to finish college." And I knew I wanted to be in college, as for me, so I didn't want to give up at all.

When Cory was asked what kept him going through the two attempts in the pre-curriculum Math and four attempts in the Reading, he responded, "Well, I'm just me. It's when I have my eye on something, I am driven to do it. I'm driven to do it, even taking all the blows." Although Leah experienced a number of ups and downs, she described how she would get herself recharged and going again,

I always thought about the future. Every time my mind was about to give up, I would think of how it would affect my future, if I were to give up, or if I was to fail that class.

Thinking about the future. Trying to get my degree. Trying not to be here another semester. These participants expressed applying and developing their resources of determination and tenacity to help them justify persisting through the psychic pain of the threat, stigma and marginalization associated with pre-curriculum enrollment. As they did so, they also built their endurance and tolerance for strain.

From Marginalized to Mattering

All of the participants described experiencing the stigmatization and marginalization associated with identification as academically underprepared. Fifteen of the participants also described experiencing marginalization in their previous academic settings. For these students identification as academically underprepared reinforced their previous marginalization. The 12 of the participants who chose the theme “proves that he/she can do it” as reflecting their pre-curriculum experiences were describing the internal and external impact of shaking off the stigma and marginalization of “not being college material” or “not measuring up” to the institution’s standards. This enhanced their sense of accomplishment in completing the pre-curriculum courses, provided evidence of their competence, and created an internal satisfaction and sense of belonging and mattering. All of the participants also described positive and meaningful experiences with institutional personnel, especially faculty, who contributed to their sense of mattering within the context. Even when they had experiences with teachers who contributed to their marginalization, the self-enhancing experiences compensated for these, and led them to doubt the credibility of the faculty who had left them feeling as though they were “dumb” or “did not belong.”

For all 16 of the participants, overcoming marginalization and feeling as though they mattered was central to their willingness to persist to complete their pre-curriculum courses. Seven of the participants described experiencing trajectory-altering adaptations in their assumptions about themselves and their situations as a result of interacting with their instructors. Grant, Jonathan, and Leah all described an advisor or instructor who persuaded them to stay and complete their courses when they were contemplating giving up. Tony, James and Andre described the influence of one or more teachers on their interest in learning. Andre said that when he first enrolled in pre-curriculum courses, he felt that all teachers “belittled” him, but after a pre-curriculum instructor reached out to him and made him feel like he mattered, he began to adapt his assumptions. He described recognizing, “the importance of actually being able to have trust in someone, trust in people you don’t know...” He described how a professor gave him the courage to take the risk of trying, “It made me really take into consideration that people really wanted to help me and that the other half was up to me.” He said that the experience triggered him to become willing to engage in the class, the course materials, and to feel as though he mattered. He explained, “You really have a sense of dignity about yourself, self-dignity.”

Like Andre, James described moving from identification as marginalized to mattering during his transition through and out of pre-curriculum courses and how it also made him want to help himself. He explained,

I came from [being] someone who was disenfranchised from things to more of a leader and more of who I naturally am, without fear...And because others were willing to put in the time to invest in me, that gave me the hope to realize that it was really not that bad. They held me accountable for things and that definitely helped. And of course, eventually, I held myself accountable in the same ways those other people did.

Leah described relationships with multiple professors who had helped her work through her challenges of balancing school and home life and made her feel as though she mattered to them,

So, I got people rooting for me who see so much potential in me. And I think they are going to feel very warm...gonna be proud to see me walking across that stage. And I can't wait. I want to prove them right and not prove them wrong.

Three of the participants also described freeing themselves from a sense of internally imposed marginalization. Cory, James, and Jonathan, described letting go of their angst and concerns about learning differently and accepting it as part of their identity. After multiple unsuccessful attempts at the pre-curriculum Reading, when Cory finally passed it, he said, "I started looking at things differently. I started looking at it as, you know, I'm not going to get it on the first time. I think it just taught me a lesson. Be you. Be yourself." He accommodated his learning difference and his need to process through his college courses at his own pace and to not compare himself to those who completed them more quickly. Like Andre, he recognized his personal dignity did not reside in being like the typical student. He developed his own sense of mattering.

Following his completion of the pre-curriculum Reading on his fourth attempt, Jonathan also adapted his assumptions about himself and began to see repeating the courses as learning at his own pace, "I learn slow. I went at a slower pace and then I gradually worked my way up. I understood; it was just for the better." Like Cory he accepted that he learned at a different pace than other students and realized, "I had to work harder...to achieve my full potential." Likewise, as James progressed through his three pre-curriculum Math courses, he said, "I came to the realization that I always needed additional time." These three participants were realistic about their differences, their need to plan accordingly, but they rejected the assumption that their

differences marginalized them. Instead, they embraced their differences and developed an internal sense of mattering.

Evolving Perception of Self

Letting go of hangover habits and developing self-regulatory resources contributed the participants' willingness to engage in new strategies and monitor their effectiveness. These activities resulted in an accumulation of small successes that promoted a sense of competency, self-efficacy, and adaptations in their assumptions about themselves and their situations. For most of the participants, developing competency and self-efficacy in pre-curriculum courses led them to feel less uncertain about their futures, to develop more elaborate images of their future possible selves, and to adopt more open mindsets and optimistic processing. It also promoted the development of internalized goals and commitments. Because they had not been challenged to work hard or learn deeply in their previous educational settings, as the participants developed a sense of competency, most described evolving from "hating" or avoiding the course work to understanding its relevance.

From the rigor and demands of his pre-curriculum courses, Zachery described learning, "what hard work really is." Andre described the outcomes of engaging in the work and experiencing successes. He said, "I have a better attitude about getting work done....Now, I embrace getting the work done." Jonathan adapting his assumptions from thinking that the instructors would just "babysit" students to understanding the importance of hard work, "...every day, no matter what I do, I actually say to myself, I have to work my hardest...to achieve my full potential." Zachary described the role of working hard and developing a sense of competency, and the relationship between competency and increasing certainty about achieving his imagined future possible self.

I think, like school wise, I definitely became more confident. Like this can be accomplished, like graduating and getting my associate's degree and going on to get a bachelor's degree. It didn't look as hard, even though it's going to be harder, I know that I can do it.

Darius described a similar perception of his competency, "I know that I'm capable of doing it. It's a challenge and I just love challenges, especially with school." Leah admitted to struggling with regulating her emotions, but she became increasingly more aware of how this interfered with her ability to persist in her classes. She described recognizing the need to actively regulate her emotions to secure her imagined future possible self and described her budding self-confidence,

I feel like I can do it. I know I can do it. I got my confidence up a little. I wake up each morning, instead of being down and walking around mad or not wanting to be bothered, now I can speak and I got a smile and I can laugh."

Caroline shared how she adapted her assumptions from uncertainty about her ability to be successful in college to more certain, "I've changed a lot. I guess, now I realize that I can do versus, before it was in my mind, set in stone, that I couldn't do it.

Seven of the participants also described changing their assumptions about their education after experiencing success in their pre-curriculum courses. Andre said when he enrolled, "I didn't have a mindset of graduating college...My mindset was a little bit more on [my sport]..." He said he began "...to see things different, as far as the importance of education." Grant, Zachary, Darius, and Tony also described being more focused on their sport when they first enrolled, but realized that the education had a lasting value not found in their sports. Sara described a similar transformation. She described herself as "someone who did not know what

she wanted...” and only came to college to please her mother, but her experiences in pre-curriculum Math provided a stark contrast to her experiences with Math in high school. She discovered, “I loved Math. It was not stressful like it was in high school.” She continued, “I knew what I wanted after that and I changed my major to Business because of that too. I like solving problems.” Completing remediation and developing competence contributed to these students’ growing self-awareness, their adaptations in their assumptions about themselves, and promoted a more elaborate view of their imagined future possible selves. These participants also demonstrated the development of internally defined goals and defining themselves.

Evolving Outlook

In either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, all of the participants described becoming more open to change or engaging in more optimistic processing after resolving the initial threat to identity that pre-curriculum courses posed to their existing and imagined future possible selves. As they reflected on movement out of their pre-curriculum enrollment, all sixteen participants moved from seeing the experience as an overwhelming threat to identity to seeing them as character or resource-building experiences. In the member-checking interviews, they each equated identification as academically underprepared and enduring pre-curriculum enrollment as taking “hits” or experiencing “setbacks” that they gradually became more determined to bounce back from or overcome. Fifteen of the 16 participants said of their the pre-curriculum enrollment, “This is how it is; you’re gonna have setbacks. You just gotta keep getting back up and trying again until you get it.” These adaptations in assumptions reflect movement from a more fixed, fearful, and uncertain view of their ability to complete the courses to developing a more open and optimistic view of their ability to resolve this and future challenges.

Thirteen of the participants also described developing habits of optimistic processing as they navigated their pre-curriculum courses. James described moving from being “motivated by fear” to being “relaxed and...motivated by happiness.” Michelle described adapting from being a more reactive “outspoken” person who readily voiced her complaints and frustrations to becoming someone who proactively regulated her responses and intentionally developed an optimistic pattern of processing. Following her second enrollment in pre-curriculum Math, she said, “...instead of looking at everything negative...I feel like I take every negative thing and put it towards motivation. I just turn it around to look at it in a good way, a good perspective.” Similarly, Jonathan described developing an optimistic approach to support his persistence through his multiple pre-curriculum course repeats. He said he realized, “You gotta turn negatives into positives.” Jonathan was describing an openness to change and a desire to continue growing. When he was paraphrased in the member-checking interviews, “You gotta turn negatives into positives,” 10 additional participants said that they developed this approach to coping as a result of enrollment in pre-curriculum courses.

Even though Kayla was reluctant to find value in the pre-curriculum courses initially, she said she intentionally used “staying positive” as a strategy to keep her going through her four attempts at the pre-curriculum Reading.

Because when I was in high school, it was a situation, but I knew that I dealt with it in a negative way and I got a negative response, so I feel like if you have a positive response, like, if you have a positive attitude, you will get a positive response.

In the in-depth interview, Jonathan reflected on how having to pick himself up after each failed attempt in a pre-curriculum course forced him to develop emotional self-regulation and resilience to endure the pain of multiple pre-curriculum failures.

I think I changed in a positive way, in that, I know that no matter how many times I fail, I know that you can't give up. I understand that I took a class four times, that some people would just, some people would not come back, but I just kept going, so I think I changed in a positive way. I think I changed for the better.

He recognized the value of developing the internal resources of resilience and hardiness in navigating future challenges,

That is going to play a big role. It is going to play a big role 'cause now I am understanding that I am going to fail sometimes. I truly am, but that is not going to hold me back in what I want to do in life.

He concluded that these courses “made me a stronger person.” When he was quoted in the member-checking interviews, 10 additional participants agreed that enrollment in pre-curriculum courses “made [them] a stronger person.” The participants moved from seeing their experiences in pre-curriculum courses as a threat to their identities as college students and to their imagined future possible selves to seeing them serving in supporting these identities. They also reframed their perceptions of the stigma and marginalization to viewing these experiences as helping them build resources for enduring future challenges.

Adapting Learning and Thinking

In addition to adapting their assumptions about themselves and their situation, the participants in this study also adapted their assumptions about learning and thinking. These adaptations reflected development of more autonomous thinking and beginning to take responsibility for defining self. In either the in-depth or the follow-up interviews, all of the participants claimed that enduring the pre-curriculum courses forced them to start thinking or acting “like an adult.” For 12 of the participants, acting like an adult included caring less “what

others thought” of them. This reflected letting go of their need for external validation and beginning to internally define themselves. Kayla admitted that when she first came to college, she relied heavily on her boyfriend for external validation. She recognized this had taken her focus off her pre-curriculum courses and saw it as a mistake. She said she would tell a new freshman who was enrolling in pre-curriculum courses, “Don’t let nobody get in the way, no friendship, especially no relationships with no guys.” Her regret reflected an awareness of the need to internally define herself and her goals. Twelve of the participants described changing from not knowing why they wanted to go to college, enrolling to please someone else, or having only a very vague reasons for wanting to earn a college degree to realizing “I had to do this for me.” Internalizing their goals evidenced taking responsibility for defining themselves and movement away from the need for external validation.

Grant described himself as initially wanting and needing external validation from others to create a sense of self-worth, but realizing that this was not working for him. He described living up to others’ expectations for him to be unsuccessful in college, “The first couple of semesters, I was just pretty much proving them right.” But he described growing tired of being defined by others, “I just got tired of listening and just everybody thinks they know who I was gonna be.” He described how he adapted his reasoning,

I don’t just do what somebody asks me to do. I think about how to get it done. What steps will make this easier? What would be a better way to solve the problem, like why, who, what? I question a lot of things. Before, I would just be like, yeah, ok. But now I think for myself.

Grant describes moving from letting himself be defined by others to taking responsibility for defining himself. He is also moving from accepting received knowledge to questioning it and

thinking for himself, finding his own methods and meanings. Along with many of the participants, Grant evidenced movement away from absolute knowing and beginning to construct his own knowledge and define his relationship to the world.

All 16 participants described recognizing the need to take responsibility for learning and that “nobody else can do it for me.” They also described taking responsibility for “thinking for myself.” These adaptations in assumptions reflect movement away from absolute knowing, or accepting that knowledge is obtained from authorities, and beginning to trust in their own ability to construct knowledge. Grant reported that the rigor in the pre-curriculum classes forced him to not only become a “a critical thinker,” but to also take responsibility for learning, “You gotta learn for yourself.” Andre described constructing his own knowledge and autonomous thinking when he employed analysis and evaluation to make personal goal-oriented decisions, “Seeing what would really help me be successful and seeing what would really benefit me in the best way, just like putting things in pros and cons in my head.” His thoughts also suggest taking responsibility for defining himself and his goals. Cory described developing as an independent learner and thinker, “What is different...is going farther... and really seeing how *I* needed to do things.” He is recognizing that receiving knowledge is not as effective as taking charge of it and sharing his ability to construct knowledge. Reflecting on the effect of his pre-curriculum course enrollment, James described developing strategies and flexibility in gaining knowledge and solving problems. He said he had learned to,

...evaluate choices, decision processes...and learning how to manage myself...I learned how to learn in those classes. I learned how to learn and that is more important than anything.

For James, learning how to learn reflected not only recognition of his own ability to construct knowledge, but also a trust in his ability to do so. The degree to which the participants successfully integrated these adaptations in assumptions into their identities evidenced the degree to which they experienced personal development. Those who integrated habits of defining self, thinking autonomously, and constructing knowledge into their identities demonstrated interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development. Although all of the participants told stories and used language that suggested this type of development, not all of the participants demonstrated sustaining their adaptations in assumptions and behaviors.

Struggles and Inconsistencies

Based on their narratives and their transcripts, 13 of the participants, and that includes nine of the 11 who completed a degree, continued to experience some academic difficulties as they progressed through their curriculum courses. Five of the participants evidenced inconsistency in integrating their adaptations into their identity and struggled with effort, time, priority, and/or attention regulation. Three of these, Joseph, Sabrina, and Tony, demonstrated stalled progress in at least one of their curriculum course series and stopped out of college at the end of the semester in which data was collected. Kayla and Leah described struggling with regulating emotions and priorities. However, they also described a pattern of rallying and regaining control over their situations every time they experienced a setback. These experiences compromised their potential outcomes in their courses, but made it possible for them to graduate with a degree. Additional data related to inconsistencies is available in Appendix J.

Participants' Theories on High Pre-curriculum Attrition Rates

The participants in this study presented their theories on why they thought the majority of their peers, nationally, failed to complete their pre-curriculum courses. They suggested that pre-

curriculum students stop, or drop out prematurely because 1) they believe the message that they are not smart enough for college and do not believe they have the necessary resources to persist through a failure; 2) they cannot see the value in the pre-curriculum courses; 3) they do not have internalized goals; or 4) they are not in receipt of adequate external encouragement and support. Additional discussion about these theories is available in Appendix K.

Perceived Contributions to Academic Under-preparedness

The participants in this study described their perceptions of the internal and external resource assets and liabilities that believed influenced contributed to their academic under-preparedness for college. They recognized their role in their under-preparedness, but also attributed responsibility for to conditions at their previous educational institutions. They recalled achieving passing grades for compliant behavior and experiencing grade inflation and social promotion. Eleven of the participants said that their teachers just “baby-sat” them in high school and 15 said their instructors did not have or did not want to take time to provide additional instruction for students who needed it. They described their instructors as focused on honors and AP students and said average or lower performing students were not a priority. They also identified two central personal contributions to their under-preparedness, compromised academic effort and struggling in at least one academic subject area. Additional data regarding their perceptions of the conditions that contributed to their under-preparedness is available in Appendices L and M.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study, a qualitative case study designed to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in and completed pre-curriculum courses and successfully transitioned to full enrollment

in curriculum courses. Using the data collected from the in-depth and member-checking interviews with the 16 participants, this chapter summarized the participants' personal characteristics outcomes and provided an overview of the participants' patterns of adaptation. It details the 10 transitional themes that emerged from the data as they relate to the three overarching phases of the participants' transition through pre-curriculum courses. This chapter also briefly addressed the participants' perceptions of the conditions that contributed to their academic under-preparedness and their thoughts on why the majority of pre-curriculum college students choose to exit college before completing their remediation.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in and completed pre-curriculum courses and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses. The conclusions of this study emerged from the central research question: How do academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI experience the transition into, through, and out from pre-curriculum studies to earn full enrollment in the curriculum courses? The narratives of the 16 participants in this study rendered data that supported Schlossberg's (1981/2016) assertion when individuals adapt their internal and external resources in response to a threat to identity and integrate these adaptations into their identities, they will develop interpersonally, intrapersonally, and cognitively. To attempt to understand the unique experiences of the participants in their context, this interpretation also drew upon college student development theory and research on first-year and at-risk college students (Baxter Magolda, 2004/2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Levin, 1976; Pizzolato, 2004). This chapter summarizes the national, institutional, and participant trends relevant to this study and introduces the study conclusions. It describes the experiences that made the participants vulnerable to early exit in the acute phase, promoted persistence in the reorganizational phase, and the outcomes that emerged in the reintegration phase. It also addresses the conclusions' implications for practice and future research.

National, Institutional, and Participant Trends

College enrollment has increased 161% since 1984 and 146% of that change reflects the increasing number of minority students who are choosing to enter college (Gasmon & Conrad,

2014; Harmon, 2012; Li, 2007). The college that served as the site of this study experienced this increase in minority enrollment and tends to average an enrollment of approximately 70-75% students who claim minority status and an average 25-30% who claim majority status (IPEDS, 2015-2016/2016-2017). Unlike most institutions in the United States, approximately 62% of the student body is male and the remaining 38%, on average, is female (IPEDS, 2015-2016). African American males compose the largest sub-population on the campus.

Like the rest of the nation, the two-year MSI that served as the site for this study experienced an increase in enrollment of academically underprepared students over the last three decades and, at the same time, has seen the attrition rates in pre-curriculum courses increase (Attewell et al., 2006; Bahr, 2012; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Jenkins & Zeidenberg, 2007; NCES, 2009/2012/2013; Zavarella & Ignash, 2009). At the study site, over half of the entering first-time students place into at least one pre-curriculum course and many place in two or three. It is not unusual for students to need to repeat a developmental course before achieving the institution's designated cut-off score on course exit exams.

The participants in this study approximated a cross-section of the student enrollment: 87% claimed minority status; 12.5% majority; 63% were male and 37% were female. Similar to the rest of the student body, 14 or 88% of the participants evidenced low socioeconomic status. There was no information regarding the socioeconomic status for the two participants in receipt of full funding from the Veterans Administration. Even through the ages of the participants, 19 to 22 at the time of data collection, reflected the institutions' enrollment trends, 14 of the participants experienced delayed progress as a result of enrollment in pre-curriculum courses and/or other variables. The participants also reflected the institutional pattern of pre-curriculum enrollment, but potentially at a higher rate than average because of the criterion for participating.

One of the students placed into only one pre-curriculum course and the remaining 15 placed in two or more. Like the national trends, all of the participants in this study experienced a pre-curriculum failure. However, unlike the national trend, they all persisted to complete their remedial studies, fully enrolled in curriculum studies, and remained enrolled for at least four semesters. Eleven, or 69% of the participants graduated with an Associate's Degree, and 13, or 81% of them successfully transferred to a four-year college.

Conclusions

The participants in this study shared how the personal strains associated with identification as academically underprepared and enrollment in pre-curriculum courses had a greater impact on their desire to exit college before completing remediation than their cost in terms of time and money. The ten themes that emerged from the study evidenced how the experiences in the acute phase of the transition into pre-curriculum courses contribute to students' desires to exit college early as a way to manage the high stakes threat under-preparedness poses to identity, and the stigma, marginalization, and intense emotions that accompany it.

The transitional themes that emerged from this study also suggested that experiences in the reorganizational phase contribute to a willingness to begin to adapt assumptions and behaviors in ways that promote persistence through remediation. In this phase the participants became more realistic about their need for remediation, began to develop a hope for completing it, and began to engage in self-regulatory strategies that supported content learning and success. The themes associated with the reintegration phase tended to reflect the developmental outcomes of resolving a threat to identity. The participants who were successful at integrating their adaptations in assumptions and behaviors into their identities experienced interpersonal, intrapersonal, and

cognitive development. From the data provided by the participants, this study drew the following nine conclusions, which are organized using Schlossberg's three phases.

The Acute Phase

1. Pre-curriculum college students are most vulnerable to stopping or dropping out of college during the acute phase of the transition into their remedial studies.
2. Pre-curriculum college students who are absolute knowers will perceive identification as academically under-prepared as a credible prediction that they will fail or at least struggle in pre-curriculum or curriculum courses.
3. Pre-curriculum college students who enroll in college because they want to earn a degree will experience identification as academically underprepared as a threat to their existing identity and their hoped for imagined possible selves.
4. Pre-curriculum college students experience marginalization and stigmatization as a result of identification as academically underprepared and enrollment in remediation.
5. Pre-curriculum college students who are absolute knowers or who have had minimal opportunities to develop their internal and external resources will struggle with managing the stress and strains of enrollment in remediation.

The Reorganizational Phase

6. Pre-curriculum college students who endure the stress and strain of the acute phase of the transition into pre-curriculum courses and engage in the adaptations associated with the reorganizational phase will increase their likelihood of completing remediation and fully enrolling in curriculum courses.
7. Interactions with empathetic faculty that provide content assistance and honest feedback and validate competence, promote pre-curriculum college students' sense of mattering and their persistence in remedial studies.
8. Pre-curriculum college students who recognize the need to be more realistic about their academic under-preparedness, let go of their avoidance- and denial-oriented strategies, and engage in approach- and goal-oriented self-regulation will persist longer through their pre-curriculum courses and increase their likelihood of transitioning into full enrollment in curriculum courses.

The Reintegration Phase

9. College students who complete their pre-curriculum courses and internalize their adaptations in assumptions and behaviors will evidence interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development.

These conclusions are discussed as they relate to the phases of adaptation. Because the acute phase is characterized by intense emotions, the need to manage stress and strain by using avoidance and denial oriented strategies, conclusions regarding experiences that interfere with persistence and promote exiting college before completing remediation are discussed as they relate to this phase. Because the reorganizational phase is characterized by an adaptation in assumptions and behaviors, conclusions regarding experiences that promote persistence through pre-curriculum courses are discussed as they relate to this phase. The developmental outcomes of resolving a threat to identity are discussed as they relate to the reintegration phase of adaptation.

The Acute Phase: Experiences that Promote Early Exit

Conclusion 1: Pre-curriculum college students are most vulnerable to stopping or dropping out of college during the acute phase of the transition into their remedial studies.

All first-year college students experience higher levels of stress than their older peers because they are moving from settings where they often have had a level of stasis that has not challenged them to develop the psychological resources necessary to navigate multiple, significant changes simultaneously (Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Edwards & Clark, 2013; Seli et al., 2009; Zimmerman, 2002). As well, they often have not had many experiences that have challenged their assumptions and, as a result, view their world from the standpoint of absolute knowers who do not realize their own capacity to construct knowledge, and define themselves based on the assessment of trustworthy authority figures (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004). Even though they have a lack of resources for managing change, they are simultaneously undergoing multiple major transitions associated with young adulthood including leaving home for the first time and living independently (Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Edwards & Clark, 2013). They are also transitioning into an environment where they must adopt new roles, routines, relationships, and take on many new

responsibilities. These multiple concurrent transitions generate stress and strain that places all first-year college students at risk of stopping or dropping out of college.

The 16 participants in this study were also at-risk for characteristics related to low socioeconomic, minority, and/or first-generation status before they were also identified as academically under-prepared. The assessment by a credible authority that they were academically inferior to their prepared peers, the threat this assessment posed to their identities, and the stigma and marginalization it generated made the 16 participants ideal candidates for leaving college before they completed their pre-curriculum courses. Their narratives, describing the intensity of these concurrent stresses suggest that pre-curriculum college students are most vulnerable to stopping and dropping out of college during the acute phase of the transition when these experiences are most raw and overwhelming (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). The participants' descriptions of their vulnerability during the acute phase of the transition is further developed in this section as it addresses the impact of the assessment as academically underprepared, the threat it posed to identity, the stigma and the marginalization it generated, and the participants' tendency to adopt strategies that sabotaged their potential for success.

Credible Expectation For Failure

Conclusion 2: Pre-curriculum college students who are absolute knowers will perceive identification as academically under-prepared as a credible prediction that will fail or at least struggle in pre-curriculum or curriculum courses.

College student development theorists suggest most traditionally-aged, first-time enrolling students enter college with a view of their world that reflects the unquestioned acceptance of the set of beliefs they were socialized to adopt in their home and communities (Baxter Magolda,

1992/2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1978; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). They tend to have few experiences with threats to identity, challenges, or conflicts to their assumptions and have not questioned the credibility or reliability of these assumptions (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). As a result they accept as absolute the view of authorities or experts that they have been conditioned to believe are credible and trustworthy (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1978). Because they have not questioned their own views or the views of the trustworthy authorities they know, they believe that knowledge is dispensed by the authorities and can only be obtained from authorities or experts (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008).

These students believe that there are only right and wrong answers and do not believe that they are capable of creating knowledge for themselves. (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). In the same way that they believe knowledge exists externally and is to be obtained, they also define themselves based on the perceptions of others and seek their validation from external sources. If pre-curriculum college students are absolute knowers, when they are identified as academically underprepared by an expert, such as a professor or an institution, this identification will have credibility and power. All of the participants in this study admitted to a discomfort with the institution's assessment of them as academically underprepared. They interpreted it as "not measuring up" and as "not being smart enough" for college. They also perceived it as predicting that they would not succeed in either pre-curriculum or curriculum courses and that it would take them longer and cost them more to complete their degrees.

Like the participants in this study, many pre-curriculum college students will perceive identification as academically underprepared as an expectation for failure or a prediction that they will at least struggle in pre-curriculum or curriculum courses. The more inclined students

are to accept this assessment of them from an authority as true and unchangeable, the more likely they are to stop or drop out before completing their remedial studies (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Rattan et al., 2012). Pre-curriculum students who buy into this message may perceive exiting college as a responsible choice and a way to save time and money. Others may choose to stop or drop out before experiencing a failure in a pre-curriculum course as a way to avoid confirming the assessment (Seli et al., 2009). For the participants in this study, the credibility of this assessment also transferred credibility to the additional messages that accompanied identification as academically underprepared, such as the threat it posed to identity and the stigma and marginalization associated with it.

Threat to Identity

Conclusion 3: Pre-curriculum college students who enroll in college because they want to earn a degree will experience identification as academically underprepared as a threat to their existing identity and their hoped for imagined possible selves.

Even though 11 of the participants initially only had a vague understanding about why they wanted to go to college, all of the participants were enrolled by choice and only one was initially enrolled to please a parent. They each perceived college as a way to achieve financial security in the future. Because all 16 of the participants in this study described having or developing a desire for a college degree, they experienced identification as academically underprepared as a threat to their identities as college students and their imagined future possible selves (Anderson et al., 2014). They perceived it as a direct assault on their intellectual ability that led them to doubt their ability to succeed in pre-curriculum or curriculum courses and to question whether they belonged in college. In this way, it was a threat to their existing identity (Anderson et al., 1981/2016). As they doubted their ability to succeed in college, they were compelled to also to

doubt the viability of their hoped for images of their future possible selves with college degrees (Anderson et al., 2014).

Because they experienced identification as academically underprepared as threatening, not just to their current activities and identity, but also to their long-term goals and imagined future selves, it posed a high stakes threat. Nine of the participants also described it as creating uncertainty, not just about their ability to complete a degree, but also their ability to be able to secure and maintain future employment. For the 13 participants who saw college as the only viable way to escape the financial insecurity of their home communities or families, underpreparedness had the potential to foreclose on the only option they believed they had to create long-term stability, further escalating the potential impact of this threat. One participant shared his belief that if he could not pass his pre-curriculum courses, he did not think he would have the skills needed to hold a job at all.

The higher the stakes of a transition, the more intensely it will be experienced. For the participants in this study, this assessment intensified their anxiety and fear. A heightened perception of the power of a threat also increases the stress, strain, and emotions associated with it (Anderson et al., 2014; Ballard et al., 2016; Elliot & Covington, 2001). While this strain will be challenging for any pre-curriculum college student, those who are recent high school graduates or have limited resources for navigating this level of stress and strain will find it even more daunting. The participants' perceptions of remediation as a threat to identity and their narratives describing the intense stress and strain it caused suggests that these experiences contribute to pre-curriculum college students' decisions to exit college before completing remediation. Exiting college before completing remediation allows them to deny the relevance of a college degree to their existing and imagined future possible selves and to avoid confirming

that they are not “smart enough” for college. It also provides instant relief from the psychic pain of the threat (Seli et al., 2009).

Experiencing Marginality and Stigma

Conclusion 4: Pre-curriculum college students experience marginalization and stigma as a result of identification as academically underprepared and enrollment in remediation.

All of the participants described experiencing the stigma and marginalization associated with identification as academically underprepared and enrollment in pre-curriculum courses. They described this perception as pervasive and used phrases, such as “not smart enough” or “dumb” to describe how multiple aspects of pre-curriculum enrollment made them or their classmates feel. They described perceiving themselves as inferior to and segregated from their prepared classmates. Six of the participants said they had instructors who reinforced this stigma, another six described being the butt of jokes and teasing that reinforced it, and three of them said that elements of the curriculum also reinforced it. Even the somewhat innocent remark by a teacher, “you should already know this,” reinforces vulnerable students’ existing perceptions of inferiority and stigmatization, especially when it comes from an authority figure, such as a faculty member (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pizzolatto, 2004; Richman et al., 2015). All of the participants suggested that the stigma directly impacted the pre-curriculum classroom environments. To attempt to deny their need for remediation, students cut up in and disrupted the classes, publically announcing that they already knew the material, and exerting pressure on other students to agree with their assessment that the classes were “a waste of time.” The participants described teachers who could not handle the students, struggled to teach over the disruptions, and getting angry.

For 13 of the participants, the stigma echoed previous experiences where their competence had been questioned or their differences highlighted. College students who have experienced chronic stigmatization before coming to college are more sensitive to any new experiences that draw attention to their differences. They are also more likely to internalize the messages these experiences send, placing them at increased risk of exiting college either because they believe or seek to avoid confronting these assessments (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Hellman, 1996; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pizzolato, 2004; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989). How pre-curriculum students perceive their situations when they first move into a transition has a critical impact on whether they will persist through it (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016). Stigma contributed additional angst to an already challenging situation. If institutional representatives, peers, or family members further reinforce it, it increases students' psychic pain and strain and adds additional credence to any existing thoughts of stopping or dropping out as a way to escape that pain (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1989/2004; Pizzolato, 2004/2005).

Identification as academically underprepared also caused 15 of the participants in this study to question whether they belonged in the college and experience a sense of rejection from the community they were seeking to join (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Hellman, 1996; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pizzolato, 2004; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989). Having to enroll in classes where they were segregated from their prepared peers reinforced these perceptions of marginalization. Schlossberg (1989) argues that all college students feel marginalized when they first come to college because they are experiencing multiple identity threats that place strain on all four dimensions of their identities, their roles, routines, relationships, and assumptions. She suggests that as college students adapt,

however, and settle into their new roles, and develop new relationships and support networks, their sense of marginalization will be moderated (Schlossberg, 1989). But she also notes that college students will remain in a state of marginalization if their existing internal and external resource deficits and liabilities exceed their assets, if they are overwhelmed by too many demands on their limited resources, or if they are continuously reminded of their differences (Schlossberg, 1989).

Pre-curriculum college students are reminded of their differences from their prepared peers every time they go to a remedial class, especially if that class is disruptive, or the instructor uses language or gestures that reinforce students' perceptions of inferiority. As well, their sense of marginalization will be prolonged if they fail one or more of their remedial courses, as did each of the participants in this study. Schlossberg (1989) reports that college students who experience marginalization over a prolonged period become overly sensitive, develop chronic feelings of inferiority, and are at increased risk of stopping or dropping out of college (Schlossberg, 1989). Pre-curriculum college students who are continuously reminded of their differences or who do not have experiences that help them process through the stigma and marginalization are at increased risk of exiting college before completing their remediation unless they have or develop internal and external resources that compensate for these liabilities.

Self-Regulatory Deficits and Liabilities

Conclusion 5: Pre-curriculum college students who are absolute knowers or who have had minimal opportunities to develop their internal and external resources will struggle with managing the stress and strains of enrollment in remediation.

As stated previously, most college students enroll as absolute knowers with limited experience coping with threats to identity and significant changes in routines, roles, relationships, and assumptions (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991;

Terenzini et al., 1996; Schlossberg, 1989). They also have not been compelled to develop the self-regulatory resources necessary to navigate challenging transitions and struggle from six weeks to over a year in this area (Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Misra et al., 2000; Seli et al., 2009). In addition to having fewer self-regulatory resources, going off to college forces individuals to simultaneously process through a number of the major transitions of young adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995/2002; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Terenzini et al., 1996)

For residential college students like those in this study, these transitions include taking on the responsibilities of living independently; learning to navigate a new academic structure; developing new relationships, routines, roles, and attempting to pick up the new codes for behavior in multiple new settings (Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Misra et al., 2000). Their need to navigate these various concurrent strains draws on their limited resources and energy and contributes to their risk of exiting college during the first year. (Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012). Identification as academically under-prepared contributes to this drain on self-regulatory resources and increases the likelihood that these students will not have sufficient energy to sustain them through their remediation (Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002; Schlossberg, 2004). Those who are capable of completing remediation under better circumstances may experience energy and resource depletion that compromises their ability to perform and exit college with the misunderstanding that they are not capable of succeeding.

Adding the experiences associated with pre-curriculum enrollment—the threat to current identity and hoped for future possible selves, the stigma, and the marginalization—compounds

these existing strains and stresses and place additional demands on their limited self-regulating resources (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Schlossberg, 2004). As a result of these multiple demands, when they were initially enrolled in their pre-curriculum courses, all of the participants described feeling a lack of control over their circumstances or some element thereof. Some described initially feeling helpless and unable to determine what was expected of them in their pre-curriculum courses. All of them described experiencing a lack of control over the length of time they would need to be in pre-curriculum courses and over their outcomes in them. They emphasized their perceived lack of control over the placement test, and more importantly, over the exit exams that were the sole determinant of course completion. They also described how the threat, stigma, and marginalization generated some degree of psychic pain and emotions that ranged from discouragement and disappointment to anger, fear, anxiety, shame and embarrassment.

To manage their emotions and the stress and strain, all of the participants in this study adopted avoidance- and denial-oriented strategies that were passive, inactive or counter-productive, and reflected a lack of investment in the pre-curriculum courses (Hayes et al., 2013; Levin, 1976). These strategies allowed them to assume a reality that that was less threatening, less stigmatizing, and less marginalizing. These strategies included adopting unrealistic evaluative narratives that denied or minimized the relevance of their identification as academically underprepared and the threat it posed. These narratives tended to frame the identification as a mistake and attempted to externalize the cause of their pre-curriculum enrollment or attributed it to more palatable internal causes, such as not taking the placement test seriously or not really trying on the test. The participants also adopted strategies to support their narratives. All of the participants described how they or others “faked” understanding of course

content and “cut up” or interrupted the teacher with comments such as, “I learned this in middle school” to draw attention away from their academic skill deficits.

Not only did these strategies prevent them from improving their understanding of course content, it disrupted the classes and interfered with the “teacher’s ability to teach” and the other students’ “ability to learn.” They each admitted to failing to invest the effort required in at least one pre-curriculum course. The primary problem associated with these strategies is their potential to sabotage pre-curriculum student success. Continued use of strategies that employ avoidance and denial has been shown to lead to lower GPA’s and the increased likelihood of stopping or dropping out of college early (Edwards & Clark, 2013). After experiencing at least one failure in a pre-curriculum course, each of the participants was able to look back and admit that avoidance- and denial-oriented strategies directly impacted that failure.

The Reorganizational Phase: Experiences that Promote Persistence

Conclusion 6: Pre-curriculum college students who endure the stress and strain of the acute phase of the transition into pre-curriculum courses and engage in the adaptations associated with the reorganizational phase increase their likelihood of completing remediation and fully enrolling in curriculum courses.

As the participants moved out of the acute phase and into the reorientation phase, they began to engage in activities that distinguish them from the majority of the pre-curriculum college students who do not complete their remediation (Attewell et al., 2006; Collins, 2010; Crisp & Delgado, 2013; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012; Quint et al., 2013). Rather than experience energy depletion, the 16 participants in this study applied denial- and avoidance-oriented self-regulation to preserve valuable self-regulatory energy and resources. Using avoidance and denial to moderate and manage stress and strain can be effective at preserving energy and resources, if these strategies are used only temporarily, if the concurrent strains are manageable, or if the individuals in transition have existing resources

or compensating experiences to validate their identity as they endure the threat (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Schlossberg, 1989).

By temporarily suspending the full reality of their academic under-preparedness, the 16 participants in this study kept the harm of the threat, stigma, and marginalization from fully impacting them for a time (Buck & Neff, 2012). This may have given them time to address some of the lower stakes demands on them as they transitioned into college, such as building support networks, and provided them with the opportunity to develop some of their internal and external resources (Anderson, et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012). The temporary suspension of reality also provided them time to begin to privately contemplate their situations and gave them opportunity to interact with institutional personnel who provided encouragement that compensated for other strains (Anderson et al., 2014; Rattan et al., 2012; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989). Surviving the acute phase of the transition is the first way in which the participants in this study demonstrated differences with the majority of pre-curriculum learners who do not complete their remedial courses before exiting college.

The participants in this study also differed from the majority of students who stop or drop out before completing their remediation in that they experienced: 1) interactions with faculty that promoted a sense of mattering, competence, and hope; 2) events that prompted them to become more realistic about their situation, accept their need for remediation, and invest in adapting their assumptions and behaviors; 3) change in assumptions that prompted them to take stock of their options for the future and explore and experiment with goal- and approach-oriented strategies; and 4) a sequence of small successes that prompted them to develop self-efficacy and take charge of their situations. These experiences and the resulting adaptations in assumptions and behaviors did not occur in a linear manner, but emerged in an overlapping, non-sequential

manner, such that adaptations occurred concurrently, reoccurred, or promoted adaptation in additional trajectories or dimensions (Bussolari & Goodell, 2006).

Interactions with Faculty

Conclusion 7: Interactions with empathetic faculty that provide content assistance and honest feedback and validate competence, promote pre-curriculum college students' sense of mattering and their persistence in remedial studies.

Although the participants in this study shared that they had some experiences with institutional personnel that did not promote mattering and competence, the quantity, quality, and impact of those that did far exceeded the impact of the negative interactions. These interactions had a cumulative effect. When they first arrived, 15 of the participants expected to have minimal interaction with their college instructors and that these interactions would be limited largely to classroom instruction. All of the participants were reluctant to engage with their instructors or other support personnel, but as they encountered empathetic instructors who reached out to them, they began to develop trust in them and become more open to their assistance. By reaching out to the participants, encouraging them to believe in their ability to adapt and develop the skills necessary to complete remediation and transition into full enrollment in curriculum courses, these instructors were sharing the message that their situations were not “fixed,” and that they were capable of overcoming their skill deficits (Ratten et al., 2012). This message was key to developing hope for moving through remediation (Anderson et al., 2014).

All 16 of the participants identified at least one source of learning support that played a role in their willingness to persist in their pre-curriculum studies and/or their ability to learn the material. All 16 described being in receipt of individualized instruction and feedback that allowed them to learn information that they had not been able to pick-up from classroom instruction. Fourteen of the participants described interacting with at least one empathetic

instructor who identified and met a specific academic or emotional need. Twelve of the participants described receiving one-on-one instruction from faculty in a Reading, Writing, or Math Lab that impacted their ability to pass an exit exam. Twelve attributed part of their success to the way in which the instructor presented the content. And 13 of the participants said that the interactions they experienced with instructors motivated them to invest more effort in their courses. Because the instructor cared, they said, they “ did not want to let their professors down.” In either the in-depth or the member-checking interviews, when asked what made a difference in their pre-curriculum success, all of the participants said, “when the professors cared” or described forming an affirming relationship with a professor.

These interactions directly supported learning course content, but also countered the impact the threat, stigma, marginalization and the sense of inferiority that enrollment in pre-curriculum courses generated. These interactions even countered the negative experiences the participants had with other faculty. By validating the participants’ emotional needs, taking time to assess and meet their content knowledge needs, and by providing effective academic assistance, these faculty members earned a professional credibility that the faculty who demeaned or dismissed them did not (Klebig, Goldonowicz, Mendes, Miller, & Katt, 2016). The supportive instructors’ credibility and the demeaning instructors’ lack of credibility made the empathetic instructors’ perceptions of them more reliable than those who demeaned them (Klebig et al., 2016). As well, the participants sought out the professors that treated them with dignity and tried to avoid the others, thus increasing the quantity of positive interactions with faculty over the negative ones.

For the thirteen participants who had experienced marginalization related to academic skill deficits in the past, these interactions were overcoming more than just the stigma and marginalization related to pre-curriculum enrollment. They were helping these participants

overcome chronic marginalization (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Hellman, 1996; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). These relationships and interactions also helped the participants let go of their shame regarding their under-preparedness and develop a willingness to ask for help and engage in goal-oriented self-regulation. For all of the participants, these interactions directly impacted their acceptance of their need to remediate, their hope for being able to complete remediation, and their growing sense of competence and mattering (Anderson et al., 2014; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Hellman, 1996; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pizzolato, 2005; Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989).

Recognizing and Responding to the Need to Be More Realistic

Conclusion 8: Pre-curriculum college students who recognize the need to be more realistic about their academic under-preparedness, let go of their avoidance- and denial-oriented strategies, and engage in the approach- and goal-oriented self-regulation will persist longer through their pre-curriculum courses and increase their likelihood of transitioning into full enrollment in curriculum courses.

As they moved into and through their pre-curriculum courses, all of the participants described encountering at least one experience that got their attention and prompted them to become more realistic about their academic under-preparedness. Although failure may be a common justification for pre-curriculum college students to exit college before completing their remediation, failure in at least one pre-curriculum course contributed to the participants' recognition of their need for remediation and their need to adapt their assumptions and behaviors. Failure in a pre-curriculum course or on course work provided feedback that compelled them to recognize that something they were doing in at least one of their pre-curriculum courses was not working. Although failure was a contributing factor, the participants shared that they did not experience this developing awareness in a vacuum. In addition to the failure, the rigor and the expectations for performance in the pre-curriculum courses and the

support and encouragement they received from empathetic instructors also contributed to an awareness of their need to adapt, take responsibility, and be accountable.

Critical to this acceptance was the message from instructors that under-preparedness is a temporary and changeable state (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). As the participants responded to feedback and continued to be in receipt of encouragement and validation from faculty members, they began to experience feelings of mattering and developed hope for completing their pre-curriculum courses. Hope for moving through a transition is a vital to finding the drive and energy to engaging in it (Anderson et al., 2014). This growing awareness also prompted the participants to take stock of their situations.

Taking stock is the practical accounting of risk and value that involves questioning and adapting assumptions about self and situation (Anderson et al., 2014). It often results in adapting underlying assumptions, dreams for future possible selves, and promotes exploring and experimenting with new self-regulatory and learning strategies (Anderson et al., 2014). In the context of the participants in this study, taking stock involved reflecting on their academic deficits, evaluating their potential to complete pre-curriculum courses, estimating the value of alternative careers, determining the value of engaging in the transition, and contemplating commitment to change (Anderson et al., 2014). The participants also needed to determine if the psychic pain, the effort, and the financial and time costs of engaging in pre-curriculum courses were worth the investment necessary to complete them (Anderson et al., 2014; Bak, 2015).

As a result of taking stock of their personal resources, all of the participants were compelled to recognize that the strategies that earned them passing grades in high school were not sufficient to earn passing grades in at least one of their pre-curriculum courses. Fifteen of the participants acknowledged becoming realistic about their time management skill deficits, 16

acknowledged accepting the reality that they had self-advocacy skill deficits, 12 identified becoming realistic about and recognizing the need to adapt their priorities, and all of them acknowledged that they needed to invest additional effort to create success in their pre-curriculum courses. Ten of the participants asserted that accepting the reality that they were academically underprepared was essential to their transition through and completion of pre-curriculum courses. Referring to the pre-curriculum course content and skills, they acknowledged, “You have to admit you don’t know it.”

Although at different points in their transition through pre-curriculum courses, each of the participants chose to come out to self and others about their resource deficits and liabilities. Confronting these deficits was painful because it meant dealing directly with their fears, anxieties, anger, shame, and embarrassment. Fourteen of the participants described letting go of their fear of others knowing about their perceived inferiority and weaknesses and developing an openness about their academic skill deficits (Kitsantas & Chow, 2005). Coming out to self and others evidenced movement away from the avoidance strategies that they had used to disidentify themselves with academic under-preparedness. They also suggest movement away from the need for external validation and a step toward defining self (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008). Although painful, admitting to the reality of their resource deficits and liabilities was an essential precursor to taking stock of their situations and their internal and external resources.

Weighing the costs to benefits of persisting in pre-curriculum courses compelled the participants to examine why they were in college. This examination led most of them to internalize their goals for going to college. Even if their primary goals were tied to family, to throwing off a stigmatized label, or to avoiding a feared possible self, these justifications became more meaningful to them as they reassessed their situations and gave them the intrinsic

motivation to keep going. Taking stock of their internal and external resources set them on the path to experiment with approach- and explore goal-oriented self-regulatory strategies and learning. As they explored and experimented with these new, more effective strategies and took ownership of their learning, they experienced small successes that served as affirmative feedback (Bandura, 1977; Anderson et al., 2014).

Their small successes also contributed to improved sense of self-efficacy and the confidence to take charge of their situations. For most of the participants, taking charge reflected continued strategy development, proactive engagement in learning, and advocating for themselves (Schlossberg, 1989/2016). All described being more proactive in seeking assistance and 14 described being more engaged in the classroom, taking charge of their time, and taking charge of their relationships. Taking charge of relationships included modifying the activities they participated in with others, letting go of old relationships, or developing new ones. They described the need to adapt their relationships to align with their evolving priorities and assumptions (Anderson et al., 2014). Taking charge and feeling competent reduced the participants' perceived uncertainty about their imagined future possible selves and lowered their perceived stress (Anderson et al., 2014; Bandura, 1977; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shapiro et al., 1996; Schlossberg, 1981/2016).

The Reintegration Phase: Outcomes that Emerge from Persistence

Conclusion 9: College students who complete their pre-curriculum courses and internalize their adaptations in assumptions and behaviors will evidence interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development.

The participants' descriptions of their experiences as they moved into, through, and out of pre-curriculum courses reflected their evolving adaptations in assumptions and behaviors. Although these adaptations were largely progressive, they also demonstrated regressive

movement, especially in the acute phase of the transition. As well, these adaptations did not occur in an orderly manner, but involved engaging in multiple developmental functions or activities simultaneously, and sometimes reengaging in the same developmental function more than once (Bussolari & Goodell, 2006). As they completed their remedial studies, theoretically, they resolved the immediate threat pre-curriculum courses posed to their existing and hoped for future possible selves and relieved any remaining stress and strain that accompanied it (Anderson et al., 2014). Movement through and completing these courses also allowed them to escape the perceived stigma and marginality they generated and removed some of their uncertainty regarding their ability to continue on their degree path.

However, completing remediation, did not fully remove the threat academic under-preparedness posed to 13 of the participants. Thirteen continued to evidence the need for additional remediation. Although five of the participants continued to evidence inconsistencies in self-regulation, the other 11 evidenced not only adapting their assumptions and behaviors as they moved through pre-curriculum courses, but also integrated these adaptations into their identities, making them a part of their habits of being and seeing in the world (Anderson et al, 2014). Including the five participants who did not fully internalize their adaptations in assumptions and behaviors, all 16 of the participants described experiencing some level of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive development in response to resolving the threat pre-curriculum courses posed to their to identity. This development was evident in their evolving assumptions about self, situation, learning, and thinking (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008).

Each of the participants described initially assessing the pre-curriculum courses negatively based on the threat they posed to existing and future possible selves, the marginalization and stigma associated with them, and their fear of not completing them. But they

all changed their assessment over time and eventually acknowledged that the content they learned in the pre-curriculum courses helped them succeed in the curriculum courses. Fourteen of the participants adapted their evaluative narratives to view these courses as part of their journey toward earning a college degree. Fifteen also developed a positive regard for having undergone a challenging experience that compelled them to develop their resources and skills and recognized it as preparing them for future challenges (Anderson et al., 2014). These participants were attaching relevance to their experiences in pre-curriculum courses and voicing appreciation for the personal growth and development they experienced as a result of resolving the threat to identity that they posed (Anderson et al., 2014; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009).

Although all of the participants in this study recognized the power of identification as academically underprepared to generate feelings of marginalization and stigma, and that not all of their instructors were empathetic or helpful, they each shared that a caring faculty member had made them feel as though they and their pre-curriculum progress mattered. This perception of mattering contributed to their hope for completing their remediation and their willingness to persist. Six of the participants also described moving from feeling marginalized by their differences from the typical college students to embracing their differences, in part, because a professor had discovered and nurtured their skills or talents and made them feel as though their uniqueness had value. The participants who embraced their differences suggested a growing comfort with defining themselves (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Schlossberg, 1989; Tovar et al., 2009). These adaptations in assumptions about self suggest both intra- and interpersonal development (Anderson et al, 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2005).

All of the participants also described adapting their assumptions about themselves in response to their evolving ability to effect change and their developing a sense of competence.

Even though seven of the participants suggested that it took them a year to fully let go of their hangover identities and habits from high school, all 16 of them described adapting from these “high school mindsets” to developing adult thinking and behaviors (Thibodeux et al., 2017). Eleven of the participants, including the eight who had previously been labeled as not capable of college work, described adapting their assumptions about themselves from afraid of living up to the low expectations of others’ to proving their competence and developing an optimistic view of the future (Anderson et al., 2014). They described developing the ability to view setbacks as opportunities. These adaptations in assumptions also suggest intrapersonal development (Anderson et al., 2014; Baxter Magolda, 1992/2008)

Navigating the multiple challenges associated with identification as academically underprepared and successfully completing their pre-curriculum courses increased the participants’ confidence in their ability to come to their own conclusions, make decisions for themselves, and think independently (Baxter-Magolda, 2012; Pizzolato, 2004). All of the participants shared realizing that success in pre-curriculum courses required taking responsibility for learning and taking ownership of remediating themselves by proactively engaging in not just the homework, but the kind of studying and help-seeking that leads to deeper learning. Twelve of the participants described movement away from dependence on instructors for knowledge and understanding toward seeking and creating knowledge for themselves (Baxter Magolda 1992/2012; Pizzolato, 2004). These participants described taking charge of making decisions for themselves and not needing those decisions to be validated by others. This autonomous thinking demonstrated evidence of becoming comfortable with constructing knowledge and reflected intrapersonal and cognitive development (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004; Kegan, 1994).

Seven of the participants also described learning how to form questions or use analysis, application, evaluation, or connecting concepts to create new knowledge and to support goal-oriented decision-making (Anderson et al., 2014; Langley & Bart, 2008; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Thibodeaux et al., 2016; Yusoff & Pa, 2011). Developing an understanding of the value of their own knowledge and becoming comfortable with higher order cognitive and critical thinking skills promoted their persistence in their pre-curriculum courses, helped them integrate into the context of college, and supported continued knowledge construction (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2012; Kuh, Pace, & Verper, 1997; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pizzolato, 2004). These adaptations also reflected cognitive development.

The seven participants who described moving from dreading a pre-curriculum subject or course to enjoying it and the 13 participants who realized that they needed to learn the pre-curriculum course content for themselves demonstrated movement toward intrinsic motivation. The 13 participants who internalized their goals and increased their commitment to earning a college degree evidenced the development of authentic, meaningful goals and movement toward defining self (Ballard & Harackiewicz, 2001; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Prospero et al., 2012; Waterman, 2004). All of participants described developing a willingness to come out to others about their deficits and 12 of them shared that they stopped caring how others perceived them or their differences. These adaptations in assumptions also demonstrated freedom from the need for external validation, taking steps toward defining self, and constructing knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kegan, 1994; Pizzolato, 2005).

All of the participants appeared to move from some degree of denial and avoidance as methods for tolerating strain to becoming realistic and using goal-oriented strategies. Coming to terms with, and adapting their assumptions about, their identification as academically

underprepared demonstrated development in their tolerance for change (Anderson et al., 2014). A tolerance for strain was especially evident in the six participants who endured repeating at least one curriculum course three or more times. Tolerance for strain is closely related to openness to change as it serves as a scaffold to individuals as they process through a transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Chi, 2007; Folkman, 2010; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Schlossberg, 2016). Nine of the participants shared their perceived openness to and tolerance for change when they described being realistic about the fact that they would experience setbacks similar to their enrollment in pre-curriculum courses in the future. All of the participants saw the transition into, through, and out of pre-curriculum courses as overcoming an uncomfortable challenge that prompted them build resources and strategy inventories that would help them be resilient in the face of a future challenges (Anderson et al., 2014; Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Gracia, 2015; Buck & Neff, 2012; Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). These adaptations in assumptions suggest interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in and completed pre-curriculum courses and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses. The boundaries of this case were the context of the institution, the characteristics of the participants, and their accounts of their experience of the phenomenon of interest—identification as academically under-prepared and enrollment in and completion of pre-curriculum courses. The interpretation of these findings has application to other contexts when they are understood in their relationship to the boundaries of this case study (Bryne, 2009; Cresswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011

Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). The participants' narratives provided an understanding of the experiences of academically underprepared learners who are at-risk based on their under-preparedness and at least two additional characteristics, such as first-generation, minority, or low socioeconomic status. The participants' narratives of persisting through and completing pre-curriculum courses offered insights into the experiences that interfere with pre-curriculum college student persistence and into those that promote persistence in and completion of these courses. All institutional interactions that reinforced the identity threat, stigma, or marginalization associated with identification as academically under-prepared impeded persistence and all interactions that moderated or countered these experiences promoted persistence.

Consistent with the quantitative studies that find that the majority of pre-curriculum college students exit college before completing their remedial studies, the participants' narratives suggested that they were most vulnerable to stopping or dropping out of college while they were enrolled in their remedial studies (Bailey & Jagers, 2016; Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018). They attributed this vulnerability to the perceived threat to identity, the stigma, and the marginalization generated by the identification as academically under-prepared and enrollment in courses that segregated them from their prepared peers (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/1989/2016). Although cost and uncertainty about time in enrollment were also factors, managing the intense feelings of rejection, inferiority, and shame had more impact on how the participants and their peers perceived themselves and their situations than cost and lost time.

The experiences of the participants in this study also supported the findings of research that suggests that academically underprepared college students' ability to persist to complete their enrollment is in part related to their non-academic resource deficits (Bailey & Jagers,

2016; Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018). They described suffering from a lack of understanding of how the pre-curriculum courses worked and how much effort would be required, felt they had a lack of control over the outcomes for the courses, and struggled to justify investing in them because they offered no apparent extrinsic value. The participants shared how their lack of experience with self-regulation made it difficult to manage the concurrent stresses of the multiple transitions into college and the intense emotions generated by the threat, marginalization, and stigma associated with remedial enrollment. They also shared how, during their initial enrollment, they and their peers attempted to manage these stresses and strains through denial, avoidance, and acting out. These behaviors contributed to their failure in at least one pre-curriculum course, negatively impacted classroom climates, and contributed to discipline problems that interfered with learning.

Most of the participants described continuing to deny or avoid admitting to their need for remediation to protect their psyches until they engaged in one or more experiences that compelled them to become more realistic (Baxter Magolda, 1992/2004). Failure and academic rigor were central to this awakening as was honest feedback and holistic support from faculty. Becoming more realistic about their situations prompted them to take stock of their internal and external resources and compare the costs and benefits of persisting in remediation against those of exiting college (Anderson et al., 2014). All of the participants described how faculty members contributed to their willingness to persist through the strain and stress of enrollment by helping them learn the material, develop self-regulatory strategies, bring them comfort and encouragement, and help them feel as though they and their progress mattered (Schlossberg, 1989).

The narratives of the participants in this study made it clear that practitioners have the power to both promote and hinder persistence in pre-curriculum courses by the way in which they engage with their students. They perceived faculty as “caring” when they were accessible, approachable, provided individualized instruction that met their unique learning needs, reached out to them repeatedly, encouraged them when they are discouraged, and informed them that they that they were capable of learning the content and being successful in college (Rattan et al., 2011; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Caring gave these faculty members a credibility that countered the marginalizing messages of disaffirming faculty (Klebig et al., 2016). Most importantly, the participants shared that when they perceived that an instructor cared, they were not only willing to invest more in the course, but they also became open to adapting their assumptions and behaviors. Becoming open to change and adapting assumptions and behaviors are the transitional themes that draw attention to the difference between pre-curriculum students who persist and complete and those who exit college to avoid the psychic pain associated with remedial enrollment.

To meet the needs of pre-curriculum students like the ones in this study, institutions need to provide ample opportunities for them to engage with empathetic pre-curriculum faculty in one-on-one settings (Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018). To ensure that this instruction is and effective, institutions must hire instructors who have a record of successful, judgment-free relationship building with vulnerable students and provide training to help pre-curriculum instructors develop instructional skills that encourage students to feel as though they matter, to believe they are capable of succeeding, and ensure that they do not unintentionally send disaffirming messages, such as, “you should already know this” (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pizzolatto, 2004; Richman et

al., 2015). When these conditions are in place, students are more likely to feel comfortable seeking the assistance and developing both the academic and non-academic skills they need to complete remediation and be successful in curriculum courses.

For institutions that have limited flexibility in adapting programming and policies, they can increase retention in and completion of pre-curriculum courses by assessing student readiness using more than just a single test score on a single day. Although this can be labor intensive for determining placement, this is easily accomplished and essential for determining post-treatment readiness following remediation (Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018; Hughes, & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Providing multiple forms for assessing the unique ways in which individuals can express their ability provides students with an increased sense of control over their outcomes and increased hope for completing their remediation and achieving their educational attainment goals, factors that promote persistence through a transition (Anderson et al., 2014; Schlossberg, 1981/2016).

Where possible, institutions can establish policies, programming, and practice that provide some type of extrinsic motivation for remedial success and minimize opportunities for academically underprepared students to feel as though they do not belong in college or feel inferior to, or segregated from, their prepared peers. Examples of non-traditional formats currently in practice that minimize these impacts include using diagnostics instead of placement tests to develop targeted self-paced, remediation modules, and accelerating movement out of remediation by placing students directly into curriculum courses. These approaches minimize time to completion, improve retention, and have not been found to exceed the costs of traditional remedial models (Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018; Hodara, & Jagers, 2014). However, to improve retention rates through curriculum courses, these programs must remain rigorous and

include substantial supplemental, individualized support to address both students' academic and non-academic resource preparedness (Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018; Hodara & Jagers, 2014).

Implications for Future Research

This study examined a set of students in a single context at a given period of time that experienced the transition into, through and out of pre-curriculum courses and onto full enrollment in curriculum courses. Their narratives provided insights into the experiences of the majority of students who do not persist in pre-curriculum courses, in that they each participant struggled with identification as academically under-prepared, experiencing it as a threat to identity and as stigmatizing and marginalizing. Their narratives also provided insights into the experiences of the minority of pre-curriculum students who manage to beat the odds, complete pre-curriculum studies, and fully enroll in curriculum courses. Although some of the participants made further progress in curriculum courses than others, their collective narratives suggest that they needed time to process through a series of experiences that promoted incremental adaptations in assumptions. The adaptations in assumptions promoted adaptations in behavior that reflected a pattern of transitional themes that evolved in an overlapping, zigzagging, non-sequential manner (Busolari & Goodell, 2006). Those who internalized their adaptations in assumptions and behaviors also evidenced interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development. Additional qualitative research is needed to answer the following questions:

Question 1: Do academically underprepared college students in different contexts experience similar transitional themes as they adapt their assumptions and behaviors in response to placement and enrollment in remedial courses?

Question 2: How do academically underprepared college students in other contexts experience enrollment in pre-curriculum courses when faculty consistently and intentionally project a sense of caring; provide generous, individualized instruction; and support students' willingness to adapt their assumptions and behaviors?

Question 3: How do academically underprepared college students experience non-traditional programming that minimizes or eliminates perceived threat to identity, stigma, and marginalization?

The participants' experiences in this study suggested that pre-curriculum college students are most vulnerable to stopping and dropping out during the acute phase of the transition because they do not have the internal and external resources necessary to navigate the multiple strains of concurrent transitions and the stigma, marginalization, and threat to identity associated with remedial courses. They suggested that the feelings of shame, anger, fear, anxiety, doubt, and discouragement created psychic pain that made exiting college before completing their remedial studies more appealing than persisting through the pain. Qualitative research is needed to explore the degree to which pre-curriculum college students in other contexts perceive enrollment in remedial courses as a threat to identity, marginalizing, or stigmatizing when they initially enroll and the impact these experiences have on attrition rates. Although it would be challenging, it would be particularly useful to explore the experiences of pre-curriculum students who stop or drop out before they complete their studies to understand their reasoning for exiting college.

Each of the participants in this study had three or more characteristics for risk for stopping out of college early. Research is needed to understand how students from diverse backgrounds and different profiles for risk interpret their experiences in pre-curriculum courses. This would contribute to understanding the relationship between factors for risk and students' perceptions of their experiences in remediation and provide additional insights into the internal and external resources that promote persistence. There is also a need to understand how pre-curriculum college students perceive identification as academically under-prepared when faculty intentionally engage them in interactions that support their sense of competence and mattering; balancing rigorous curriculum with abundant, empathetic, and honest feedback; and

individualizing instruction to meet their academic, developmental, and emotional needs. It would be interesting to track, not only the retention rates in these pre-curriculum courses, but also students' rates of persistence through curriculum courses to determine if investing on the front end of the college career has implications for continued progress toward degree completion as it appeared to in this study.

Finally, qualitative research is needed to understand the experiences of students who engage non-traditional curricula that structurally minimize perceptions of threat to identity, stigma, and marginalization by targeting students' specific remedial needs, that do not publically draw attention to their differences from their prepared peers, and that accelerate their movement into curriculum courses. This research is needed to determine how these conditions impact students' perceptions of themselves and their situation, not only when they are in remediation, but as they move into and through curriculum courses.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an interpretation of the findings of a qualitative case study designed to explore the experiences of academically underprepared college students at a two-year MSI who enrolled in and completed pre-curriculum courses and successfully transitioned into full enrollment in curriculum courses. The interpretation of the findings were informed by the conceptual framework of Schlossberg's (1981/2016) transition theory, the literature related to first-year, at-risk, and academically underprepared college students and college student development. It opened with an overview of the national, institutional, and participant trends relevant to the study and a discussion of the conclusions. It addressed the experiences in the acute phase of the transition that made the early exit from college an appealing way to avoid the psychic pain of identification as academically underprepared. It also addressed the experiences in

the reorganizational phase that promoted persistence and the outcomes evident in the reintegration phase that resulted from resolving the threat that under-preparedness posed to the participants' identities. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for practice and future research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sample of Email to Student

Dear Student,

Your Perspective is Important!

You may be a candidate for a research study that is being conducted on your campus!

What would I have to do?

Qualified participants will be invited to meet with a researcher for an initial interview lasting approximately one hour and a follow-up interview lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Students who participate will be rewarded for sharing their valuable time and insights with a \$25.00 Visa gift card!

What is it for?

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of college students at a two-year college who have completed developmental studies and successfully transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Who Qualifies?

Are you currently enrolled in college credit courses? Have you taken and completed English 097, English 098, Math 095, or Math 096, Math 099? If so, you may qualify to participate in this study.

Interested?

To find out whether you qualify to participate in this study and to learn more about it, please contact the researcher, Kaye Yadusky by email at kyadusky@louisburg.edu, or visit her office in Taft 101 between (times and dates TBD). There are a limited number of opportunities to participate. So get in touch soon!

Thank You!

Please Note:

Participation in this project is voluntary. All information collected as part of this study will be kept secure and confidential. Participants' identities will be protected. In addition, participants may request to have all information that can be identified as theirs returned to them, removed from the research documentation or destroyed. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time with no explanation and no penalty.

This research project is conducted as part of completing a dissertation to satisfy the requirements for a PhD from the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at North Carolina State University. The advisors for this research are Dr. Chad Hoggan and Dr Susan Barcinas. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Kaye Yadusky at the above listed email address or my advisors: Chad Hoggan at cdhoggan@ncsu.edu; or Susan Barcinas at susan_barcinas@ncsu.edu.

Sample of Flyer

Your Perspective is Important!

Are you willing to share it?

Have you taken and completed developmental courses?

These include: ENG 097, ENG 098, MAT 095, MAT 096, or MAT 99.

Would you accept a **\$25 Visa Gift Card** to compensate you for your valuable time?

You may qualify to participate in a study of college students!

What would I do? Qualified participants will engage in an initial one hour and a 30 minute follow-up interview.

How do I get involved? Come by **Taft 101** between (times and dates TBD). Or contact Kaye Yadusky at kyadusky@louisburg.edu.

Participation is voluntary and all information will be kept confidential.

This research is being conducted as part of the requirements to complete a PhD from the

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at North Carolina State University.

Appendix C

Study Information Guide

Thank You for Your Interest in this Research!

Why conduct this study?

Over half of all students in the United States who take developmental courses do not complete them. This means that they do not go on and take the courses they need to earn the degrees they came to college to pursue. *If you have completed even one developmental course and have transitioned to full enrollment in curriculum courses, you have beaten the odds.*

Congratulations!

The researcher wants to learn more about the students who persist and complete these courses. The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of college students at a two-year minority serving college who have successfully transitioned from academic preparatory, or developmental, studies, into full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Who qualifies to participate in this study?

Students who have completed two or more developmental courses and have transitioned to full enrollment in courses that count toward an Associate's Degree qualify for this study. Ideally participants will have sophomore standing or, at least, 24 completed credits.

What if I do not qualify, but would still like to participate?

If you do not qualify at this time, but would still like to be considered for participation in the future, please let the researcher know. She will contact you if there are opportunities to participate later.

If I decide to participate, what do I have to do?

Participants will be asked to engage in two interviews. The initial interview is designed to

last about an hour, but could go longer. The second interview is designed to last about 30 minutes, but you are welcome to take more time to describe your experiences. In the initial interview you will be asked to reflect on your experiences as a first year college student taking, navigating and completing developmental studies and your successful transition to full enrollment in curriculum courses.

The follow-up interview will be conducted after the preliminary results of the research is available. The researcher will provide documentation of the preliminary research results to you and ask for your feedback. Specifically, the researcher will ask you if the results accurately reflect your experiences. You are encouraged to point out any results that do not accurately reflect your experience. At that time you may provide additional feedback as well.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign a form indicating that you agree to participate. But you will still be free to withdraw at anytime.

Why should I participate in this study?

The researcher hopes that you will consider yourself a partner in creating a better understanding of college students who enroll in developmental courses, manage to beat the odds to complete these courses, and successfully transition to curriculum courses. The researcher also hopes that you will find sharing your stories and experiences as an opportunity to reflect on your personal growth as a learner and a student.

Should you decide to participate, at the conclusion of the second interview, you will be given a \$25.00 Visa card to recognize the value of your time and to thank you for participating in this research. There are no other direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

Will my name be used or will anyone have access to my information?

All information collected as part of this study will be kept secure and confidential in

password protected electronic files or in locked storage. *Participants' identities will be protected.*

Each participant will have a pseudonym and no specific information that could identify a participant will be included in the research results. Results will be used for the purpose of academic research and publication and no data will be published that could identify a participant in anyway. Transcripts will not be released in any individually identifiable form without your prior consent, or unless otherwise required by law. In addition, participants may request to have all information identified as theirs returned to them, removed from the research or destroyed.

How will the interviews be documented?

With your permission, the interviews will be audio taped, then transcribed into electronic files. This data will be stored electronically and in hard copy formats accessible only to the researcher. The researcher will use this data only for the purpose of interpreting it. The data resulting from your participation will be treated confidentially and stored in secure, locked or password protected files.

What if I decide to participate and then change my mind?

Participation is voluntary. *Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time with no explanation and no penalty.* Participants who complete the first interview, but do not complete the second interview will still be eligible for a Visa gift card. They will need to contact the researcher to arrange to pick up the card.

Are there any risks to me if I participate in this study?

No discomforts or stresses are anticipated as a result of this interview. Likewise, no risks are expected.

What will happen to the results of this study?

This research project is conducted as part of completing a dissertation to satisfy the

requirements for a PhD from the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at North Carolina State University. Results will be used for the purpose of academic research and publication. The advisors for this research are Dr. Chad Hoggan and Dr Susan Barcinas. All published documentation will make no reference to any of the participants by name or by other identifiable characteristics. Any characteristics that could in anyway be linked back to a participant will not be used in any publication.

Who do I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Kaye Yadusky at kyadusky@louisburg.edu; Chad Hoggan at cdhoggan@ncsu.edu; or Susan Barcinas at susan_barcinas@ncsu.edu.

Appendix D

Copy of Consent Form and Letter Describing Research

Dear Potential Research Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted as part of completing a dissertation to satisfy the requirements for a PhD from the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at North Carolina State University. The purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of college students' at a two-year, minority-serving institution who have successfully transitioned from enrollment in two or more academic preparatory, or developmental classes, to full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Because you may have undergone this experience, you may be an expert on a subject that I want to learn more about. For this project, I will be asking participants to engage in two interviews, an initial interview that will last about an hour and a follow-up interview that will last about one-half hour. My goal is to learn more about how and why some students, like yourself, are able to enroll in and complete developmental courses and successfully transition to full enrollment in curriculum courses when the majority of your peers, nationally, do not. If you choose to participate, I will be asking you questions about how you experienced enrollment in and completion of developmental courses and your transition to full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Should you decide to participate, I will be offering you a small gift in the form of a \$25.00 Visa gift card to recognize the value of your time and to thank you for participating in this research. There are no other direct benefits to you to for participating in this study. I hope, however, that you consider yourself a partner in creating the knowledge that may emerge from this study and that you will find it beneficial to take this opportunity to reflect on, and share ,your

stories and experiences with me.

With your permission, I will audiotape the interviews so that I can transcribe the tapes and interpret the data. The data resulting from your participation, will be used for the purpose of academic research and publication, but will be treated confidentially. Transcripts will not be released in any individually identifiable form without your prior consent, or unless otherwise required by law. The data will be stored digitally and electronically and kept secure. No discomforts or stresses are anticipated as a result of this interview. Likewise, no risks are expected.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation from this research project at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. You can stop participating without giving any reason, and without penalty. You can also request to have all information that can be identified as yours returned to you, removed from the research documentation or destroyed. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 919.602.5203 or my advisors: Chad Hoggan at cdhoggan@ncsu.edu; or Susan Barcinas at susan_barcinas@ncsu.edu. Do you have any questions regarding what I have shared thus far?

If you are willing to participate in this project, you will be asked to please sign below:

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E

Your Rights as a Participant in a Research Study

If you are considering participating in a study, you have the following rights:

You Have the right to Voluntarily Choose to Participate or Decline to Participate

You have the right to decline to participate in any research study. You have the right to withdraw from participating in a research study at any time, without any explanation, and with no penalty, even if you have signed a consent to participate form.

You Have the Right to Informed Consent

As a potential research participant, you have the right to be informed of:

- 1) The the purpose of the research;
- 1) The processes of the research, what you may be asked to do, how long it will take, and whether you will be compensated for your time;
- 2) Any potential physical, psychological, or social risks to you and how these risks will be minimized;
- 3) Any benefits to you or to others;
- 4) How information will be kept confidential;
- 5) Who you may contact if you have any questions or concerns;
- 6) Your right not to participate, or to withdraw from participating, at any time;
- 7) And your right to withdraw from participating at any time, for no reason, and with no penalty, even if you have signed a consent to participate form.

You Have the Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to have your questions answered and your concerns addressed and you should have contact information for the researcher and any advisors or sponsors.

Appendix F

In-depth Interview Guide and Script

Opening the Interview Script:

Thank you for coming! To make sure that you understand your role in the research process, I have a written letter to you for you to keep. I will read the letter to you to ensure that you understand what it means to participate in this study. Please feel free to ask any questions and I hope that you will feel comfortable agreeing to participate.

Dear Potential Research Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted as part of completing a dissertation to satisfy the requirements for a PhD from the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at North Carolina State University. The purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of college students' at a two-year, minority-serving institution who have successfully transitioned from enrollment in two or more academic preparatory, or developmental classes, to full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Because you may have undergone this experience, you may be an expert in a subject that I want to learn more about. For this project, I will be asking participants to engage in two interviews, an initial interview that will last about an hour and a follow-up interview that will last about one-half hour. My goal is to learn more about how and why some students, like yourself, are able to enroll in and complete developmental courses and successfully transition to full enrollment in curriculum courses when the majority of your peers, nationally, do not. If you choose to participate, I will be asking you questions about how you experienced enrollment in and completion of developmental courses and your transition to full enrollment in curriculum courses.

Should you decide to participate, I will be offering you a small gift in the form of a \$25.00 Visa gift card to recognize the value of your time and to thank you for participating in this

research. There are no other direct benefits to you to for participating in this study. I hope, however, that you will consider yourself a partner in creating the knowledge that may emerge from this study and that you will find it beneficial to take this opportunity to reflect on, and share, your stories and experiences with me.

With your permission, I will audiotape the interviews so that I can transcribe the tapes and interpret the data. The data resulting from your participation, will be used for the purpose of academic research and publication, but will be treated confidentially. Transcripts will not be released in any individually identifiable form without your prior consent, or unless otherwise required by law. The data will be stored digitally and electronically and kept secure. No discomforts or stresses are anticipated as a result of this interview. Likewise, no risks are expected.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation from this research project at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. You can stop participating without giving any reason, and without penalty. You can also request to have all information that can be identified as yours returned to you, removed from the research documentation or destroyed. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 919.602.5203 or my advisors: Chad Hoggan at cdhoggan@ncsu.edu; or Susan Barcinas at susan_barcinas@ncsu.edu. Do you have any questions regarding what I have shared thus far? If you are willing to participate in this project, please sign below:

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Transitioning to interview questions script:

Thank you for choosing to participate! I hope that you benefit from this opportunity to reflect on

your experience! Let's get started with some questions about your educational experiences.

Interview Key: Prompts are numbered; optional probes are indented below numbered questions.

Low-stakes Questions for Building Rapport/Exploring Educational Background

1) How would you, or one of your professors from high school, describe you as a student?

Back then, if you had a problem with school or school work, how did you solve it?

3) When did you decide you wanted to come to college and why?

What did you expect college to be like?

How is it different from what you expected?

Higher Stakes Questions/Exploring Perceptions of Experiences

4) You were invited to participate in this interview because you enrolled in and completed developmental or academic preparatory courses. How or when did you find out that you had to take these non-credit courses?

What was that like?

Why do you think you had to take these courses?

What do most students say about these classes and why they are taking them?

Do you agree or disagree with them?

5) Which developmental courses did you take and when did you take them?

What worked or went well for you in these classes?

What did not work or go well for you in these classes?

6) Can you tell me about a time when you were frustrated or wanted to give up?

What made you want to give up?

What made you keep going?

Did anybody help you?

Can you tell me about a time when you got help?

7) Is there anything about your experience that you felt no one else saw or understood?

What would have made things better for you?

What could you have done differently?

8) Can you tell me about a time when you experienced a turning point in your academic progress?

How did you change after that?

How did your routines, relationships or roles change after that?

9) What do you wish the people who design these courses and programs knew?

How would you change these programs/situations to make them better?

Or is there something else that you would change?

10) How did taking developmental/academic prep courses affect your degree progress and your transition to full enrollment in curriculum courses?

How did these courses affect your ability to succeed in for-credit college curriculum courses?

11) Most college students in the United States who enroll in non-credit developmental courses quit before they ever make it into curriculum courses. Why do you think that is?

How do you think you different from the majority?

What strengths did you bring to this experience?

What weaknesses did you bring to this experience?

What was your key to completing these courses and successfully transitioning to full enrollment in for-credit curriculum courses?

12) If you were to compare your experience of transitioning from non-credit academic prep

classes to full enrollment in curriculum courses to a movie, a TV show, a book, or yourself to a character in any of these, what or who would you choose and why?

13) If you had to tweet advice (in 140 characters or less) out to all of the new students who just learned that they had to take non-credit academic prep classes, or to high school students who are planning to go to college, what would you tweet? Take your time and write it down for me.

14) How do you think your college professors would describe you now?

When you have a problem with school or school work, now how do you solve it?

15) Take a moment to think about how you have changed since you first came to college.

Imagine sending a video message about how you have changed to someone who really cares about you. First, who would you send it to? What would you say?

Would you be comfortable videotaping your message?

Closing the interview script:

Thank you sharing your thoughts, insights and stories with me. I hope that taking time to reflect on your experiences has been productive for you. I value your time and your contribution to this study.

I will be contacting you after I have completed all of the initial interviews to set up a time for a very brief follow up interview session. At this time, I will provide you with a copy of a preliminary summary of the results of the study. I will be consulting with you to determine if you think that the results accurately reflect your perspective on the experience of enrolling in and completing academic prep/developmental courses and successfully transitioning to full enrollment in for-credit college curriculum courses. I will contact you to schedule a time to meet for this session.

When we meet for this follow up interview, I will have and give you your Visa Gift card.

Again, Thank you for your time!

Appendix G

The Member-checking Interview Script

Opening the Interview Script:

Thank you for coming! Remember, your participation in this project is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. With your permission, I will audiotape this follow-up interview so that I can transcribe the tapes and interpret the data. The data resulting from your participation will be used for the purpose of academic research and publication. Today, I will be presenting to you a copy of the preliminary summary of the data in the form of quotes from students who participated in the study. I would like your perspective on whether you think the results accurately reflect your perspective on the experience of enrolling in and completing developmental courses and successfully transitioning to full enrollment in for-credit college curriculum courses. Please feel free to openly disagree with any of the data and feel free to write on the documents or point out the data that you agree or disagree with or to ask any questions. Do you have any questions regarding what I have shared thus far? Then let's get started!

Closing the interview script:

Thank you sharing your thoughts, insights and stories with me. I hope that taking time to reflect on your experiences has been productive for you. I value your time and your contribution to this study and would like to present you with a \$25.00 Visa Gift card to recognize your contribution. Again, Thank you for your time!

Appendix H

Participant Characteristics and Profiles

Based on their financial aid status and narratives, 14 or 87.5% of the participants, evidenced low socioeconomic status; 13 or 81% claimed first-generation status; and three or 19% disclosed having a diagnosed learning or attention difference. All of the participants were enrolled for a minimum of 4 semesters. Three, Joseph, Sabrina, and Tony, or 18%, stopped out after the fourth semester. Their cumulative GPA's averaged 2.02. One participant, Zachery, transferred after his fourth semester with 12 hours remaining, and one participant, Michelle, walked at graduation, which meant that she was six hours shy of graduation. She also transferred. The remaining 11 participants, or 69%, graduate and transferred to four-year institutions. The cumulative GPA average for the students who walked or graduated was 2.83.

Participant Profiles

Joseph

Joseph was a 19-year-old African American male from a two-parent family. He described receiving encouragement and support from both his parents and his siblings. He disclosed that he had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Joseph entered college in the fall following his high school graduation. He enrolled in and passed the pre-curriculum Math class on his first attempt, but did not pass the exit exam. He retook the course the following semester and passed the course and the exit exam. In the remaining semesters, Joseph did not complete a curriculum Math course. He also did not successfully complete the second curriculum English course in a series of 4 required courses. Joseph was in his fourth semester at the time of data collection and planned to reenroll the following semester with a goal to complete his degree. He did not return. His GPA in his final term was 1.25 and his commutative GPA was 1.87.

Sabrina

Sabrina, a 20-year-old African American female living with her single mom, described her family as supportive, “some of the time.” She enrolled in college during the summer immediately following graduation from high school. She placed in and passed the pre-curriculum Writing class and exit exam on her first attempt during the summer. She also placed in pre-curriculum Math, but did not pass the class on her first attempt. On her second attempt, she passed the class and earned a satisfactory score on the exit exam. Sabrina twice attempted, but did not complete, the subsequent curriculum Math. At the time of data collection, Sabrina had stopped out of college for one semester, had completed four semesters of college, and planned to re-enroll for at least one more semester with a goal to complete with an AA degree. However, she was having financial trouble and did not reenroll or complete a degree. Her term GPA at the conclusion of her final semester was 2.80 and her cumulative GPA was 2.00.

Tony

Tony, African American male raised by his single mom, was 21-years old at the time of the data collection. He said, “Mom is really all I really have, parents wise...” But he also described having close and supportive relationships with his brothers, peers and cousins. He disclosed that he was diagnosed with dyslexia. He took 6 months off following graduation from high school, then enrolled part-time at his local community college where he took only pre-curriculum courses. He took and completed a pre-curriculum Math course at his first institution, and took, but did not complete, both a pre-curriculum Reading and a pre-curriculum Writing course. When he transferred, he placed into pre-curriculum Reading and Writing and successfully passed both the classes and the exit exams. Tony attempted the first curriculum English course three times, but did not successfully complete it. Including his time at his first

institution, Tony was enrolled in five semesters, during which time he accumulated 42 credits toward graduation with an AA degree. His Cumulative GPA was 2.22. At the time of the interview, he was considering both returning or transferring. He did not reenroll and has not transferred back any additional credits.

Grant

At the time of data collection, Grant was a 21-year-old African American male living on his own and working two part-time jobs while attending college. He described his support as sourced in extended family with no reference to parents or any single individual as his primary care-giver. He enrolled in college in the fall after his high school graduation with the purpose of continuing to play his sport on the college level. He placed in pre-curriculum Writing and Math. He passed the pre-curriculum Math courses and exit exam on the first attempt. He did not pass the Writing exit exam and was reenrolled in and passed this class on his second attempt. Grant graduated with an Associate Degree in Business with a GPA of 2.23. He transferred to a four-year university.

Leah

Leah, an African American female from a two parent home, was 20 years old at the time of the data collection. Before she went to college, she felt that her support system was “just mom and dad.” She did not make plans to go to college until the summer after she graduated from high school. She placed into the pre-curriculum Writing and Math courses. She passed the pre-curriculum Writing on the first attempt. She also passed the Developmental Math class, but not the exit exam on the first attempt. She completed it on her second attempt. Leah completed 3 semesters, took six months off, then returned for two more semesters. She graduated with an AA

degree after five semesters and transferred to a four-year institution. Her final term GPA was 2.25 and her cumulative GPA was 2.38.

Zachery

Zachery, a 20-year-old European American male athlete at the time of the interview described coming from a two-parent home. He viewed his parents as engaged and supportive. He also said that his coaches in high school “would sometimes help” when he needed support. On the placement tests, he scored below the cut-off on all 3 pre-curriculum courses and was subsequently enrolled in the Developmental Reading, Writing and Math. He passed the Developmental Reading and Writing courses and exit exams on his first attempts. He passed the Developmental Math class on his first attempt, but did not pass the exit. He passed both the class and the exit exam on his second attempt. Zachery was enrolled for four semesters and needed less than 12 credits to complete his degree when he transferred to a university. He planned to transfer back his 12 hours to graduate with his AA degree, but did not do so after four semesters. His cumulative GPA after his last semester was 2.46.

Derrick

Derrick, an 18-year-old African American male from a household led by a single mom, was the youngest of the participants in the study and the only one still in his first-year of college at the time of the interviews. He shared that he earned “good grades” in high school and felt that he had a strong support network composed of family, friends and coaches. He enrolled in college in the fall immediately following high school graduation. He placed into all 3 pre-curriculum classes and successfully passed all three on the first attempt, but he did not pass the pre-curriculum Reading exit exam. He passed both the pre-curriculum Reading course and the exit

exam on his second attempt. Derrick completed his AA degree after 4 full semesters and 2 summer sessions. His cumulative GPA was 2.65, and he transferred to a 4-year college.

Caroline

At the time of data collection, Caroline was a 20-year-old European American female from a two parent family. She enrolled in college immediately following graduation from high school. When she took the placement tests, she scored below the cut-off in all three subject areas. She enrolled in pre-curriculum Math, Reading and Writing in her first semester. She passed the reading and writing classes and exit exams on the first attempt, but not the Math. She passed the Developmental Math class and the exit exam on her second attempt. After four semesters, and two summer sessions of enrollment, Caroline completed her AA degree with a cumulative GPA of 2.73 and transferred to a university.

Andre

Andre was a 22-year-old African American male athlete raised by a single mom. He described a “lack of support” because his mom had to work long hours. He took time off between high school and college to work, then went to “an open door college” to play his sport. At his first institution, he enrolled in courses equivalent to pre-curriculum Writing and Reading. When he transferred, he was again enrolled in pre-curriculum Writing and Math. He completed the pre-curriculum Writing on his second attempt and passed the pre-curriculum Math course on his first attempt, but did not pass the exit exam. He passed both on his second attempt. After five semesters, Andre completed his AA degree with a 2.67 GPA and transferred to a university.

Cory

Cory, an African American male raised primarily by a single mom, was 20-years-old at the time of the interview. He described feeling supported, especially by his mother. Six months

after his high school graduation and after working construction for several months, Cory enrolled in college. His scores on the placement tests indicated a need for remediation in all three subject areas. He completed the pre-curriculum Writing course on his first attempt and the pre-curriculum Math course on his second attempt. He passed the reading class four times, but did not achieve the cut-off score on the exit exam until his fourth attempt. After enrollment in five semesters, one summer session, and transferring back one course, Cory graduated with an AA degree and continued at his four-year university. His cumulative GPA was 2.78.

Jonathan

Jonathan, an African American male living with extended family enrolled in college in the fall following his graduation from high school. He was 20 at the time of the interviews. He described minimal support from all but his primary caregiver, his aunt. When he took the placement tests, Jonathan scored below the cutoff in all three subject areas and, subsequently, was enrolled in three pre-curriculum courses. He took and passed all three courses on his first attempt, but he did not pass the exit exams in the Reading and Math. He retook and passed the pre-curriculum Math course and exam on his second attempt. He attempted and passed the Developmental Reading course three more times, but did not achieve an acceptable score on the exit exam until his fourth attempt. After five semesters and two summer sessions, he graduated with his AA degree and transferred to a four-year college. His cumulative GPA was 2.80.

Kayla

Kayla, an African American female living with extended family while her single mom was deployed, was 20 years old at the time of data collection. Kayla described being in receipt of ample support from her aunt and cousins. She placed into the pre-curriculum Reading and Math courses. She did not pass the Math class on her first attempt, but passed the class and the exit

exam on her second attempt. She passed the pre-curriculum Reading class four times, but she did not pass the exit exam until her fourth attempt. She completed an AA degree with a cumulative GPA of 2.89 after five semesters and two summer sessions. She transferred to a four-year college.

Darius

At the time of the data collection, Darius was a 19-year-old African American male who lived with his mom, had good relationships with both parents, and described his family support as “strong.” He related that he was an honor roll student during all four years of high school and shared that he was awarded a full athletic scholarship to a D-1 university, where he was placed into all curriculum courses, including Calculus and Freshman Composition. After two semesters, and one summer session, he lost his scholarship and transferred to the site of the study in the following fall. He was enrolled in pre-curriculum Reading and Writing. He successfully completed the Writing course and exit on his first attempt. Although he attempted and passed the pre-curriculum Reading class three times, he did not achieve an acceptable score on the exit exam until his third attempt. Following enrollment in six semesters and two summer sessions, Darius completed his AA degree with a 3.03 cumulative GPA and transferred to a university.

Michelle

Michelle, an African American female who entered college in the fall semester immediately following her graduation from high school, was 20 years old at the time of the interviews. Although raised by a single mom, she described her support system from family and friends as strong. Her placement test scores indicated that she needed remediation in Math and Writing before moving into the curriculum courses. She passed the pre-curriculum Writing course and exit exam on the first attempt. She passed the pre-curriculum Math class on her first

attempt also, but she did not pass the exit exam. She passed both the course and the exit exam on her second attempt. Michelle was on track for an Associate in Arts degree, had completed all but 2 of her required courses in four semesters, and was registered for summer school for the remaining courses, so she was allowed to walk with the graduates. She transferred to a four-year college with a cumulative GPA of 3.07.

Sarah

Sarah, a Latina American from a two-parent family, was 20 years old at the time of her interview. She described her nuclear family as emotionally supportive. She placed into all three developmental courses and she passed all of them on her first attempt, but she did not pass the exit exam for the Reading course until her second attempt. Sarah transferred to a university after four semesters of enrollment and graduated with an Associate of Arts Degree in General College. Her cumulative GPA was 3.36.

James

At the time of data collection, James was a 22-year-old African American male raised by a single mom. He described an absence of support from his family. He disclosed that he was diagnosed with ADHD. He took time off after completing high school and worked for a year before enrolling in college. James was informed that he needed to enroll in the pre-curriculum Writing and Math courses. He enrolled in and passed the pre-curriculum Writing class and exit exam on his first attempt. He enrolled in the pre-curriculum Math course three times. He withdrew on his first attempt, failed the class on the second attempt, but passed the class and the exit exam on the third attempt. After five semesters of enrollment and one summer session, James graduated with an AA degree and transferred to a four-year university. His cumulative GPA was 3.38.

Appendix I

Pre-curriculum Placements, Attempts, and Completions

One of the participants placed into a single pre-curriculum course, seven or 43% placed into two pre-curriculum courses, and 8 or 50% placed into three (see chart seven). The average number of placements per participant was 2.4. Ten or 63% of the participants placed into Reading, 14 or 88% placed into Writing, and 15, or 94% placed into Math. The 16 participants were enrolled in a total of 213 hours of remediation, ranging from 6 to 21 hours, with an average of 13.3 hours per person. All of the participants failed at least one pre-curriculum course, with pre-curriculum course repeats ranging from one to six hours in duration. The average number of repeat enrollments was 2.2 per participant, or nearly twice the placement rate. The repeat rate in the pre-curriculum Reading was 2.5%; in Writing it was 1.28%; and in Math, it was 1.86%. Additional information about the participants' enrollment and completion rates can be found in Table 7.

Table 7: Summary of Pre-curriculum Placements and Enrollments

Participant	Reading	Writing	Math	Total Placements	Total Enrollments	Total Hours
Joseph	0	0	2	1	2	6
Sabrina	0	1	2	2	3	9
Tony	2	2	2	3	6	18
Grant	0	2	1	2	3	9
Leah	0	1	2	2	3	9
Zachery	1	1	2	3	4	12
Derrick	2	1	1	3	4	12
Caroline	1	1	2	3	4	12
Andre	2	2	2	3	6	18
Cory	4	1	2	3	7	21

Table 7. (continued).

Participant	Reading	Writing	Math	Total Placements	Total Enrollments	Total Hours
Jonathan	4	1	2	3	7	21
Kayla	4	0	2	2	6	18
Darius	3	2	0	2	5	15
Michelle	0	1	2	2	3	9
Sarah	2	1	1	3	4	12
James	0	1	3	2	4	12
Totals	10	14	15	39	71	213
Placements	63%	88%	94%	2.4		
Enrollments	25	18	28		4.4	13.3
Repeat Rate	2.5%	1.28%	1.86%		1.82%	

Appendix J

Struggles and Inconsistencies

Five of the participants evidenced inconsistency in integrating their adaptations into their identity. Three of these, Joseph, Sabrina, and Tony, demonstrated stalled progress in their curriculum courses and stooped out of college at the end of the semester in which data was collected. Kayla, Leah, and Sabrina all described struggling with regulating emotions and priorities, but Kayla and Leah shared that they often rallied and regained control over their situations and completed their courses successfully. They both went on to graduate. Sabrina evidenced a pattern of avoidance that included missing large quantities of class time and withdrawing from classes rather than rallying. All five of these participants described continuing to struggle with effort, time, priority, and attention regulation.

Sabrina, Joseph, Leah, Tony, Kayla, and Sabrina, each claimed that they experienced adaptations in their assumptions and resources, but also shared experiences that suggested that they struggled with fully integrating these adaptations into their identities. They described learning what it means to work hard, but also described struggling with consistently following through with actions that reflected this adaptation. At the time of data collection, for example, Kayla described continuing to struggle with “self-doubt” regarding her ability to succeed in college. She also questioned her personal growth since coming to college, “... to this day, I try to figure out if I have changed for the better or worse...I have no motivation, really.” She was not entirely certain what she wanted out of a college degree and was questioning whether she would return to finish up, even though she only needed one more semester. Because she is in the process of becoming more self-aware and asking important questions about her identity and purpose, Kayla may be on the verge of taking responsibility for defining self and internalizing her goals, but she is not there yet.

In spite of her uncertainty, she did return, graduated the following semester, and transferred to a four-year college.

Leah, who had stopped out of college for 9 months before returning, described struggling with emotional regulation and perceived some of her experiences as out of her control, including her parents' health issues, completing assignments in a timely manner, and challenging relationships with teachers. She described how she responded to these experiences, "When I am going through something, I withdraw. Because if I am going through something and I am around people, I might take it out on them." Withdrawing included missing classes and leaving class early if she was upset. She described one situation, "I tried to talk to [the instructor]. It's only like I can't project myself. I can't express it to him...But I stormed out. Yeah, I did. I was crying." In the semester of the data gathering, she admitted to being discouraged and distracted by her mother's and father's health issues,

So basically I've been missing a lot of school and my grades been going down and...before Spring Break, I was ready to throw in the towel. I felt like giving up. It's like, I can't do it. I won't do it. I stopped going to class, stopped coming to school.

But Leah also described a pattern of rallying after each distraction. She described returning after Spring Break with a renewed commitment even though she was still failing the "...main two classes I need to graduate." Leah said her advisor told her, "You've got six weeks and even though it may not sound like a long time, you've got time. It's not too late yet." In response, she said, "So I'm believing in myself right now and I'm gonna do it, get that degree." Leah may have been struggling with some of the same self-doubts that Kayla was struggling with, but she had the internalized goal for completing her degree and transferring to a four year college where she

could pursue a major in fashion design. She engaged the necessary resources to complete her degree and transferred as planned.

Sabrina described struggling with distractions that led her to missing class, not turning assignments on time, and to repeatedly asking her instructors to give her extra time on assignments because, “I had some times...some times when I had something going on, like at home.” She had stopped out of college previously for a semester before returning with the plan to complete her degree. At the time of the interviews, she was in her second attempt at the first curriculum Math in her degree sequence. She described her recurring pattern of avoidance,

But this semester, I did the same thing I did last time. I hardly went to class. I don't like Math, so I can honestly say, that I am not applying myself enough. I don't like to work out all of the problems and I don't like doing all of that extra stuff.

She went on to explain, “I don't like to challenge myself. I give up easily, especially when it comes to Math.” She also described experiencing emotional strain when she was nearly withdrawn from school for failing to pay an installment on her tuition and described feeling uncertainty about how she would pay for school, what degree she should pursue, and she was unrealistic about the number of courses she needed to complete. Sabrina was dropped from her Math and one other course that semester because she missed too many classes. She did not return the next semester. Sabrina was able to articulate what she needed to do to achieve success, but was not able to follow through with the behaviors and suggests that she did not internalize some of her adapted assumptions. She and Leah may have struggled at times with having enough energy to deal with their multiple, perceived, concurrent stresses.

Tony and Joseph also described failing to consistently follow through with their perceived adaptations. They both also disclosed having a learning disability and readily admitted

that they did not advocate for themselves by notifying their instructors or requesting accommodations. Although Joseph said that he wanted to pursue a graduate degree following completion of a Bachelor's degree, he described having no plans for a major, suggesting that his goals for his future were vague and not internalized. He also admitted to continuing to struggle with managing time, attention, organization, and effort. He explained, "So I am gonna admit that it's kind of hard to keep up with the same things every day. Sometimes, you know, I let it slide." He continued, "It is really hard for me to balance out the work for my classes and to keep up in all my classes." Like Sabrina, he did not complete an entry-level curriculum Math after three attempts. He also had not completed the second English course in the curriculum sequence after two attempts. Although he was planning to return to complete his degree, Joseph did not return the following semester.

Tony described becoming more effective at managing his time and effort, but he also admitted that he experienced setbacks in this area, especially after he took a Residential Life position. He described his experience, "At first [the job] didn't affect my grades that much, like I went down to 2.1 from 2.3. So I tried it again. That's when my grades just went down. I forgot all about my time management skills." This suggests that he did not internalize his adaptations in assumptions or sustain the energy and effort required to continue to build his resources. He did not complete the first English course in the curriculum sequence after a total of six semesters of full and part-time enrollment. At the time of the interviews, he was uncertain about his future. He did not know whether he was returning or transferring and he did not have any specific goals for a major. He did not return the following semester.

These five students were not alone in experiencing struggles in the curriculum courses. Based on their narratives and their transcripts, 13 of the participants, and that includes nine of the

11 who completed a degree, continued to experience some academic difficulties as they progressed through their curriculum courses. In addition to Leah, Kayla, Joseph, Sabrina, and Tony, James, Cory, Jonathan, Caroline, Zachery, Sarah, Andre, and Grant continued to struggle with being successful in some of their courses. For nine of the participants, Kayla, James, Joseph, Caroline, Cory, Zachery, Jonathan, Sabrina, and Grant, their academic struggles were related to Math. Sarah, Andre, and Tony experienced struggles in English courses and Joseph experienced struggles in both Math and English. Michelle and Darius's transcripts and narratives did not reveal additional struggles academically once they moved out of pre-curriculum courses.

Appendix K

Participants' Theories on High Pre-curriculum Attrition Rates

The participants in this study presented their theories on why they thought the majority of their peers, nationally, failed to complete their pre-curriculum courses. They suggested that pre-curriculum students stop, or drop out prematurely because 1) they believe the message that they are not smart enough for college and do not believe they have the necessary resources to persist through a failure; 2) they cannot see the value in the pre-curriculum courses; 3) they do not have internalized goals; or 4) they are not in receipt of adequate encouragement and support.

All of the participants recognized the need to have and develop internal and external resources to manage the strain of the stigma, marginalization, the sense of inferiority and the threat to identity that emerges from identification as academically underprepared. Five of the participants suggested that under-prepared college students have to have the internal resources necessary to persist through the message the pre-curriculum courses send that, "You are not smart enough," They suggested that this strain alone was sufficient to make many students stop or drop out before gaining full access to curriculum courses. Cory said of pre-curriculum students, "They get discouraged. They feel as though they are not smart." Sabrina explained, "You're basically hearing, 'You're not smart enough, you're not supposed to be here.' It would be easy to just feel like that and just give up." Sabrina is noting the importance of experiencing a sense of belonging to support persistence in college. Caroline agreed and describes how identification as academically underprepared can remind students of any chronic experiences with stigmatization, such as being held back. She explained how it feels, "Because you are in this class, you are not smart enough. It's almost like getting held back."

Kayla suggested that pre-curriculum students quit "...because the developmental classes make you doubt yourself a lot. And they feel like, if they can't do a developmental class, then they can't do a normal class." Kayla is pointing to the tendency for some students to perceive an assessment from an authority as predictive. If they have a fixed mindset and do not believe they can change, or if they are heavily influenced by the assessment of an authority, they will choose to leave college before establishing that predication as accurate. In keeping with Kayla's thought, Tony suggested a rationale, "They feel like they are not smart enough. It's like, 'man...I'll just go get a regular job and keep rolling.'" These participants are suggesting that enduring pre-curriculum courses involves having a developing the ability to having or developing the ability to endure the strain of the threat to identity, the stigma, marginalization, inferiority, and the sense of not belonging.

Five of the participants suggested that failing a pre-curriculum course once was also enough to prompt students to quit. Like Tony and Kayla, Michelle theorized that some pre-curriculum students are vulnerable to perceiving a failure as an expectation for additional failures. "I feel like people don't want to take [a pre-curriculum course again] because they feel like, well, I flunked once, you know, what is the use in me taking it again?" She imagined that someone would say to themselves, "I feel like if I don't know it the first time, it's not like I'm gonna' know it the second time." Jonathan agreed with her assessment, "They failed the class once and said, 'I'm going to stop going.'" Derrick suggested that majority of pre-curriculum students quit, "...cause they failed it, or they just know they are going to fail [again] and they just give up." Identifying the strain of enduring a failure and the need for internal and external resources to manage this, Darius suggested, "Maybe stress, they don't think they can do it." Grant explained his perspective based on his observations of his classmates, "They feel like, if

they couldn't get it to this point, they're not gonna get it now. They just give up on themselves. A lot of people just do that. They give it up." Jonathan also proposed that a perceived lack of resources contributed to the choice to stop or drop out after a failure. Referring to a lack of self-confidence or awareness of ability, he said, "When you just up and quit, you don't see your full potential." Darius thought a lack of an internalized goal or plan for the future might also influence students to abandon their pre-curriculum course studies after a failure. He suggested, "Maybe they don't have dreams that they want to accomplish and goals set."

Five of the participants suggested that pre-curriculum students might be inclined to quit because they perceive the effort required to complete these courses as daunting and that they do not believe they have the resources and energy necessary to invest that effort. Joseph said, "Some students quit because they feel it is a lot of work. It is a lot of extra work." Sarah also believed that students would consider quitting "...because the work is extremely hard in the developmental classes. It is intense." Sabrina agreed, "It's a lot of work." When asked why the majority of pre-curriculum students quit before completing their pre-curriculum courses, Leah reflected, then proposed, "I'm going to say the work. Probably too much work. Probably so much on their plate." She may also be alluding to the role concurrent stresses and strains play in diverting energy away from investing in the pre-curriculum courses. James admitted, "Heck if someone had told me how many hours I would spend, I might have quit." He suggested that many students stop or drop out of pre-curriculum courses because they are not used to working hard because they have not had to work for their grades in high school. He explained, "Some people are used to getting things handed to them. Why do the hard work? I feel like...the education system pushes [students] from grade to grade whether they deserve to pass it or not. They're not held accountable." He suggested that all students have to learn that in college, "If

you put very little effort into a class, you're going to get very little results back. It directly impacts you.”

Six of the participants pointed to the fact that it would be easy for a pre-curriculum college student choose to stop or drop out because it is a challenge to find value in persisting in these courses. They do not count toward graduation or toward students' GPA's, and thus offer not extrinsic rewards, but students have to pay for them in money, loss of time, and in terms of the psychic pain they must endure as they move through them. Joseph hypothesized that because they don't count toward the degree, some students think, "...it is unnecessary, [that] they ought not have to do it.” They do not recognize the value they may offer in terms of learning useful content or material and decide that it is not worth the cost of money or the loss of time. Leah said that a student who was “struggling” might feel like,

It don't count, so you're doing all this work for nothing 'cause I know that when I found out, I know I was sorta disappointed too. Like I'm doing all this work for nothing, in vain? You're telling me that even if I have an A in this class, it is not going to count? It is not going to weigh? It's just a P [for pass]?

Zachary, Sabrina and Sarah took a practical view of the courses. Zachary proposed,

I think that one big reason why people slack off in those classes is because they don't count for anything, you know...and I probably wouldn't wanna stay in school any longer if I keep taking classes that don't even count towards anything. You know, that's just wasting money.

Sabrina offered a similar argument. She suggested that people quit pre-curriculum courses “Cause you have to pay for these courses and they don't count for anything.” While Zachary and Sabrina took the financial cost into consideration, Sarah looked at the cost of the classes in terms

of time. She suggested pre-curriculum students "...might quit when they start realizing they are behind. Some people don't want to stay in school for longer than four years." James conjectured that students who do not recognize the value of learning the course content might be more likely to quit. He reported, "I know so many people who go to classes and say, 'I'm not going to use this, why should I learn it?'"

Darius and Caroline referred to the need for external resources to promoting persistence through pre-curriculum courses. They suggested that some pre-curriculum students may not have the kind of support and encouragement that they need to be willing to persist. Darius put forward, "Maybe they got no encouragement behind them. Nobody to push them through." Caroline hypothesized, that the students who are more likely to quit are the ones, "...who don't get the support from at home. I feel like that would factor in."

Appendix L

Perceived External Contributions to Academic Under-preparedness

In the member-checking interviews, four of the participants, Kayla, Darius, Jonathan, and Derrick, reported that they “got good grades in high school, but did not get the knowledge” required to be academically prepared for college. Eleven of the participants, Caroline, Sabrina, Grant, Joseph, Cory, Tony, Zachary, Sarah, Leah, James and Andre, admitted that they simply “did not get the knowledge in high school” required to be prepared for college curriculum courses. It is not clear whether these students are taking some responsibility for their lack of knowledge and skill development or attributing their condition to their institutions, but based on their narratives, they are likely referring to the combination of self and situation. While most of the participants recognized their own role in their academic under-preparedness and all of the participants described personal experiences and environmental conditions that also contributed to their academic under-preparedness. Institutions. Each of the participants attributed at least a portion of their academic under-preparedness for college curriculum courses to their previous educational institutions’ lack of rigor and low expectations, standards, or demands. Several also identified a lack of adequate exposure to the academic skills needed for success in college, a lack of support in achieving these skills, and a lack of awareness of their under-preparedness.

Lack of Rigor

Eleven of the participants attributed a portion of their academic under-preparedness to a lack of academic rigor in their previous institutions. Joseph identified a lack of rigor at his previous schools as contributing to his under-preparedness for college curriculum courses. In contrast to his college courses, he said his high school “classes were pretty easy.” James echoed

this sentiment, “Except for Math, classes were easy for me...” Jonathan was able to look back and reflect, “Yeah, high school was pretty easy. In high school, they just did the whole thing for you.” He is recognizing that he did not have to actively engage in the learning process.

Suggesting that the instructors in his high school had low expectations for their students and did not challenge them, he added, “They just baby sat us a lot of times.” Grant also described an atmosphere of low expectations, “Professor wise... I feel like they babied you.” In the member-checking interviews, Sabrina, Derrick, James and Cory also indicated that their high school teachers often “just baby sat” their students rather than challenging them academically.

Sabrina compared the knowledge and skills she needed to be successful in the pre-curriculum courses with what she was exposed to in high school, “I mean, some of it I learned in high school, but some of the material, I had never seen before.” Sarah contrasted the expectations for reading comprehension in high school with that of her pre-curriculum reading course, suggesting that previously she needed to only account for having read an assignment and not engage in higher order thinking and analysis,

In high school and middle school and elementary, it was always read something and just summarize this, but here [pre-curriculum Reading] it was different. They expected you to summarize it in a specific way and if it wasn’t done that specific way, it was wrong.

Although Michelle and Darius did not recognize that their high school transcripts misrepresented their academic ability, their narratives and transcripts suggested that they both should have been prepared for Calculus I for their first semester in college. At his first college where he was not required to take a placement test, Darius, a high school honor student, was placed into Calculus I. While many factors likely contributed to his lack of success in his college Calculus class, when he was tested, his scores indicated that he was not ready for Pre-calculus I, even though he had

taken both Pre-calculus I and II in high school. As well, Michelle had completed her required high school Math sequence a year early, took honors Pre-calculus I and II her senior year. Her scores on the placement test indicated that she needed to begin with the lowest pre-curriculum Math course. The difference between Michelle and Darius' high school course experience as recorded on their transcripts and their performance in the area of Math on the placement tests suggests that their high school Math courses lacked academic rigor.

Twelve of the participants suggested that grade inflation and social promotion contributed to their or their peers' academic under-preparedness. Nine of the 16 participants described variations on grade inflation. Zachery described being able to convince his instructors to give him "a free pass" and drop any low grades that would bring his course averages down. James, Andre, Sarah, Cory, Sabrina, Tony, Derrick, and Leah reported being able get away with not turning in all of their assignments and still earning satisfactory grades in high school. James explained, "In high school, you can get away with not doing the work." Tony said, "When I went to high school, you could make a really bad grade and still get a C in the course. Teachers gave grades away." In the member checking interviews, 10 additional participants Leah, Grant, Derrick, Sabrina, Joseph, Jonathan, Kayla, Sarah, Andre, and James acknowledged that teachers in high school "...just gave grades away."

Three of the participants, James, Tony and Grant, described the influence of social promotion on their academic under-preparedness. Tony said that, even though his teachers knew he did not know the course material or have the grades to pass a class, "They just passed me on." Grant described a similar pattern. Referring to his teachers,

...they kind of just pushed you on, even if you didn't deserve it. Even if you didn't work for it, and they knew you didn't work for it. They just kinda' pushed you on.

James alluded to points in his own background when he believed he was socially promoted.

Regarding high school, he said,

Half the time, I was playing hooky, getting myself in trouble. Yet, they just pushed me through in high school. They just pushed me through the system. I probably should have been held back a grade. How can I show up for half the classes and still get a 3.5? How does that happen? You know what it tells me? It tells me that teachers want to give students good grades, so it looks like they are doing their jobs, so they don't get fired and the system continues to work.

He also described an experience in primary school,

I remember I never learned my multiplications tables. I remember that in the 5th grade. And they passed me on to middle school and they really did me a disservice. I had to spend countless hours as an adult trying to fix what I should have learned in a class I should not have passed. They say leave no child behind, and I understand...but still, if somebody doesn't pass something, they shouldn't pass.

Lack of Support and Instruction

Fifteen of the 16 participants regarded a shortage of time spent on content teaching and learning or a lack of academic support as factoring into their academic under-preparedness. Six of the 16 participants, Sara, Caroline, Tony, James, Sabrina and Cory, described situations in which their teachers did not spend enough time on course content for them to fully learn it before moving on to new material. In the member checking interviews, they agreed, "If you don't get it

when you are supposed to, too bad. They are not going to go back and teach it.” About his teachers, Jonathan said, “They did not really help me out in high school.” In the member-checking interviews 10 of the 16 participants also agreed with the comment, “a few teachers would give extra help; most would not” as accurately describing their high school experience. In either the in-depth or member-checking interviews, 10 of the 16 participants, Leah, Caroline, Andre, Tony, Sabrina, Grant, Sarah, Zachary, Joseph and Michelle, mentioned that their teachers had so many responsibilities, students, or distractions that they did not have time to address their students’ diverse academic needs. Tony explained, “Teachers say. ‘I got this and this many students, over 200 students. I can’t take time out for the one that just needs your help.’” Caroline described her experience,

Very few teachers were willing to put forth the effort to, who would spend after hours with me, helping me understand the information. There were very few teachers who would take the extra time to help at the end of the day, to basically tutor for free.

Fifteen of the participants suggested that school personnel did not want to provide them with academic support because they perceived them as a lower priority than other students and that assisting them was too much trouble, or they were not worthy of support. Michelle suggested that teachers only had time to invest in the students who were failing, “Teachers always have so much going on, so many kids. They don’t get to know you... [unless] you are failing.” On the other hand, eight participants, Andre, Tony, Sabrina, Grant, Sarah, Zachery, Caroline, and Joseph, felt that their teachers were more likely to invest their time in assisting and supporting the really strong students, rather than the average or weaker ones. Sarah related, “I feel like teachers only helped the smarter kids.”

Andre had a similar perception, “Basically...they were more interested in the kids in the Advanced Placement classes.” Sarah said she asked her guidance counselor for support, but the way the guidance counselor spoke to her was “...so bad. I guess she didn’t want to help me. Maybe she thought I was just going to get pregnant. She never believed in me. That is how I felt.” Tony described high school teachers who made him feel “dumb.” He said these teachers did not provide support because they found it “...aggravating to break it down” for the students, like himself, who “don’t understand it fast enough.” Andre described his experiences with high school teachers. He said,

They didn't just neglect you, they made comments, like were hidden jokes, or try to use big words to call you idiot or stupid, that they thought that you really didn't know what they meant. It makes you feel less of a person.

In contrast to the 15 participants who shared having a “lack of support in high school,” Darius said he received “lots of support” after he moved to a small prep school for his last two years of high school.

Appendix M

Perceived Internal Contributions to Academic Under-preparedness

The participants in this study recognized their own contribution to their academic under-preparedness, but often not until they had spent at least a portion of a semester in pre-curriculum courses. They identified two central personal contributions to their academic under-preparedness, compromised academic effort and struggling in at least one academic subject area.

Academic Effort

A number of the participants described participating in behaviors that reflected compliance, classroom engagement, or persuasion as a means of achieving acceptable grades with minimal effort in high school. Jonathan, Sarah, Derrick, Darius, Kayla, Michelle, Caroline, and Cory, described themselves as engaged or compliant in the high school classroom. Kayla said, “I ask a lot of questions.” Sabrina said, “My teachers really liked me because, although I sat in the back of the class, I always raised my hand. I always asked a lot of questions.” Michelle said, “I had a good connection with my teachers...very outspoken and very, like you know, dedicated and on time.” These behaviors allowed them to earn acceptable grades, but also to “do just enough to get by” at least part of the time. The remaining 8 participants, Grant, Leah, Zachary, James, Joseph, Tony, and Andre, plus Sabrina, suggested that “doing just enough to get by” accurately characterized their investment in their high school academics most or all of the time. Sabrina confided, “In high school, I barely passed. I just rolled with it.” Joseph admitted, “I’m lazy, when it comes to school.” Leah and Tony also used the term “lazy” in discussing their academic habits in high school. Tony saw himself in high school as “lazy some of the time” and Leah admitted that when it came to school “I was fairly lazy.” James recalled his level of investment in high school, “I never did homework. I didn't apply myself. I was very

impulsive...I would skip class whenever I could.” Andre did not skip class, but because of his experience with his high school instructors, he admitted “... I just did not even want to go to class.”

Academic Struggles

In either the in depth or the member checking interviews, all of the participants, except Michelle, admitted that they sometimes “struggled” in school or that they “struggled” with at least one subject in school. Sarah admitted that she had to work hard because of her challenges with English as a second language. She said her high school teachers would describe her,

...as someone who does her homework, but does not learn what she was supposed to learn. For example, when we had homework assignments, I always did my homework, but I did not always understand what I was doing.

Caroline also described herself as having to work hard, “Because, even if I put the 100% of the average student, I’m still going to score, like a C, type of thing.” Nine of the participants, Zachary, James, Cory, Jonathan, Joseph, Sarah, Caroline, Sabrina, Kayla, and Leah, all described struggling with Math prior to coming to college. Seven of the participants, Tony, Andre, Joseph, Cory, Caroline, Sarah, Darius, described struggling in language-based courses. Derrick described struggling with all of his classes in his junior year of high school.