

ABSTRACT

BURKS DRAUGHON, GINGER. “We See You”: Policy Supports and Barriers for Part-time Undergraduate Students. (Under the direction of Dr. Audrey J. Jaeger).

Almost seventy percent of today’s jobs require postsecondary education or training (Carnevale, Garcia, & Campbell, 2019) and to meet those workforce needs, the United States will need to dramatically increase degree production (Grawe, 2017). However, “beginning in the mid-2020s many colleges will enter an extended period of shrinking enrollment pools” as the numbers of high school graduates are expected to decline (Grawe, 2018, p. 14). Thirty-two of the 50 U.S. states cannot meet educational attainment goals by having only traditional-aged students gain in earning postsecondary degrees (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2008). As the enrollments of “traditional” students on college campuses decrease, policymakers and campus leaders need to recognize and adjust to this change (Falk & Blaylock, 2010).

There are individuals who may be enrolled in or want to return to higher education, including “nontraditional students,” “post-traditional learners,” “today’s students,” students who work a significant number of hours, those who have stopped out from college, adult students, and part-time students. Students who enroll on a part-time basis are projected to outpace the enrollment of full-time students and make up to 40 percent of college students by 2023 (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). However, since 1970, the overall proportion of part-time students enrolled at public universities has decreased (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Even though research universities “educate the plurality of our nation’s undergraduates” (Owens-Smith, 2018), exclusively part-time students are significantly less likely than their full-time counterparts to attend public or private 4-year doctoral institutions – 11% versus 33% (Chen & Carroll, 2007).

This qualitative case study explored the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a 4-year doctoral level public institution. “Increased institutional rates of student success ...

are the result of a series of intentional institutional actions, policies, and practices” (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p.16), but existing research is lacking regarding how policies and practices can encourage persistence and degree attainment for part-time undergraduates (Cooper, 2015). This began to address that gap, with findings that make an important contribution to the literature on higher education policy by focusing on part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university. Supportive policies and practices include: degree programs designed for these students, favorable transfer-in policies, online programs and courses, flexibility, affordability, financial support, positive experiences in the institution, encouraging faculty, accommodating advisors/single points of contact, positive interactions with other academic and student support personnel, and encouragement from other individuals in the students’ lives. Barriers to part-time undergraduates’ success were due to lack of financial aid, assumptions of full-time enrollment within the advising process, academic program designs, price of college and the cost/benefit of services, a tuition surcharge policy, course mode of delivery limitations, difficulty with transfer-in policies, internship/practicum requirements, negative or non-responsive “front door” interactions, the feeling of a “stigma” especially due to policies and practices, lack of desirable opportunities to engage more with the campus, lack of course availability, difficulty with group work, lack of on-campus parking, and for some, difficult advising experiences.

In the final chapter, a Research to Practice Report recommends nine *Key Action Areas* for policymakers and practitioners to improve persistence and success for part-time undergraduates. These include: better data and data analyses, the use of “student portraits,” reform of financial assistance options, evaluation of state funding models and tuition and fee charges, reconsideration of academic programs, training for faculty and advisors, designing new

engagement opportunities, and recognizing in campus trainings and communications that all faculty and staff can positively influence the experiences of part-time undergraduates.

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“We See You”: Policy Supports and Barriers for Part-time Undergraduate Students

by
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DEDICATION

To those who kept me going through this journey -

To Kelvin, Dorsey, and Margaret -

We became a family while I pursued my Ph.D. and

I am blessed to have you beside me at the finish line.

I love you all more than I can ever adequately express.

Since my dissertation is done, I imagine that you are ready for our next family adventures!

To the part-time students who shared your experiences, insights, wisdom,

and stories of perseverance with me -

I hope that I have done them justice.

Your hard work, generosity, and pursuit of your dreams will stay with me always.

I see you.

“You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we’re apart...I’ll always be with you.”

— **A.A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh**

BIOGRAPHY

Ginger Burks Draughon is a native North Carolinian who was blessed to be born into a family that valued hard work and education. She grew up in Shelby, North Carolina where many family members, friends, and friends who are family have encouraged her along this pathway. After graduation from Shelby High School, Ginger enrolled at the first of three public doctoral institutions where she would earn a degree, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After completing her undergraduate degree in Chapel Hill, she then went on to earn her Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Georgia. Her professional career began in Georgia's Office of Planning and Budget, first working on performance evaluations and then becoming a budget analyst. She returned to North Carolina to work in the Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) as a budget analyst for the University of North Carolina System and several of its campuses. After working at OSBM, she then found her next professional home in the Finance Division of the University of North Carolina System Office. At the UNC System Office, she worked for ten years on a variety of topics and issues related to the state operating budget and related policies.

There, Ginger's belief that public higher education can indeed transform lives and improve our society continued to grow. She worked in a variety of areas related to the University's operating budget, providing information to the President, Board of Governors, executive and legislative budget staffs, and constituent institutions. Ginger learned an extraordinary amount about policy and budgets in the setting of a great public university system. There were a lot of long days and nights with a group of talented and motivated individuals working on topics such as campus enrollments, tuition and fees, student need-based financial aid, university personnel, and many others.

In 2012, Ginger began taking courses at North Carolina State University (NC State) as a non-degree seeking student. Within a short timeframe, she also had the opportunity to join the university as the Director of the Office of Finance and Administration's new Office of Cost Analysis. Combining her work and her studies at a great institution like NC State gave Ginger even further insight into her passion for public higher education. After realizing that she was learning an immense amount and truly enjoying the doctoral courses in the department of Educational Research and Policy Analysis, Ginger became a part-time student in the program's Fall 2014 cohort.

While enrolled and pursuing her Ph.D. as a part-time student, Ginger also continued to work full-time for the university. Along the way she was also blessed beyond measure with her partner in life, Kelvin, and two amazing children, Dorsey and Margaret. In her newly acquired spare time, Ginger will enjoy the opportunity to read for pleasure and plan new adventures with her family.

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“It’s hard to explain how a few precious things seem to follow throughout all our lives.”

— **Kenny Loggins, Return to Pooh Corner**

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Dr. David English and Dr. Bruce Mallette - you were wonderful professional colleagues and mentors long before I embarked on the journey to this degree. We worked together through some challenging times and enjoyed a great deal of collegiality across the aisles of the Academic

Affairs and Finance Divisions. It is a true honor to have great professional colleagues also guide me along this dissertation pathway.

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improve my work. Although one of my regrets is not having had a class with you, I certainly feel that I learned a tremendous amount from you through this dissertation process. You possess impressive abilities to get directly to the point, be extraordinarily gracious while doing so, and offer ways to expand and enhance the impact of my research. Thank you.

Other faculty in NC State's College of Education and the Educational Leadership, Policy, and Human Development program have all pushed me to learn more, grow as a scholar, and consider a broader perspective of higher education. Dr. Kay Moore created a stepping stone in her History of Higher Education course, where she encouraged me that I could pursue this degree and confirmed that I had more than just a passing interest in higher education. That was continued with the Foundations course taught by Dr. Joy Gaston Gayles, where our cohort bonded. Dr. Gaston Gayles encouraged our individual interests and passions with the reminder to choose a dissertation topic that we loved and that would motivate us. My knowledge and understanding of higher education finance, an area where I have spent most of my career, was expanded with the teachings of Dr. Paul Umbach. Dr. Stephen Porter pushed me to be a better researcher. Dean Mary Ann Danowitz was firm in her dedication to education and an unwavering encourager who always took the time to see me and my goals.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Once a world leader in the number of its citizens who had completed college, by the early 2000s, the United States had fallen to the global average among countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Grawe, 2017). The National Center on Public Policy and Higher Education has reported that the United States was in the top five nations based on the proportion of individuals who attend college, yet it dropped to 16th in the proportion who complete college (Hauptman, 2012). The Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce has estimated that “today, two out of every three jobs require at least some postsecondary education or training” (Carnevale, Garcia, & Campbell, 2019, p.6). In order to meet workforce needs, the United States will need to increase degree production by about 40% (Grawe, 2017). The U.S. government and multiple states have called for increasing the number of Americans with a postsecondary degree; similarly, in 2009, the Lumina Foundation set a national policy goal for 60% of adults to have a 2- or 4-year degree by the year 2025 (Kelly & Schneider, 2012; Lumina Foundation, 2013, 2015; Russell, 2011). By 2015, however, only 40% of American adults had achieved that level of education (Lumina, 2015). Meeting the 60% goal would require the completion of almost 20 million additional degrees (Lumina, 2015).

The Lumina Foundation also encouraged states to set their own individual attainment goals and to develop practices and policies to support them (Brosh, 2020). By 2018, 42 states had set individual goals for the percentage of their citizens with high-quality postsecondary degrees, certificates and other credentials (Brosh, 2020). Since my study is located in the Southeastern United States, it is important to examine the goals in that area. Goals set by most Southeastern states generally mirror the Lumina Foundation goal of 60% educational attainment (Brosh, 2020). For example, Alabama, Kentucky, and Texas all used some version of a 60% attainment goal (Brosh, 2020) In North Carolina, which set one of the higher goals, projections

indicate that 67% of jobs in North Carolina will require a postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2030, yet only 49% of North Carolinians ages 25-44 currently have that level of education (myfutureNC, n.d.-b). This translates to a gap between the 1.6 million adult North Carolinians who are projected to have high-quality credentials or postsecondary degrees by 2030 and the need for approximately 2 million to have attained a degree or credential. In fact, 39% of North Carolinians report that they have not reached their own desired level of education (myfutureNC, n.d.-b). North Carolina's stated goal as of February 2019 is that by 2030, 2 million working-age adults will have a high-quality credential or postsecondary degree (myFutureNC, n.d.-a). However, it was noted "[t]he need for postsecondary training and degrees is compounded by the differences that exist for people of different racial, economic, and geographic backgrounds" (Brosh, 2020).

Demographic changes taking place in the United States add additional difficulty to the need to increase college attainment levels. Fertility rates in the United States have declined since 2007 and therefore, the number of native-born children at college age will be in decline beginning in 2026 (Grawe, 2018). The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) indicates that between 2026 and 2031, the number of high school graduates is predicted to drop by 9% (Bransberger & Michelau, 2016). While this drop is not expected to be evenly distributed across all regions of the United States, it is still an important consideration. The expected decrease in high school graduates will have a direct impact on the traditional enrollment pools for colleges and universities, "beginning in the mid-2020s many colleges will enter an extended period of shrinking enrollment pools" (Grawe, 2018, p. 14). Thirty-two of the 50 U.S. states cannot meet educational attainment goals by having only traditional-aged students gain in earning postsecondary degrees (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2008). In

the definition used by Ziskin, Torres, Hossler, and Gross (2010), a “traditional student” is one who left high school, entered higher education in a predictable manner, and flowed through in a straight path. The numbers of traditional students on college campuses will continue to decline; thus, policymakers and campus leaders need to recognize this change and be prepared to respond and adjust to it (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). Policymakers will need to consider new approaches and focus on these changing demographics (Kelly & Schneider, 2012; Peters & Burks Draughon, 2017). As framed by Bosworth (2012), the traditional student pipeline will not be sufficient to meet the need:

Meeting these [post-secondary education completion] goals will be a huge challenge. Even with the most optimistic assumptions about high school graduation, college continuation, and degree completion, there simply are not enough traditional students to meet ambitious goals within existing patterns of attainment. (p. 105)

The challenge then is how goals for postsecondary degree attainment can be met during this time of dramatic demographic changes. How can the United States as a whole, individual states, university systems, and higher educational institutions create environments to foster the additional degree attainment needed when that growth will not be possible from traditional aged high school graduates? As noted by Grawe (2018), administrators should look at two ways: “reaching beyond traditional students or by increasing attendance rates within the traditional student population” (p. 103).

One of the groups that could help the nation meet postsecondary completion goals is individuals who might choose to enroll on a part-time basis. The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines part-time undergraduates as those

enrolled for fewer than 12 credit hours in a semester (U.S. Department of Education, 2015 & 2017). A brief discussion of the terminology used in my research is in order. Since little research has focused exclusively on part-time students, I have also utilized relevant information about adult learners, nontraditional students, and post traditional learners. As used in my document, the definitions are:

Table 1.1. Terminology and Definitions

Term	Definition and source(s)
<i>Part-time student</i>	A student who is enrolled for fewer than 12 credit hours in a semester (U.S. Department of Education, 2015 & 2017)
<i>Adult learner</i>	The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) indicates that “adult learners are a diverse group, typically age twenty-five and older, with a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds, adult responsibilities, and job experiences” (SREB, “Who”)
<i>Nontraditional student</i>	The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the “official” source of postsecondary student data for the federal government, indicates that “nontraditional” students are those who have one or more of the following characteristics: “being independent for financial aid purposes, having one or more dependents, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying postsecondary enrollment, attending school part-time, and being employed full-time” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, “Demographic”).
<i>Post-traditional learner</i>	Post-traditional learners are “individuals already in the work force who lack a postsecondary credential yet are determined to pursue further knowledge and skills while balancing work, life, and education responsibilities” (Soares, Gagliardi, & Nellum, 2017, p. v).

Throughout this document, I endeavored to use the terminology as used by the author(s) cited. While I have included research related to these other groups, I have noted issues with the use of the term *nontraditional*. Therefore, I use the term identified by the researcher and only use “nontraditional” when that is the term and definition used by the researcher in the literature I have cited. Due to issues with the term “nontraditional”, I refrained from the use of that term in defining my student population, opting instead to use *part-time student*, meaning a student who was enrolled for less than 12 hours for any nonsummer semester.

Part-time undergraduates are a group that is growing rapidly and projected to continue to grow (Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013; Bombardieri, 2017; Falk & Blaylock, 2010; Hussar & Bailey, 2016). Part-time undergraduate student numbers were projected to grow by 17% which is more quickly than the anticipated 12% growth of full-time undergraduate student enrollments between 2015 and 2023. These projections will result in a narrowing of the gap between the two groups and make it even more important to consider and address policy issues for part-time students (Cooper, 2015). By 2009, 38% of all enrolled postsecondary students were enrolled on a part-time basis (Baum et al., 2013). Soares, Gagliardi, and Nellum (2017) found that there were approximately 98 million people in the United States in 2016 who met their definition of post-traditional learners: “individuals already in the work force who lack a postsecondary credential yet are determined to pursue further knowledge and skills while balancing work, life, and education responsibilities” (p. v). By 2023, part-time students are projected to make up to forty percent of college students and growth in their enrollment will outpace that of full-time students (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). In fact, the National Center for Education Statistics noted in 2017, “the number of full-time students was 7 percent higher in 2017 than in 2007, while the number of part-time students was 10 percent higher” (Digest of

Education Statistics 2018, Table 303.10). Since 1970, the overall proportion of part-time students enrolled at public universities has decreased (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016).

Recent research (Causey, Ryu, & Shapiro, 2020) indicates that first-time, degree seeking students who begin by enrolling part-time in a higher educational institution are at a disadvantage for completing college. While 65.6% of students who enrolled full-time in Fall 2013 had completed a postsecondary credential six years later, only 34.2% of first-time part-time students had graduated in that same 6-year timeframe. In fact, 51.2% of the part-time students had left college altogether, and without earning a credential, or nearly two times more than the 26.1% of first-time full-time students who started in Fall 2013 (Causey, Ryu, & Shapiro, 2020). The data did show that 7.2% of the students who began on a part-time basis were still enrolled in their beginning institution in the sixth year (Causey, Ryu, & Shapiro, 2020). Seventy-one percent of students who began full-time in the Fall of 2013 at a public 4-year university had completed a postsecondary credential six years later. For their part-time colleagues at 4-year public institutions who began in Fall of 2013, only 37.2 percent had completed a credential six years later and almost 50% had left college without a credential (Causey, Ryu, & Shapiro, 2020). The Executive Director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Doug Shapiro stated, “With colleges and students under enormous stress because of COVID-19, it’s important for institutions and learners to keep in mind the unique challenges and needs of part-time students, even in normal times, to persist and graduate.”

Most policies at the campus, state, and federal levels were built around the “traditional student” (Ziskin et al., 2010). “Nontraditional” students in Markle’s (2015) study indicated they “felt marginalized by institutional policies they believed favored traditional students” (p. 277). While there is a great deal of research to support the importance of traditional students’

interaction with the institution in terms of their ultimate academic success, research about student success for “nontraditional” students (i.e., those who are low-income, part-time, enrolled in nonresidential institutions, attend multiple institutions, or are students of color) is very limited (Ziskin et al., 2010). Since research about policies that address the “nontraditional” student is lacking, policymakers and institutions who are interested in that population would have difficulty using research-based strategies to change policies or practices. My research addresses that gap by examining the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university and how policies and institutional practices impacted their experiences.

The research that does exist regarding success for “nontraditional” students often attributes success or lack of success to the characteristics or life circumstances of the individual students – things such as personal background and psychological indicators (Rowan-Kenyon, Swan, Deutsch, & Gansneder, 2010). However, there are other factors - such as perceived support from the campus, a feeling of belonging, financial aid availability, state policy supports, campus policies, and others that can influence the students’ long-term likelihood of completion (Lynch, Gottfried, Green, & Thomas, 2010; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2010). Lynch et al. (2010) encouraged an examination of “whether the widely accepted traditional model of higher education (i.e., student enters higher education immediately upon high school graduation, is financially dependent on parents, has little work experience, is enrolled full-time) applies to all students” (p.115). The authors hypothesized that if students and their needs were all the same and had not changed over the years then the traditional model was appropriate. However, if there had been variations in students’ characteristics and changes in education, then a reconsideration of the basic framework may be needed to better align “public policy, institutional goals and characteristics, and student needs” (Lynch et al., 2010, p.116).

The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines part-time undergraduates as those enrolled for fewer than 12 credit hours in a semester (Hussar & Bailey, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015 & 2017). Part-time students include many types of individuals with different life situations and experiences (Bombardieri, 2017). As described by Bombardieri (2017):

...even though they are a large proportion of the college population, part-time students have often been relegated to the shadows from a data, research, and policy standpoint. As a result, it is difficult to even identify the bright spots where part-time students are more likely to graduate, let alone figure out what those communities or institutions are doing differently. The effects of this limited knowledge extend to a broader difficulty with policy. (p. 17)

My research focused on policies and institutional practices that exerted influence, both those that supported and those that impeded progress toward degrees for undergraduate students who attended a public university on a part-time basis. Limited research has been done specifically about part-time students who attend public 4-year universities. Instead, most of the related literature is from studies of working students, adult students, community college students, or others labeled “nontraditional”. Students attending universities on a part-time basis face many struggles – not fitting into the “traditional student” mold, complex lives outside of higher education, and policies and practices that in large part were not designed with them in mind. Traditionally, related research has taken the approach of highlighting students’ characteristics that constrain their ability to participate in traditional models of higher education, rather than exploring ways that universities can adapt to meet their needs better (Bowl & Bathmaker, 2016)

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Part-time students are projected to be 40% of the college population by 2023, and the growth in their enrollment is expected to outpace full-time students (Hussar & Bailey, 2016), yet there is limited research on these students (Bombardieri, 2017; Ziskin et al., 2010). In fact, from 2007 to 2017, the number of part-time students grew 3% faster overall than the number of full-time students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Despite the fact that research universities “educate the plurality of our nation’s undergraduates” (Owens-Smith, 2018, p. 48), exclusively part-time students are significantly less likely than their full-time counterparts to attend public or private 4-year doctoral institutions – 11% versus 33% (Chen & Carroll, 2007).

Knowledge and understanding of part-time university students and what policies or institutional practices either support or detract from their degree pursuits could help policymakers and campus administrators understand ways to increase degree completion rates. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public 4-year doctoral level university as well as how policies and institutional practices impacted their experiences. Through a qualitative case study format and use of interviews as the primary data source, this study enhances the understanding of the real-life experiences of these students and the campus, university system, state and federal policies or practices that both positively and negatively affect their degree completion. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university?
2. What policies or institutional practices do these students believe impact their educational progress (persistence) or degree attainment (success)?

3. How do administrators at a public doctoral level university consider (or not consider) the enrollment of part-time undergraduate students in contexts such as policy setting and campus planning?

Theoretical Framework

Tinto and Pusser (2006) framed two models to examine the context of how institutions and policymakers could support student success. The first is the Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model and the second is the Model of Institutional Action. Their work is a useful framework for my study of how policies and institutional practices may impact the degree pursuits of part-time students. The researchers' models describe the existence of a specific context for each student's likelihood of success and how policies within and around that may affect the possibility of a successful outcome (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). While I approached the study from the students' experiences, it is not their individual attributes that I focused on, but rather "on the conditions within institutions" and the context established based on policies implemented at other levels (e.g., state, system, federal) that then impact the institution and its students (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 5). Tinto and Pusser's (2006) models provide a framework for my examination of how institutional actions and policies that originated both within an institution and outside of the campus can impact student success. This is consistent with their model, which focused on those actions of the institution that impact student success and ways that student success can be influenced by other policymakers.

Significance of the Study

The United States needs more individuals to complete postsecondary degrees, yet many potential students are unlikely to attend college full-time. In fact, due to both demographic and economic changes, in the near future, growth in part-time students is expected to outpace that of

full-time students (Falk & Blaylock, 2010; Hussar & Bailey, 2016). This did happen from 2007 to 2017 as the number of part-time students grew 3% faster than the number of full-time students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Yet since 1970, there has been a dramatic decline in the proportion of part-time students enrolled at public universities (Snyder et al., 2016). Data and policy lag the reality of both current and future part-time postsecondary students. Duderstadt & Womack (2004) described the common perception that:

it is through public colleges and universities that the educational, intellectual, and service resources of higher education have been democratized and extended to all citizens. The missions of these institutions reflect some of society's most cherished goals: opportunity through education, progress through research and cultural enrichment. (p.1)

Yet in 2017, despite the fact that 39% of total student enrollment was in public 4-year institutions, only 18.4% of the total part-time undergraduate student enrollment was in these same institutions (College Board, 2019). Given that there is an expected overall increase in the numbers and proportion of students who will be enrolled part-time, yet there has been a decline in that population at public universities, a better understanding of this population is needed. This study contributes to knowledge in a valuable and significant way by exploring part-time undergraduate students' experiences in a public doctoral level university and the institutional practices and policies that impact their journeys. The resulting data can help policymakers and institutions better understand this group and support these students' degree completion efforts.

Significance for research. Through this study, I endeavored to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university, as well as how policies and institutional practices impacted their experiences and degree progression. A portion of my

research also examined how administrators at the same public doctoral level university considered (or did not consider) the enrollment of part-time undergraduate students in contexts such as policy setting and campus planning. There is currently a lack of research about how policymakers and practitioners can make adjustments that will affect degree attainment for part-time undergraduate students in public doctoral level universities. As indicated by Hossler et al. (2008), “[t]hat students’ experiences within institutions are shaped by policies and everyday practices occurring on campus is undeniable, but institutions lack research evidence on the complex yet concrete realities of how these policies and practices affect student persistence” (Hossler et al., 2008, pp. 4-5). For the United States to remain competitive in the global economy, it is critical that a larger number of individuals obtain a baccalaureate degree. An important group for consideration are those individuals who enroll on a part-time basis. This qualitative case study makes an important contribution to the literature on higher education policy by expanding and enhancing the research on policies and practices that can impede or create support for this group of students.

Significance for theory. In this study I used two models formulated by Tinto and Pusser (2006) to focus “on the conditions within institutions rather than on the attributes of students themselves. We do so because it is too easy to see the absence of student success as solely the responsibility of students” (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 5). Their Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model examined the importance of postsecondary policy formation at campus, state, and federal levels and their Model of Institutional Action focused on how institutions can act within the context of their campuses to increase student persistence and success.

Most prior studies using Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) frameworks focused on applications of the Model of Institutional Action for student success (MIA) and therefore on the commitment,

expectations, support, feedback, and involvement (or engagement) to improve student success, but my study incorporates that model as well as the Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model (PP&SS). The PP&SS Model focuses on four key policy domains that impact student success: preparation, finance, access, and accountability.

Significance for practice. For the United States to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy, it is critical that more individuals obtain postsecondary education credentials. Since data shows that there are demographic changes leading to a stagnation or decline in the numbers of traditional high school graduates, it is imperative that policymakers and practitioners address barriers and supports for other types of participants in the postsecondary education environment. As described by Tierney (1997):

If academe is to succeed, then, out of necessity we must discover ways to develop curricular, pedagogic, and cultural activities that appeal to diverse groups rather than the chosen few... In order to improve we need to consider our language, our policies, and our actions. (p. xii)

This study focuses on the experiences of part-time undergraduate students and what policies and practices contribute to their success or failure. Many previous studies point to the attributes of students as the reasons why they do or do not complete their degrees (Bowl & Bathmaker, 2016). This study focuses instead on supports and barriers for part-time students' degree progress that are within the control of policymakers and practitioners. Even while policymakers have pushed for students to enroll full-time or to graduate in 4 years (i.e., which requires at least some full-time enrollment), it is also imperative to acknowledge that there are many individuals for whom full-time enrollment will simply not happen. While research shows us that full-time attendance does increase the likelihood of graduation, we must also

acknowledge that there are many individuals who can only progress toward an undergraduate degree by enrolling part-time. As such, there is value in learning what policies and practices may help support part-time undergraduate students and what might instead create barriers.

Overview of the Methodology

As described by Merriam (2009), a qualitative case study is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). In this case, a single-site approach was employed to describe and analyze policies and institutional practices that impact the persistence and degree attainment for part-time students in a public doctoral level university. This case study design was bounded by time - participants who have been enrolled part-time during at least one semester since Spring 2008. It was also bounded by place – the same state university in one Southeastern state. For the purposes of maintaining the confidentiality of student participants, administrator participants, and the institution itself, I have used a pseudonym of “Duncan University” for the institution.

Semistructured interviews with individuals who were currently or had been previously enrolled as an undergraduate student in the same public university on a part-time basis were the cornerstone of my research study; other data enhanced the study (Yin, 2014). Using purposeful sampling, I endeavored to interview individuals who were currently enrolled part-time students, recent alumni who were enrolled part-time for at least one semester, and individuals who may have been enrolled on a part-time basis but had not completed their degree. For the purposes of this study, they are collectively referred to as “students” or “student participants.”

Prior to conducting interviews, the beginning point for my study was to conduct a document analysis by reviewing the institution’s vision and mission statement as well as the strategic plan, particularly for any relevant information regarding part-time undergraduate

students. According to Merriam (2009), “documents are, in fact, a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (p. 139). This document analysis helped me to be more informed about the institution and about any information portrayed in its mission statement and strategic plan. I also reviewed some documentation about the history of Duncan University, for additional context for the institution. Following these reviews, I recruited and interviewed 23 student participants who met the study criteria.

After I completed the interviews with students and the resulting data analysis, there was a document analysis of policies and websites as a follow up to the information provided by the students. In this study, document analysis was primarily done as a means of locating, exploring, and analyzing policies and institutional practices referenced by the student participants (Bowen, 2009; McLendon, Tuchmayer, & Park, 2009). I used the document analysis to confirm a set of policies and institutional practices previously described by the student participants. I also interviewed administrators involved in the programs that enrolled the student participants, and others involved in enrollment planning and/or policymaking at the campus. Document analysis was done after conclusion of the student interviews but before the administrator interviews, so that I could tie students’ experiences to the policies and include relevant questions in the administrator interviews. As a result of the two sets of interviews, connections were made to policies and institutional practices that either supported or hindered the students’ degree completion goals. Document analysis continued through the completion of the study as needed to pinpoint applicable policies and practices. The multiple forms of data created the opportunity for triangulation and enabled greater understanding of the students’ experiences. With the convergence of data and triangulation, the findings or conclusions have greater accuracy (Yin,

2014). The collection and analysis of multiple methods also decreased the possibility that conclusions reflected the biases or limitations inherent in only one type of data (Flick, 2018).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in public doctoral level universities and how policies and institutional practices impacted their experiences. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the existing related literature. I first give context by providing definitions, data and demographic information about part-time students, and also include relevant literature about “nontraditional” students, adult learners, and post-traditional learners. To address the gap in literature between policy goals of higher education completion and the experiences of part-time students in public higher education, I explore the literature about these students and the institutional practices or policies that support or create barriers for success. Due to a dearth of research focused specifically on part-time students (Bombardieri, 2017; Stokes, 2006), I also include relevant literature about “nontraditional students,” adult learners, working students, and “post-traditional” learners. As I will discuss later, there are some concerns about the use of the term nontraditional, thus I have taken care to use that term only when the authors or researchers used that term in their own studies. Otherwise, for my research, I use the term “part-time” and the associated definition described below.

Definitions, Data, and Demographics

Definitions and data. The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2015), the “official” source of postsecondary student data for the federal government, indicates that nontraditional students are those who have one or more of the following characteristics: “being independent for financial aid purposes, having one or more dependents, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying postsecondary enrollment, attending school part-time, and being employed full-time”

(“Demographic”). While these types of undergraduates may be broadly categorized as “nontraditional,” they are not the minority. In fact, since 1995-96, at least 70 percent of undergraduates would be considered “nontraditional” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, “Demographic”). Of the population of undergraduates in 2011-12, about 74 percent had at least one of these characteristics (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, “Demographic”). Tinto (2012) stated:

[I]est we forget, so-called traditional students, who enroll full-time in a residential college or university immediately after high school, make up only a quarter of all college students. Most students do not live on campus. A great many work while in college, especially those of low-income backgrounds, and attend part-time. (p. 5)

My research focused on that particular subset of students, those who are or were enrolled as part-time undergraduates. I adopted the NCES definition of “part-time undergraduate student” which is an undergraduate student enrolled for fewer than 12 credit hours in a semester (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, “Demographic”). In Fall 2014, there were a total of 20,207,369 students enrolled in United States institutions of higher education. Of the students enrolled in degree-granting institutions, 7,753,394 (38.4%) were enrolled on a part-time basis (Snyder et al., 2016). Of those 7.8 million, 29% were enrolled in public 4-year institutions (a decline of 12.5% since 1970), 18.8% in private 4-year institutions (a decline of less than 1% since 1970), 52% in public two-year institutions (an increase of 13% since 1970), and 0.5% in private two-year institutions (Snyder et al., 2016). Since 1970, a large proportion of part-time students have shifted from 4-year institutions to 2-year institutions, and that change has happened within public higher education (Snyder et al., 2016).

By the fall of 2018, there were a total of 16,610,235 undergraduate students enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Of those 16.6 million undergraduate students, 6,343,100 (39.2%) were enrolled on a part-time basis. Out of all the students enrolled in Fall 2018, 10,865,027 (65.4%) were enrolled in 4-year institutions. Of those 10.9 million undergraduate students enrolled at 4-year institutions, 2,708,660 (24.9%) were enrolled on a part-time basis. Part-time students were more likely (57.3% compared to 42.7%) to be enrolled in 2-year institutions (Digest of Education Statistics, 2019).

For whatever reason, part-time students are “unable or unwilling” to be enrolled in higher education on a full-time basis (Tight, 1991). Part-time higher education is varied and needs consideration from multiple dimensions – it can “include evening, day, and/or night courses; distance, mixed methods, and face-to-face courses; switching between part-time and full-time status over the course of a student’s academic career; and special part-time degree programs” (Peters & Burks Draughon, 2017, p. 155; see also Tight, 1991). These types of options give part-time students an ability to create schedules to fit their lives and therefore the ability to complete a postsecondary degree (Peters & Burks Draughon, 2017). Most part-time students work full or part-time, are less interested than traditional students in out-of-class activities, and are able to embrace technology to assist in their education (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). This group of students represent the largest share of those who will attend college in the near future and can be referred to as the “newer students” of higher education (Falk & Blaylock, 2010).

Historical context. The original “nontraditional” students were the military veterans who used the GI Bill to attend colleges and universities after the end of World War II and the Korean Conflict (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). At that time, campuses made many accommodations for those students that benefited other “nontraditional” students who attended after them, even though

institutions mainly returned to focusing on traditional students until larger waves of “nontraditional” students began to arrive on campuses in the 1970s-1980s (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). By the 1970s, part-time student enrollment had increased and surpassed 40% in 1978 (4,592,435). Part-time student enrollment remained over 40% through the mid-2000s, when it decreased to a low of 37.7% in 2009 (Snyder et al., 2016). Recently, part-time student enrollment remained steady in the upper 30% range, with projections for part-time enrollment to reach 9 million students, or almost 40% of enrollments in 2025 (Snyder et al., 2016).

Who are part-time students today and in the future? O’Toole, Stratton, and Wetzel (2003) indicate that before state and federal legislators attempt to limit students who may choose to attend on a part-time basis, they need to first seek a better understanding of why that choice is made. According to those authors, “if both the individual and the nation benefit from increased education, then the reliance on 4- to 6-year graduation rates to assess colleges and universities may be inappropriate and policies that discourage part-time enrollment will need to be modified” (p. 535). The following information describes what is known about contemporary part-time students and projections for future part-time students in order to better inform this study and describe the policy context.

Age. Part-time enrollment is particularly common for students over the age of 23, (O’Toole et al., 2003) and they have been the fastest growing segment of individuals in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). For most people “college” brings to mind “young students, ivy covered buildings, dormitory life, and ‘the final four’ yet this stereotype of the 18-22 year old full-time undergraduate is really only about 16% of the population of higher education” (Stokes, 2006, p. 1). Based on data from NCES, 92 million, or 46% of the adult population in the United States participated in some form of adult education in 2001 and

approximately 8 million were enrolled in college or university degree or certificate programs on a part-time basis (Stokes, 2006). Between 1970 and 2000, enrollment for students younger than age 24 grew by 51%, but the increase in older students was actually three times that amount (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). It is projected that by 2026, 8.8 million individuals 25 and older will be enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

On average, part-time students are about 9 years older than their full-time counterparts (McCormick, Moore, and Kugh, 2010). Of the 7.8 million part-time students enrolled in higher education in 2014, only 496,000 were the traditional 18-19 years old, whereas over 7.2 million were 35 or older (Snyder et al., 2016). Bombardieri's analysis (2017) found that 64% of part-time students were age 24 and over, as compared to only 34 percent of full-time students. This can lead to issues of significant importance for the older students and the institutions that they attend.

If the institutional environment is youth-oriented, the adult undergraduate worker often has difficulty gaining validation and locating connected classrooms for learning engagement. Thus, classrooms representing policies and an ethos directed to younger full-time undergraduates create disjunctures for the adult student...All of this can feed into preexisting concerns that they will not fit in and that college is only for the young and mentally agile...some collegiate environments value and support adult workers, while others offer a tacit negative, if not conflictual, environment for adult learner involvement. (Kasworm, 2010, pp. 34-35)

In contrast to, or despite this challenge of potentially feeling disconnected or not fitting in, part-time students over the age of 24 are more successful, with graduation rates more than twice those of younger part-time students (Bombardieri, 2017).

Importantly, adult students, and particularly those who are enrolled on a part-time basis, likely have their primary identities in their employment, family, and other community responsibilities (Kasworm, 2010). For adult undergraduate students, these other parts of their world affect their participation, engagement, and sense of identity.

To understand the world of adult students who are workers is to understand their unique life world represented by their life biography of formal schooling, the trajectory of their work and career, their maturational stage of development, and their current experiential learning engagements in their key life roles. (Kasworm, 2010, p. 32)

Understanding adult workers who are also undergraduate students requires consideration of their sense of identity and how their motivation for the degree fits with their other roles. Markle (2015) indicated previous studies found that “[a]ge has a small negative effect on degree completion for men but not for women” (p. 269). Bergman, Gross, Berry, and Shuck (2014) studied factors that impacted persistence of adult students and an outcome of their research was that since campus environments play a significant role in helping adult students across the degree completion line, that additional research about student experiences in different types of institutions would be important.

Underserved or historically underrepresented populations. Part-time undergraduates are also much more likely to be first-generation college students and students of color (Chen & Carroll, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2015, “Demographic”). African American and

Hispanic/Latino students are more likely to attend part-time (Chen & Carroll, 2007; McCormick et al., 2010). A large part of the increase in part-time enrollments since 1970 is due to the overall increase in students of color (O'Toole et al., 2003). Among other variables where their characteristics tend to differ, exclusive part-time enrollment is more common for students of color and for students who have families (Cook & King, 2004; Ziskin, et al., 2010). Rabourn, BrckaLorenz, and Shoup (2018) similarly found that adult students are less likely than traditional-aged students to be white males and are more likely to be first generation.

Financial independence and family status. Over 70% of exclusively part-time undergraduates are classified as financially independent (Bombardieri, 2017; Chen & Carroll, 2007), while that is the case for only slightly more than 40% of full-time students (Bombardieri, 2017). Notably, Black students are more likely to be financially independent from their parents than are white students and female students are more likely to be financially independent than are male students (Lapovsky, 2008). As compared to their full-time peers, exclusive part-time undergraduates are much more likely to be married with one or more dependents, which may also explain why part-time undergraduates are also more likely to be employed during their degree programs (Chen & Carroll, 2007). Bombardieri (2017), based on an analysis of data from the 2011-12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, found that 23% of full-time students have dependents compared to 38% percent of part-time students.

Socioeconomic status. It is possible that financial dependence or independence is related to students' socioeconomic status (SES). Students from low socio-economic backgrounds represent a large portion of part-time students. For example, in 2012, 47% of part-time students received a federal Pell grant (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, "Demographic") which

generally meant that their family had an income below \$30,000 per year (Huelsman & Cunningham, 2013). Boumi, Vela, and Chini (2020) found that part-time enrollment was much more common among University of Central Florida students with lower family incomes. According to those authors, patterns of “non-normative attendance concentrated among students of lower social origins attending non-elite institutions” (Boumi et al., 2020, p.3). Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) found that across three state university systems, “high SES students [were] nineteen percentage points more likely to graduate than [were] low-SES students (74 percent versus 55 percent)” (pp. 37-38).

Gender. In 2012, over half of all part-time students were female (59%), or slightly more than the portion of full-time students who were female (56%) (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). From 1970 to 1998, the number of men attending part-time increased by 59%, but the number of women part-time college students during the same period of time increased by 190% (O’Toole et al., 2003). It is projected that by 2025, 39% of students in postsecondary education will be enrolled part-time, and 60% of part-time students will be female (5.4 million out of 9 million part-time students) (Snyder et al., 2016). Previous studies have found that gender has no significant impact on persistence (Markle, 2015). Markle (2015) found that women who enrolled part-time had higher levels of persistence.

Employment. Potentially related to lower socioeconomic situations and/or financial independence, in 2003-04, 83% of part-time students were working, and 53% were working full-time (Chen & Carroll, 2007). By contrast, 73% of full-time students worked, but only 23% worked full-time (Chen & Carroll, 2007). Bombardieri’s (2017) analysis of the 2011-12 data showed a slightly different comparison, that 19% of full-time students worked full-time while 42% percent of part-time students were also full-time employees. In addition to the value that

work experience might give students in terms of making career and educational choices, Lynch et al. (2010) indicated there may be positive attributes that are not commonly researched such as the idea that working students might add value to the overall classroom experience for other students.

To better understand students whom they classified as “mobile working students,” Ziskin et al. (2010) asked the students to describe their lives and routines. The students that they interviewed were quite varied in their life circumstances, yet they commonly described “heavy, highly structured daily and weekly schedules” that were delicate balances of their work, family and school obligations. Students tended to develop patterns where their weeks or their days were divided for work and school, according to what worked best for them, their families, and their childcare options. Often schoolwork occurred at the expense of sleep, and the days’ schedules were quite tight and could be difficult to handle if one thing did not work as expected/needed (Ziskin et al., 2010). The authors found that “with few exceptions, working students scheduled specific, limited time periods for school work, rather than taking the time necessary to complete assignments. Most participants made the homework fit their work schedule instead of fitting their schedule around the amount of homework assigned” (p. 82). Similarly, Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2010) found that working adult students in their study described their lives as a “stamina marathon” and a “horse-race” in which they were constantly tired. Similar to the findings of Ziskin et al. (2010), they found that students had very tightly coordinated and structured timelines and schedules for meeting their many obligations (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2010).

Kasworm (2010) and Perna (2010) both indicate that campus administrators and policymakers need to consider how institutional policies and practices can create support practices for educational access for students who work. This is important to discuss, but is

contrary to the traditional perspective of considering what works for traditional undergraduate students. Adult workers who are enrolled part-time in college have very complicated lives and multiple roles in those lives. As asserted by Kasworm (2010), it is critical that researchers and other leaders in higher education not consider these adult workers who are students as only students, but also acknowledge that they come to the educational process with other experiences and world views (Kasworm, 2010). These worlds outside of their student role can affect their choice of which institution and academic program in which to enroll (Kasworm, 2010).

Returning students. An interesting sub-population of part-time students are those that are returning to higher education from having not completed during an earlier time in their lives. Erisman & Steele (2015) indicated this population of students was highly likely to enroll exclusively part-time or vary between full-time and part-time enrollment, and only a quarter of the returning students did so on a full-time basis. This may indicate that states and institutions who seek to attract this population to complete their degrees will need to be prepared to accept and serve their desire to return as part-timers (Erisman & Steele, 2015).

Institutions chosen. Table 2.1 shows the breakdown of part-time students' attendance patterns using data from the NCES. Of all the students enrolled in Fall 2017, 11.4% (more than 2.2 million) were enrolled part-time in public 4-year institutions; however, very little research is focused on them.

Table 2.1. Fall 2017 Enrollment in Degree-granting Postsecondary Institutions.

Total enrollment	19,778,151
Total part-time students	7,702,010
# in 4-year institutions	3,976,563
# in public 4-year institutions	2,544,710

Note. Adapted from Table 303.55 U.S. Department of Education. Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019, *Digest of Education Statistics*.

The largest numbers of part-time students are in community colleges, but many part-time students pursue 4-year degrees (Cook & King, 2004; Huelsman & Cunningham, 2013). Working students may choose to attend regional campuses and community colleges due to “preferring how things are in these institutions” (p. 88) as compared to other types of institutions (Ziskin et al., 2010). Even state comprehensive universities generally have less than 25% of their students enrolled part-time (Varsalona, 2016). Exclusively part-time students are significantly less likely than their full-time counterparts to attend public or private 4-year doctoral institutions – 11% versus 33% (Chen & Carroll, 2007).

There were 19.6 million students enrolled across all institutions and all levels of degree programs in 2018. Of those, 14.5 million (74 percent) were enrolled in public institutions and 4.1 million were enrolled in public research universities. Of the total students enrolled in both public and private universities in 2018, there were 16.78 million undergraduates, 6.3 million of whom were enrolled part-time (or almost 38 percent) (“College Graduation Statistics,” 2020).

Different types of adult students are more or less attracted to different types of institutions, and those different types of students also then have different expectations of themselves and the institution they choose to attend (Kasworm, 2010). Rabourne et al. (2018) indicated “a greater proportion of adult learners attended for-profit, less competitive, and online institutions than traditional-aged students” (p. 29). Some literature indicates that adult students are overrepresented at entirely online institutions (Rabourne et al., 2018).

Community colleges are most often selected by adult working students who have limited college education and financial resources. Adult degree programs are more attractive to students with employer tuition reimbursement programs or whose employers have a particular history with an institution or degree program. Ziskin et al. (2010) noted students who also worked

seemed to prefer attending regional campuses and community colleges as compared to institutions that they perceived as “higher status.” The authors inferred that this suggested a broader sense of campus culture or characteristics was at work in students’ college choices (Ziskin et al., 2010). As Varsalona (2016) pointed out, 75% of state comprehensive universities had less than 25% of their students enrolled part-time and only about a third of all the state comprehensive universities had more than a quarter of their enrollments made up of adult students. Coulter and Mandell (2012) stated:

While adult students may indeed be the majority of undergraduates, they are by no means equally distributed across the university landscape. They might wish to enjoy the fruits of the best universities and colleges, but they can neither drop out of life to study full-time nor waste time fulfilling requirements designed for youngsters...In contrast, so called second-tier universities and community colleges, heavily dependent on enrollments, have eagerly responded to adult learner needs and concerns. Less inclined to revere the old ways of education, these institutions have embraced flexibilities of place, time, pedagogy, curriculum – anything that enhances access and promotes success for these students...The result is *de facto* segregation. Adults are funneled into community colleges, night schools (or their modern-day equivalents), distance learning institutions, and a variety of specialty degree-completion, accelerated, or otherwise adult-friendly programs that have cropped up across the United States. A testament to the popularity of such schools is the phenomenal growth of huge for-profit colleges, which now enroll hundreds of thousands of adult learners. (p. 41)

Despite the fact that research universities “educate the plurality of our nation’s undergraduates” (Owens-Smith, 2018), exclusively part-time students are significantly less likely than their full-time counterparts to attend public or private 4-year doctoral institutions - 11% versus 33% (Chen & Carroll, 2007). Other than a relationship to social status or employer push towards a degree, there are not clear distinctions explained for those who chose research institutions (Kasworm, 2010). Kasworm (2010) asserted that in fact, “research universities with highly competitive undergraduate admissions have presented uneven interest and support for undergraduates who have had a break in schooling, who desire to be part-time students, who have full-time jobs and families, and who have more limited involvement in the collegiate environment” (pp. 143-144), factors which have led to a limitation of these students’ access to research universities. In addition:

Examination of adult undergraduates in research universities suggests that they experience a more difficult and turbulent environment, one that is often unsupportive of adults and particularly of adult workers. Students suggest that the research university environment is not as responsive to their lifeworld given its restrictive academic practices, policies, and environment that privileges full-time young adults. Further, adult workers who are undergraduates in research universities suggest they need a complex set of strategies, expectations, and beliefs to survive and persist in comparison to adult workers in community colleges and adult degree programs in liberal arts colleges. (Kasworm, 2010, p. 37)

Kasworm's (2010) research suggested it is possible the observation of higher enrollments of adult enrollments in regional public universities and community colleges is due to more supportive environments including targeted student services and degree programs.

Part-time degree programs. By the late 1980s, the National University Continuing Education Association reported that increasing numbers of U.S. adults were seeking out higher education degrees and some institutions had developed degree programs in which they could complete degrees on a part-time schedule (Hegener, Rowan, & Goldstein, 1985). Part-time programs are often able to tailor their scheduling to meet the needs of students who are employed or have families by offering day, evening, and even exclusively weekend courses. These types of programs also often offer financial aid to students and offer course credit for out-of-the-classroom based work (Hegener et al., 1985). Perhaps due to the existence of part-time degree programs in those disciplines, students who work full-time were most likely to enroll in majors related to business and management, health disciplines, and the arts and humanities (Flowers, 2010).

Likelihood of completion and time to degree. Unfortunately, research shows that undergraduate students who enroll part-time are significantly less likely to graduate than students who attended college full-time (Chen & Carroll, 2007). In the original Department of Education *Toolbox* report, part-time enrollment status was labeled as "hazardous" (Adelman, 2006; Carroll, 1989) to degree completion. In a Delta-p test analysis included in the *Toolbox Revisited* (Adelman, 2006) report, part-time students from the 1992 12th grade graduation class who attended a 4-year institution on a part-time basis at any time in their program were found to be 35% less likely to complete a bachelor's degree (Delta $p = -.3545$, $p=.001$). The negative correlation should be viewed with some skepticism since the number was significantly high for

the number of students who were identified as part-time, but is concerning for higher education policy (Adelman, 2006).

Chen and Carroll's (2007) report also found that undergraduates in the 1995/1996 cohort classes who attended college exclusively part-time had lower completion rates than full-time students. Of students who attended exclusively part-time, only 15 percent had earned a degree (no bachelor's degrees earned) or certificate by 2001 – or within six academic years. Of exclusively full-time students, by contrast, 64% had completed a degree or certificate by 2001 (44% had earned a bachelor's degree). Of the students who had a mixed “enrollment intensity” (some full-time and some part-time study over the duration of attendance), 46% completed a degree or certificate by 2001 (Chen & Carroll, 2007).

Bombardieri's (2017) analysis showed that of students who began on an exclusively part-time basis, 41% dropped out before they began their second year. Part-time male students and African American students were even less likely to complete than other students (Bombardieri, 2017). A recent study by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2017) found that attending full-time for even one semester increased the likelihood that community college students would persist and ultimately complete a certificate or degree. As compared to dependent students who enrolled in college after high school, nontraditional students are more likely to drop out and are less likely to graduate (Zerquera, Ziskin, & Torres, 2018).

Researchers have taken different approaches to calculating the number of students who study on a part-time basis. Using a longitudinal study from a 1990/1994 survey with a national sample of more than 7,000 students, O'Toole et al. (2003) examined the enrollment rates and persistence of part-time students and found that 40 to 50% of students enrolled part-time during at least one “nonsummer” term. This study indicated that part-time enrollment was twice as

common as previously indicated. Furthermore, between 52 and 62% of respondents had stopped out for a term or enrolled part-time at some point. Still, 40 to 60% of the students were still enrolled or had graduated after 5 years, which was comparable to the 60% persistence rate of part-time students. O'Toole et al. (2003) suggested policymakers need to focus more attention on students enrolled part-time, especially since the population of part-time students is expected to grow.

The biggest impediment to part-time students' degree completion is the lengthier timeframe required to complete (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). A related issue can be limited opportunity for interaction with faculty members and other students, which can mean there is then a lack of support system (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). More data about the numbers of credits part-time students typically enroll in each semester would be helpful, so that policymakers and institutions could better understand the common timeline for part-time undergraduates' degree completion. For example, a student who takes a half-time undergraduate load of 6 hours per semester would typically need 10 years to complete a bachelor's degree that requires 120 credit hours (Bombardieri, 2017).

Mixed enrollment strategy. In Adelman's (2006) analysis, of the students who started in postsecondary education in 1995/96, only 12.2% indicated they attended part-time, yet an additional 40.7% indicated they had at some points attended both full-time and part-time. Based on transcript records, part-time students accounted for 48% of postsecondary students (Adelman, 2006). Boumi et al. (2020) studied students' enrollment strategies at the University of Central Florida from 2008 to 2017 and found students using full-time, part-time, and "mixed" enrollment strategies. Those researchers also found that students with lower family income were more likely to enroll part-time as compared to students with high family income.

Part-Time Student Policy Research

Although part-time students have not received much scholarly attention (Bombardieri, 2017; Carroll, 1989; Falk & Blaylock, 2010; Smith, 1978), the rise of students enrolled on a part-time basis justifies additional research. Smith (1978) used two categorizations to consider part-time students - continuing (i.e., students pursuing a degree completion) or career education (i.e., students with an existing credential who were trying to improve their career prospects). At that time, higher education was becoming more accessible to part-time students, but policy continued to focus on full-time students (Smith, 1978; O'Toole et al., 2003). By the late 20th century, several studies that included some attention to part-time students were initiated through the U.S. Department of Education, including the "Toolbox" reports (Adelman, 2006) and a 1995 study by McCormick, Geis, and Vergen as cited in O'Toole et al., 2003. These authors also suggested attention be focused on part-time students, especially with the anticipated growth in their population.

Kasworm's 2007 proposed model of Adult Undergraduate Student Identity did acknowledge that characteristics of the adult undergraduate students (e.g., learner roles, life roles, life experiences, and knowledge mastery) interact with the formal practices of higher education (e.g., policies and practices, academic programs, faculty and staff relations, and institutional clusters and systems; Soares et al., 2017). Specifically, with respect to adult learners (a large share of part-time students), Pusser et al. (2007) noted:

The policy community has long stereotyped adult learners, seeing them as primarily displaced workers and homemakers seeking to enter the job market, a group in need of relatively short-duration job training. This view has neglected the richness and complexity of the lives and aspirations of adult learners. As a

result, most state policy attention and resources have coalesced around vocational retraining programs, contract education and non-credit-bearing programs that provide short-term job skills and employment. Such programs are certainly needed, but if policymakers support them exclusively, they neglect some of adult learners' most crucial needs. (pp. 15-16)

As states have decreased public financial support of higher educational institutions, there has been a corresponding rise in the costs to students that may have contributed to an increase of students enrolling or desiring part-time enrollment (Pusser, 2010). The growth in “nontraditional” students may be tied to the development of a global knowledge-based economy with the underlying expectation that more individuals would need higher education (Lynch et al., 2010). As noted by the Lumina Foundation and others, national college completion goals, needed for the new economy, cannot be fully met with just degree completions by traditional students (Bosworth, 2012; Dougherty & Natow, 2015; Dougherty & Reddy, 2013). The rise of students enrolled on a part-time basis and the need for more citizens to complete degrees justifies additional study even though part-time students have not previously received much scholarly attention (Bombardieri, 2017; Carroll, 1989; Smith, 1978). With regard to post-traditional learners (i.e., workers who are pursuing a postsecondary credential) Soares et al. (2017) stated:

Still, the traits and factors that positively and negatively impact post-traditional learner success are not well understood. That will need to change in order to develop and implement effective policy solutions. (p.5)

Policy Barriers and Supports for Part-Time Undergraduate Students in Public Universities

As described by Tinto and Pusser (2006), “the postsecondary policy environment is remarkably complex, multilayered, and mediated to a great degree by local, state, and

institutional culture and political contexts” (p. 19). In many, if not most, higher education policy situations, it is the combination of multiple policy actors and their actions that actually sustain the effort over time (Gornitzka, Kogan, & Amaral, 2005). To gain an understanding of the policy and institutional practices that may influence the degree completion of part-time students, I needed to consider this complex environment of policy actors and actions. As described in the PP&SS model from Tinto and Pusser (2006), that includes federal, state, and institutional policy actors and policies.

Federal data limitations. When media accounts discuss “college students,” most adults envision their children, not their coworker or sibling who is enrolled in college (Adelman, 2006; Bombardieri, 2017). Adelman (2006) asserted that our ways of counting and describing students are inadequate for the diversity and complexity of the contemporary college student population. This creates dissonance within public discourse, as universities are called upon by legislators and others (who are thinking about traditional-aged, full-time students) to explain seemingly low 4- and 6-year graduation rates (Adelman, 2006). These dynamics could be improved by better ways of both counting and describing the student population (Adelman, 2006).

Public discourse and research have been impeded by the way that data has been collected and compiled by the NCES, “the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education” (National Center for Education Statistics – About Us, 2019). The major source of postsecondary information from NCES is the annual Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) survey (National Center for Education Statistics – About Us, 2019).

Traditionally, the student data have been limited to collection of fall term and focus largely on full-time students, with marginal attention to students who do not follow a traditional pathway (Adelman, 2007; Bombardieri, 2017; Lipka, 2012). This has created difficulty in understanding

the paths of part-time students and it means that they can be left out of policy altogether, especially given the concept that “what’s measured gets managed” (Bethune & Huler, 1998). The federal tracking of student graduation rates has historically been limited to the rate of graduation for those students who begin the fall semester as first-time full-time students (Bombardieri, 2017). In the fall of 2009, 5 million students started college, but 2.4 million did not fit the traditional federal definition for counting in graduation rate calculations; nearly 40% of those were excluded due to being enrolled part-time (Lipka, 2012). Only recently (2017), is the data published by the federal government beginning to shift; in the fall of 2017, new “outcome measures” were published, which include some data on part-time students. With that change, about 1.2 million part-time students who started college for the first-time in 2008 or who were entering as transfer students at a new institution were then covered in the outcome measures data. This represented an important change and helps to make these students more visible to policymakers (Campbell & Bombardieri, 2017). However, the data are not broken down by student characteristics such as age, race/ethnicity, and gender which creates significant challenges to further analysis and understanding (Soares et al., 2017).

The most commonly reported timeline for tracking graduation rates is 6 years from initial enrollment (Boumi et al., 2020). However, “truly grasping the scope and span of educational careers requires much longer time horizons” (Boumi et al., 2020, p. 3). In their article about University of Central Florida students, the authors were able to use a full 22 years of data to “establish the eventual attainment of delayed completers or of the 20% of rapid completers who finished college after turning 25” (Boumi et al., 2020, p.3).

Federal, state, campus, and employer aid. Since part-time students are more likely to be from low socioeconomic groups, it is important to assess the availability of financial aid to

assist them in paying for college. Part-time students are eligible for the federal Pell Grant and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). Yet Bosworth and Choitz (2002) noted that in data they examined less than 0.5 percent of students who enroll less than half-time receive a SEOG. In 2001, only 1% of students who received Pell Grants were enrolled less than half-time (Bosworth & Choitz, 2002). There is, however, significant evidence that the federal Pell Grant program does benefit older students and contributes positively overall to their enrollment (Lapovsky, 2008). Perkins and Stafford are the major federal loan programs for students; yet only the Perkins loans are available for students enrolled less than half-time or who are not enrolled in a certificate or degree program (Bosworth & Choitz, 2002; Lapovsky, 2008). Both the SEOGs and Perkins Loans are designed for students with “exceptional need,” and there are very limited funds available (Bosworth and Choitz, 2002). Dynarski and Scott-Clayton (2013) described the changing landscape of financial aid and summarized existing research about student aid. They acknowledged the variation amongst students in higher education today and the limited research that has been done to examine aid amongst different types of students:

Students today are a much more heterogeneous group than they were forty years ago, and the effect of a given program may vary by student characteristics such as income, age, and family status. Whether aid ‘works’ may depend on who is receiving the aid and what outcomes they aim to achieve through postsecondary education...in most cases the available evidence focuses only on average program effects. (p. 69)

Nearly 50% of part-time students enrolled in higher education in 2011-12 received some kind of federal aid (full-time = 71.4%), almost 38% percent received a federal grant (full-time =

47.4%), and almost 39% received a federal loan (full-time = 55.2%) (Radwin, Wine, Siegel, Bryan, and Hunt-White, 2013). While part-time students are eligible for Pell Grants, if they are enrolled less than half-time, only the price of tuition and fees (no living costs) can be covered, so overall they receive a lower amount of aid than their full-time counterparts (Lapovsky, 2008). “Nontraditional” (especially older and part-time students) were not the focus when most of the existing financial aid policies were designed; instead, most programs were designed for financially dependent, traditional students (Lapovsky, 2008). Since aid policy considers students to be independent at age 24, “nontraditional” students may have less access to aid (Lynch et al., 2010). “Like most of the financial aid programs currently in place, the need-analysis system for determining ability to pay was designed for families of dependent students and modified to accommodate the different circumstances of independent students” (Lapovsky, 2008, p. 146).

Although federal aid is very limited for part-time students, it probably does a better job of reaching them than do state or institutional grants (Lapovsky, 2008). “Full-time students are more likely than part-time students to receive grant aid from each source, but the differences are greater for state and institutional grants than for federal grants” (Lapovsky, 2008, p. 150). Part-time students are “disadvantaged in terms of the financial support that they can receive from their institutions. They are usually not eligible to apply for financial assistance programs such as scholarships, assistantship positions, tuition waivers, and student loans” (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005, p. 914). This ineligibility may be a key issue that leads to lower completion rates, since the availability of financial aid has been linked to an increased likelihood of graduation (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). State and campus-based financial aid programs are most commonly directed towards traditional-aged students and/or those who attend full-time (Bosworth & Choitz, 2002; Erisman & Steele, 2015). As of 2002, only about fifteen states had aid programs specifically

targeted to less-than-half-time students or had opened their general state grant programs to part-timers (Bosworth & Choitz, 2002). West Virginia's Higher Education Adult Part-time Student Program, for example, provides grant awards, based on need, to cover tuition and mandatory fees (Erisman & Steele, 2015). In the research by Erisman and Steele (2015), stakeholders noted the lack of state financial aid availability for part-time and/or "nontraditional" students as the second largest impediment to increasing enrollment for this group of potential students. As evidence that there is possibly a large demand from adult students for state-based financial aid opportunities, when Tennessee opened up its lottery-funded free community college program "Tennessee Reconnect" to all adult residents in 2018, far more potential students applied than were expected. Higher education officials had originally projected that 8,000 adults would apply, but by April 18 of that first year, almost 12,000 had submitted applications (Smith, 2018).

Although low-income adults were more likely to have applied for and received aid than traditional students, they receive less aid on average and are less likely to receive grants (Cook & King, 2004). This may be due to low-income adults being more likely to attend lower-priced institutions that also offer less institutional grant aid but also due to less grant aid available to students who are part-time. Those low-income adults who borrowed generally borrowed more than traditional students – perhaps due to higher annual borrowing limits for independent students (Cook & King, 2004). There is also a "work disincentive" built into the current method of assessing students' need for financial aid since students who work are "taxed" a greater portion of their income as available to pay for college. "The more they work, the less aid they are eligible to receive, potentially creating a destructive spiral" (Lapovsky, 2008, p. 148). This significantly impacts part-time students who may be trying to work in order to pay for college.

Beyond federal, state and campus-based aid, adult students may benefit from education subsidies or other related financial support from their employers. The availability of this type of employer-sponsored aid varies over time and is somewhat unpredictable (Bosworth & Choitz, 2002; Mason, 2014). Support for employees engaged in higher education can help businesses bring new ideas and skills into to their companies. In 2004-05, approximately 45 percent of adult learners (students 25 and older) received some type of employer assistance, which might have included paying for the costs, having programs offered at their place of work, or salary while they are in classes (Lapovsky, 2008). Federal tax policy, though, can be detrimental to working part-time students because it treats any employer tuition reimbursement as a taxable benefit (Lynch et al., 2010). However, Mason (2014) found that the number of companies providing tuition assistance to employees has been decreasing. There is some evidence to suggest that even when employer assistance is offered, it may be concentrated in a way that benefits workers who are already higher paid and better educated (Bosworth & Choitz, 2002). Furthermore, some students indicate that the “strings attached” to employer tuition reimbursements were concerning to them, and even when available, they may opt out of them (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2010).

Of course, employer support cannot cover all the needs of part-time students. As the numbers of part-time student enrollments have increased, there is a growing need for a reevaluation of financial aid programs, to ensure that financial aid is made available to part-timers and not limited to full-time students (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). As asserted by Huelsman and Cunningham (2013), a review of federal financial aid policies and their impact on “nontraditional,” and particularly part-time students, is in order. Similarly, state and institutional policies also need reexamination. Erisman and Steele (2015) extended this to indicate that all levels of financial aid programs need to be adapted to support students who enroll on a part-time

basis. There is likely a need for more work in this area, such as programs for flexible emergency financial aid that may be extremely important to part-time students (Lapovsky, 2008).

State policies – decrease in public funding and increase in costs to students. As state appropriations for public colleges and universities have declined, tuition and fee costs have soared (Flowers, 2010). Both Flowers (2010) and Pusser (2010) highlighted state trends to shift the burden of cost of higher education (and the benefits) to a model of private rather than public good. This shift has likely contributed to an increase in students enrolling on a part-time basis as they may consider working more to pay for their education along the way, including stopping out for semesters to earn money to return in later semesters (Flowers, 2010; Pusser, 2010). This suggests that given current financial trends, it is reasonable to expect an increasing trend toward part-time enrollments (Flowers, 2010; Pusser, 2010). Adult learners, in particular, tend to reengage in higher education when there are economic downturns, which is also the same time that states pull back on higher education funding. Over time, this has had the result of pushing some individuals away from public higher education and toward private institutions (Pusser et al., 2007).

State policies - performance-based funding in state higher education. For public institutions, the states they are in or university systems that they are a part of may create policy barriers or supports for part-time students. State funding, although declining in many areas, is still an important source of funds for the institutions' direct instructional missions. Historically, most state funding for public higher educational institutions was based on student enrollment numbers (O'Toole et al., 2003). However, beginning with the State of Tennessee in 1979, many states have implemented performance-based funding policies tying state funding for public universities to particular goals, such as student retention and/or graduation rates (Shulock, 2011).

By 2015, 33 states used some type of performance budgeting structure (Dougherty, Jones, Lahr, Natow, Pheatt, & Reddy, 2016).

These performance-based funding policies can create important incentives or disincentives. Previous version of performance-based funding models for higher education were largely abandoned, but many states have recently recreated or re-engineered those performance-based models, referred to as “performance funding 2.0,” according to Shulock (2011), “as a way to increase efficiency and reward institutions for access and success” (pp. 1-2). The metrics used in performance-based funding 2.0 (PBF 2.0) typically include student retention rates and 4- to 6-year graduation rates although some states now include “milestone” or incremental student outcomes such as course or credit hour completion (i.e. completion of 60 or 90 credits) (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013). Complete College America, the Lumina Foundation, and Gates Foundation have endorsed and even funded states’ efforts towards performance funding (Dougherty & Natow, 2015).

Potentially positive results of PBF 2.0 can be to solidify or simplify educational goals for institutions, policymakers, and the public (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2015). For institutions, some have been able to strategize to generate resources during difficult financial time periods. However, if incentives are focused only on 4-to 6-year degree completion; do not acknowledge “milestone” or incremental student gains; do not acknowledge diverse populations; and do not align measures/rewards with state goals, the effects could be negative (NCSL, 2015). In fact, according to Dougherty et al. (2016), “the predominant finding is that performance funding does not have a significant impact on 4-year graduation numbers and rates for institutions and states” (p. 142). Some research has suggested the use of “milestone” measures and “on-track indicators” can be a positive policy for improving college completion

(Offenstein, Moore & Shulock, 2010). In a study by Zarkesh and Beas (2014), the authors noted “the use of performance indicators and performance-based funding is a double-edged sword that has both benefits and drawbacks to institutions of higher education” (p. 64).

In their study of the PBF policy in the state of Illinois, Blankenberger and Phillips (2014), indicated that it would be crucial for Illinois to address particular demographics [that mirror the types of students who generally attend higher education part-time] to meet its goal for 60% of working age adults to hold a postsecondary credential by the year 2025. “To meet its lofty goals for completion, the state (Illinois) must address traditionally underrepresented students, including minorities, low-income, underprepared, and adult students” (Blakenberger & Phillips, 2014, p. 9). For that state, the use of the IPEDS measure of degree completion (which tracks a traditional cohort of first-time full-time first year students) was one of the most controversial discussions of metrics. University and community college leaders whose student populations were primarily “nontraditional” were particularly concerned about the use of this measure (Blankenberger & Phillips, 2014). In some states, student credit hour completion “milestones” or “momentum points” have been used instead of traditional retention and graduation rates, to avoid disadvantaging institutions that serve a more “nontraditional” or part-time student population. Other states have used weightings or premiums for institutions that serve more “nontraditional” students, as an attempt to overcome potential issues (Blankenberger & Phillips, 2014; Dougherty et al., 2016; NCSL, 2015).

According to data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), 30 states had performance-based funding policies in place, with four more states moving to a performance funding model (NCSL, 2015). According to Dougherty et al. (2016), by 2015 there were 33 states using some type of performance budgeting structure and several others were considering

such programs. Some states' programs would be categorized as Performance Funding 1.0 programs but others have moved towards Performance Funding 2.0 programs (NCSL, 2015). A consideration of the types of metrics used is important, "particularly in their application to institutions that serve or might be able to serve more part-time students" (Peters & Burks Draughon, 2017).

State, system, and/or campus policies - tuition and fee charges. The way that tuition and fees are assessed can unnecessarily increase costs for part-time students, an example of this being stair-step charges that top out at a full-time rate versus charging on a per credit hour basis (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). Part-time students may also question the value of paying for things like dorms, athletics, student activities, fitness centers, and other similar amenities. Since these types of programs are not valued highly by many part-time students, institutions and states may consider options with pricing differentials or allowing part-timers to opt out of some charges (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). This may even include implementing cost-cutting measures to bring costs and services in line with what "nontraditional" customers are willing and able to pay (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). Across the United States, different levels of authority regarding tuition and fees reside with the campuses themselves, governing or coordinating boards, and states, so the potential policy actor varies based on control of charges to students. It should be noted even in states with "free college" proposals to completely eliminate tuition, the programs are typically limited to full-time students, which could indicate a lack of policymaker consideration for students who are enrolled part-time for reasons other than cost (Bombardieri, 2017).

Kramer, Holcomb, and Kelchen (2017) indicated "as pressures related to efficiency, affordability, and completion mount" (p. 7) state legislatures and higher education systems have increasingly looked toward policy changes such as charging for "excess" credit hours. The first

“Excess Credit hours” (ECH) policy was adopted in North Carolina in 1992. Typically, these policies charge students an additional fee for credits taken beyond those needed to obtain a degree. As noted by Kramer et al. (2017) this is “usually between 115% and 130% of the degree’s usual required credits.” In general, the stated goal is to reduce students’ time-to-degree. The authors’ study found “students from marginalized backgrounds (i.e., first generation and low-income) appear to be most adversely affected by ECH policies” (p. 3), most notably in the form of increased student debt. The researchers also found no evidence that the tuition surcharges actually incentivized students to graduate on time or change their course-taking behaviors, perhaps “due to the lack of information students have about ECH policies” (p.22) and the fact that impact to students is delayed until they exceed the allowable number of credit hours. Finally, it is important that the Kramer et al. (2017) note that there is a possibility that the impact is greater because tuition surcharges impact students at the same time that they also exhaust federal loan eligibility.

Campus context, policies, and interactions. Markle (2015) found that students “with higher levels of university satisfaction and confidence in graduating were less likely to consider withdrawing” (p. 275). However, issues can occur when students’ experiences are vastly different from the expectations of faculty, policymakers, and student support services professionals (Ziskin et al., 2010). In these instances, an unfortunate social distance can occur which further challenges the students’ efforts towards completion (Ziskin et al., 2010). The low proportion of adult undergraduates studying part-time in public 4-year institutions “may suggest campus environments that are not accessible to adult students and that do not provide instruction and services that are responsive to adult workers” (Kasworm, 2010, p. 29). This campus environment or campus context was the focus of Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) MIA. Literature

about part-time and “nontraditional” students points towards support and engagement, design and delivery of courses and programs, campus services and policies, institutional planning, additional or near-campus resources, and campus culture for potential campus action to improve the success of part-time students.

Student support and engagement. “Student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college *and* what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (Kuh, 2009, p. 683). Most historical models that examined student attrition patterns, such as those by Spady, Tinto, and Pascarella, relied heavily on socialization or “engagement” as crucial to keeping students enrolled and progressing towards their degrees; however, “nontraditional” students are less likely to be influenced by the typical engagement initiatives (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Jacoby (2015) indicated “although...more than 60% [of today’s college students] attend part-time or part of the academic school year, little is known about their engagement patterns and college experiences” (p. 289). Adult students interact less with others on campus than their traditional-aged peers and further research “should examine what a supportive environment might look like for an adult learner” (Rabourn et al. 2018). Goncalves and Trunk (2014) found that most nontraditional student participants in their study “said they would join a club or organization that was specifically geared toward the needs of nontraditional students” (p. 167).

The student engagement models and plans at institutions need to be adapted for part-time students since most are older and do not need the traditional pipeline to adulthood model of college student development for 18-22 year olds (Kasworm, 2010; Ziskin, et al., 2010). Bean & Metzner (1985) found that the significant difference in attrition between “nontraditional” 2-year college students was that those students were more influenced by factors outside of the school

environment, whereas traditional students' attrition reasons were more due to the relationship with the institution. Kember's (1989) model of persistence for distance education students drew from the work of Tinto as well as Bean and Metzner and found similar results to indicate that distance education students' attrition was primarily due to external issues such as jobs and family obligations (Boskovic, 2017). The multiple life roles of part-time students are important for institutions to consider relative to their potential involvement in campus activities:

...students' time is a critical and finite resource that directly impacts their ability to engage in academic and out-of-class activities. By necessity, they select their campus involvements carefully. The relative value of a campus activity when compared with other priorities is a major factor in their decision to participate.

(Jacoby, 2015, p. 293)

There are often disconnects in the resources offered to "nontraditional" students versus the support that the students themselves seek (Trowler, 2017). Part-time students may have more limited opportunity for interaction with faculty members and other students, which can mean there is then a lack of support system (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). However, their success can be increased with support from faculty and campus administrators (Levin, Montero-Hernandez, & Cerven, 2010). For example, Levin et al. (2010) found that working students' confidence increased when class discussions included time management and ways to balance their jobs and their coursework. As the working students' confidence improved, they began to self-identify as achieving and have the internal persistence to continue their degrees (Levin et al., 2010). Closer monitoring by the institution and by faculty teaching these students, along with additional supports (e.g., funding and peer support), can also have a positive impact on their likelihood of degree completion (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005; Whitehead, 2010). A mixed methods study by

Whitehead (2010) of at-risk part-time counseling students found that access to personal and academic supports such as funding, peer support, and academic confidence were significant factors in support of retention and completion.

Classroom interactions. Tinto (2012) indicated for all students, but particularly for part-time students, “the experience of college is primarily the experience of the classroom. Their success in college is built upon their success in the classroom” (p. 6). Due to this, his assertion was that campus retention and graduation efforts needed to focus on the classroom. In fact, in a later iteration of the Model of Institutional Action, Tinto (2012) specifically indicate the goal was to create a “framework for institutional action that places the classroom at the center” (p.6). Ausburn (2011) indicated faculty could enhance adult learners’ experiences by being more available and approachable through virtual means as well as by using a more practical approach to assignments. In their study at a small private college in New Jersey, Goncalves and Trunk (2014) found that most of the nontraditional students they interviewed felt that their interactions with faculty were positive. Similarly, Zerquera, Ziskin, and Torres (2018) explained nontraditional students were in class most of the time that they were on campus and therefore faculty were their most consistent point of contact. In their study of faculty viewpoints of nontraditional students, Zerquera et al. (2018) pointed out that most faculty “had themselves followed traditional college-going pathways, including full-time enrollment, dependent status, and part-time or no outside employment” (p. 40). Thus, there was often a disconnect “between their own experiences and the experiences of students they serve” (p. 43) and as a result, faculty often had to adapt their viewpoints to relate well to nontraditional students (Zerquera et al., 2018).

Design and delivery of courses and programs. While it is often assumed that adult learners are best served by distance education, students themselves typically seek out in-classroom courses in their region, scheduled at times that fit around their work commitments (Kasworm, 2010). Key points to timely completion for adult workers are consistency, long-term planning, and the potential for accelerated learning (Kasworm, 2010). Rabourn et al. (2018) found that adult students generally pursued flexible options such as online courses, part-time enrollment, and were often transfer students. Lack of course availability and course times that do not work for their schedules are obstacles to nontraditional students' degree progression (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014). Students expressed a need to know that the institution is committed to offering the entire program at the same time or via the same method, so that they can plan their courses in sequence (Ehlers & Schneckenberg, 2010). The implementation of this could be much different than a traditional model in which "classes are organized at scheduled times in a fixed location on the assumption of full-time attendance" (Ehlers & Schneckenberg, 2010). Part-time students need the ability to schedule courses and access academic advising around their personal and professional lives. This includes the need to schedule in such a way that a student could complete a degree program without ever needing to attend a class during the hours that they need to be at work; generally, this shows a need for night and weekend scheduling options (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2010). Competency-based options or offerings on faster timeframes (less than a traditional semester, e.g. accelerated or compacted schedules) are highly valued (Kasworm, 2010; Varsalona, 2016). Furthermore, part-time students engage further in their coursework by having opportunities to integrate their work experiences or add knowledge directly related to their jobs (Kasworm, 2010). Faculty also need to be aware that attendance

requirements and group work projects could be more challenging for working adult students (Varsalona, 2016).

Campus services and policies. Campus services can be structured to provide support for part-time students, but they require deliberate thought and design (Lynch et al., 2010). For example, registration and courses can be offered online, in the evenings, or on weekends to benefit students who might be working during the day. Campuses could consider allowing students to have longer time horizons to complete degrees, rather than holding them to institutional or state-defined timeframes (Lynch et al., 2010). Faculty and other academic advisors, financial aid offices, and other student support services need to be accessible to individuals who work, perhaps through virtual options, thereby reducing or eliminating undue hardship on the student (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2010). Braxton et al. (2014) specifically indicate that part-time students need an assigned advisor whom they meet with periodically, at times that are convenient for the student. Credit transfer policies could be revisited (or streamlined) with part-time students in mind (Stokes, 2006; Varsalona, 2016). Working adults, for example, may have begun a degree in one state but moved due to a career change (Stokes, 2006). Efforts to streamline transfer policies can be of great benefit to these students (Varsalona, 2016).

In addition, campuses could reconsider their campus master plans and designations of physical space. Part-time students would likely require less space for things like dormitories and student organizations (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). However, since they are more likely to be juggling work and school schedules, convenient spaces on campus that could be devoted to studying between classes or between work and school are needed (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2010). For example, Austin Peay State University and Portland State University have created student

resource centers to focus more on adults with lifestyles and responsibilities different from those of traditional students (Varsalona, 2016).

The more recent “nontraditional” students value “convenience, flexible programming and/or class scheduling, credit for life experiences, career-focused learning, career development and placement services, and financial aid packages” (Falk & Blaylock, p. 26). It would be helpful for colleges, states, and accrediting agencies to be willing to evaluate students on a more individualized basis and consider granting course credits for relevant prior work experience (Lynch et al., 2010). One way to facilitate this might be through university credits already offered through the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), College Level Examination Program (CLEP), and American Council on Education (ACE) (Lynch et al., 2010).

Institutional planning. There is scant research about whether or how institutions strategically plan for a larger number of part-time students in higher education. Due to a growing population and an increased market perspective of higher education, the demand for part-time education will continue to increase into the future (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). It is unclear whether institutions are considering or planning for these shifts in population. Falk and Blaylock (2010) found that institutions have not planned and are continuing not to address the large demand from part-time students. They called for institutions to “consider how changes in college student body characteristics should prompt college leaders to alter their strategic thinking about many aspects of campus offerings, facilities, operations, services, and pricing” (p. 15). It is important for campus institutional planning groups to consider part-time students on their campus and the impact on their datasets, including future enrollment forecasts (O’ Toole et al., 2003).

Additional on-or-near campus resources. Additional issues for part-time students can be mitigated through the enhancement of resources either on or near university campuses. These

needs include healthcare options, transportation, and childcare availability (Lynch et al., 2010; Ziskin et al., 2010). Part-time students, whether traditional-aged or older, and whether working or not, are more likely to have dependents and thus could benefit from affordable, quality childcare available either on campus or very close to campus (Lynch et al., 2010; Ziskin et al., 2010). Interestingly, the availability of urban mass transit surrounding Portland State University benefitted working adult students who pursued degrees there as part-time students (Varsalona, 2016).

Family support. Another concept is to consider that “[f]or adult students in particular, perceived level of support from family members and friends also predicts positive psychological outcomes such as reduced vulnerability to stress and higher levels of self-esteem” (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2010, p. 96). As a result, having resources available for friends and families of part-time students, or including them in campus activities would be a way to provide additional support. Jacoby (2015) indicated:

...the support networks for commuter students generally exist off, rather than on campus including: partners, parents, children, siblings, employers, coworkers, and friends. Although these individuals can be supportive, students must negotiate with family, employers, and others to establish priorities, responsibilities, and time commitments. These negotiations are more difficult if significant others do not understand both the challenges and opportunities of higher education, as do campus-based advisors, counselors, and others who generally provide support to students. (p. 293)

Campus culture. Access, responsiveness, and relevance are key priorities to individuals who are students, adults and also employees (Kasworm, 2010). They will be most “at home” in

institutions where institutional policies as well as the faculty and staff clearly value their presence (Kasworm, 2010; Ziskin et al., 2010). Sundt, Berry, and Ortiz (2017) pointed out that “responsiveness” was both how long it takes for a student to get a response from a staff member, but also “symbolic indicators such as the effort the institution makes to acknowledge the presence of online students in the campus community. Responsiveness gets communicated through policies and procedures, such as office hours.” (p. 87)

Adult workers as students value being part of an academic world – but they require an academic world that connects with their understandings and their lifestyles of limited access and participation. The challenge for higher education is to create new paradigms across institutions that establish relevant and responsive standards for engagement and support of adult workers. It is highly probable that when institutions establish a set of understandings, program and delivery designs, and services for the adult worker, they will create a responsive environment that also serves the younger (17-to 24-year old) adult worker. (Kasworm, 2010, p. 40)

Hagedorn (2015) called this “institutional receptivity” and the level of which the institution recognized and accommodated older adult learners when the environment was originally designed for traditional-aged students. She stated that often “a series of micro-irritations or offenses that may build to a crescendo of dissatisfaction and resentment” (p. 313) could then lead to additional challenges in retention and success.

Positive feelings come from “one-on-one interpersonal connections in interactions on campus” (p. 83) while negative feelings about institutions are often characterized by feelings of judgement or helplessness (Ziskin et al., 2010). In the research of Ziskin et al. (2010), examples of situations that generated positive feelings ranged from a professor who developed a “buddy

list” of students’ names and contact information to be shared with the class to personal interactions signing in for reading lab. On the negative side, some students felt as though they were talked down to by campus services staff or other students thought they had academic difficulties. The students indicated this could play into concerns or feelings that they already had, thus magnifying the impact of the negative interaction (Ziskin et al., 2010).

It is important for campus leaders, faculty, and student services providers to be aware of subtle ways that social reproduction can occur based on a campus culture for traditional students or for students with similar socioeconomic situations (Ziskin et al., 2010). Unfortunately, “nontraditional” or part-time students in higher education can feel isolated, invisible or overlooked; but campuses could shift their cultures to make it less difficult and thus improve their likelihood of success (Ziskin et al., 2010).

Understanding that you belong on campus – and that an institution believes in that belonging and your potential – are important assets in succeeding as a student. Privileged students most likely take this acceptance for granted and trust implicitly in its truth...Students’ comments suggest that combating the expectation of being judged saps their energy, complicates their interactions on campus, and undermines their academic success. In this way, the norms and practices of educational institutions, including the institution of higher education research, channel students toward class- and race-defined roles that reflect their current positions, thus undermining the potential for social mobility and the transformative purposes students often cite as the reason for going to college.

(Ziskin et al., 2010, pp. 87-88)

Examples of this are described in Kasworm’s (2010) study of adult undergraduates at research institutions. Students were wary of feeling out of place and often “encountered policies,

personnel, and messages that suggested the institution was a youth-exclusive enterprise” (Kasworm, 2010, pp. 156-157). The adult students felt this “otherness” and not accepted into the research university culture, an “environment for the best and brightest” (Kasworm, 2010). As a result, a common feeling was that of needing to prove themselves and to find solutions to their own problems without expecting institutional support practices to help (Kasworm, 2010).

Varsalona’s study (2016) found the key factors for public comprehensive universities providing support for adult learners were:

- flexibility and convenience for programs, courses, and services;
- a strong access mission and regional locations;
- opportunities for accelerated completion such as credit for prior learning, competency-based education, and use of default scheduling;
- focusing on career-based opportunities by aligning programs with regional market needs, providing career information for students, and offering career assessments;
- giving students individualized attention such as more accommodating student services, small class sizes and customized educational pathways;
- integrating a culture of adult student-focused concepts such as faculty awareness, peer mentoring, tailored first-year and orientation programming, and mental-health counseling; and
- reconsidering retention and outcomes for adult students (for example engaging students at critical points, changing advisement, and offering tutoring for adults).

Higher education policy language about part-time students. The traditional aged, full-time student who lives on campus and is involved in multiple activities is no longer the norm nor represents the majority of college students, yet that continues to be the type of student who

receives the focus of policymakers, researchers, and usually the institutions that they attend (Beeler, 2016). These traditional students are who faculty and staff expect to have on campus; yet, the reality is quite different, given the numbers of today's college students who are actually "nontraditional" (Wolf-Wendel & Ruel, 2002). Campuses and policymakers may even need to reconsider the use of the term "nontraditional" because it "implies that these students are somehow nonnormative" (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2010, p. 110). Lynch et al. (2010) contended that the term "nontraditional" may be a red herring that allows higher education institutions to avoid considering changes that can meet the needs of this population, including changes in course offerings, course scheduling, financial aid, and pedagogy. According to Lynch et al. (2010) the term "nontraditional" is not only pejorative but also inappropriate since they are now the "typical" student. Unfortunately, much of the literature and research that is framed as advocating for "nontraditional" students can actually be viewed as paternalistic because it comes from a basic concept that these individuals begin higher education from a deficit position due to their educational choices (Lynch et al., 2010). It is particularly critical to consider given that this is a growing segment of the higher education market that tends to be made up of individuals from underrepresented groups (Lynch et al., 2010). Currently, instead of institutions adapting to the needs of these students, these students have to adapt to the institutions' expectations for traditional students (Lynch et al., 2010).

A better approach might be for policymakers and institutions to view academic status as a continuum (not solely "traditional" or "nontraditional"); even better, institutions could begin to understand the added value and contributions of these students (Lynch et al., 2010). Kasworm (2010) recommended that instead of thinking of themselves as bridges for students, that institutions consider themselves to be more like airport terminals where students can come and

go while accessing needed educational opportunities. Stokes (2006) asserted that “these so-called ‘nontraditional’ adult learners juggling jobs and family while studying part-time and working full-time or part-time are the new tradition in higher education” (p. 1). Since “traditional” students are now the minority in higher education, if policymakers, researchers, and institutional leaders reconsidered the use of the term “nontraditional,” it might allow for a more complex discussion of contemporary students and their successes and struggles in public higher education. Paying more attention to the diversity of students and their experiences would, in the long term, enable better policy at the federal, state and campus levels. Part-time students are one group who would benefit from such a shift.

Summary of existing literature about part-time students in public universities.

In most existing literature, part-time students are simply lumped into the broader category of “nontraditional” students, and thus it is quite difficult to know much specifically about the part-time student population. Many of the existing studies of “nontraditional,” part-time, working, and/or adult students ascribe any lack of success as due primarily to the students’ own attributes. Those studies do not consider the interaction of policy with part-time undergraduate students’ experiences. There is room to provide more research about the impact of policies and institutional practices on those students’ experiences. This gap is addressed in my research, which can then enable policymakers and campus administrators to more fully understand the impact of their decisions on the educational outcomes of the broader student population, not just traditional undergraduate students. This is an important component in making undergraduate degree completion an accessible reality for more Americans. By focusing on policy impacts to the persistence and success experiences of part-time undergraduate students at a public doctoral

level university, this research can help move the United States towards a more competitive position in the global knowledge economy.

Institutional Action and Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Models as a Theoretical Framework

Certainly, within higher education, the “typical” expected pattern for a student is one who has recently graduated from high school and then enrolls full-time in college (Ziskin et al., 2010). However, as previously discussed, the need for more individuals to have university degrees will not be met with this population. It is important then to examine the experiences of current part-time students and the policies and practices in higher education that may contribute to or detract from their degree pursuits.

My focus on the experiences of the students, rather than viewpoints of those who created or implemented the policies helped me to discover how institutional practices and policies assist or impede part-time students’ success. The student interviews as the cornerstone to point out the policies and practices turned the power dynamic from the policymakers and administrators and even away from traditional students, instead to the perceptions of individuals who are typically left in the background of public higher education. By collecting the stories of 23 students at the same public doctoral level university and understanding their interaction with institutional practices and policies, I was able to discern ways that universities and policymakers may support or impede the educational progress of part-time undergraduates at a public doctoral level university.

Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) models. Tinto and Pusser (2006) asserted that a disconnect exists between theory, research, and practice in the realm of student access and persistence in higher education. I chose their models as my theoretical framework because I desired to use an

exploration of student experiences to then flip to understanding the ways that policies and institutional practices impacted those experiences. It was important that unlike other models about student attrition and retention that focus on the individual students' characteristics, Tinto & Pusser's (2006) models also included attention to the role of the institution and other policymakers. They did note that little has been done to research the effect of policies on student persistence (Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, & Wakhungu, 2008; Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

That students' experiences within institutions are shaped by policies and everyday practices occurring on campus is undeniable, but institutions lack research evidence on the complex yet concrete realities of how these policies and practices affect student persistence. (Hossler et al., 2008, pp. 4-5)

I chose to use the models developed by Tinto and Pusser due to their focus on the importance of policy and institutional action items as important contributors to students' persistence and success, rather than student characteristics. As noted by Tinto (2012), his research "sought to shed light on the role played by the academic and social environment of an institution in the success of its students" (p.vii).

Tinto and Pusser (2006) used the term "persistence" to mean students' enrollment over time whether continuous or not and whether resulting in degree completion or not; while "success" in their definition (while they also acknowledged that other things may constitute success) is the completion of a degree. Students who choose to enroll on a part-time basis have done so for reasons that are important to them and may make the most sense for their individual life context. Much of the literature and many theories suggest that the problem for them in their persistence and success are the very things that make them choose part-time enrollment. For institutions and researchers to focus on those things as the primary issues when they are not

typically things the students can or will choose to change (e.g., age, employment, ethnicity, financial independence, family, socioeconomic status) creates an situation where there is no reasonable way to match the students' needs with what the literature says will help them to persist and complete a degree. The goal of this research was to give perspective around the policies and practices that policymakers and practitioners could affect to increase the likelihood of success for part-time undergraduates. My choice of the Tinto and Pusser models allowed me to shift my perspective away from student attributes to those policies and institutional practices that part-time students found impactful to their experiences.

Tinto and Pusser's (2006) article had two primary components, both of which are applicable in my study. Their PP&SS model examined the importance of postsecondary policy formation at campus, state, and federal levels and their Model of Institutional Action focused on how institutions can act within the context of their campuses to increase student persistence and success. Tinto and Pusser (2006) posited that it is necessary to focus "on the conditions within institutions rather than on the attributes of students themselves. We do so because it is too easy to see the absence of student success as solely the responsibility of students" (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 5).

Tinto and Pusser (2006) outlined a model of the policy context where institutions operate within federal and state policy that in turn influences campus actions and the probability of student success. The authors also noted the importance of institutional policy. Figure 2.1 shows their PP&SS model of how each student's context for success is multifaceted and then "within and around" that are "policies that may shift the probability of student success" (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 31).

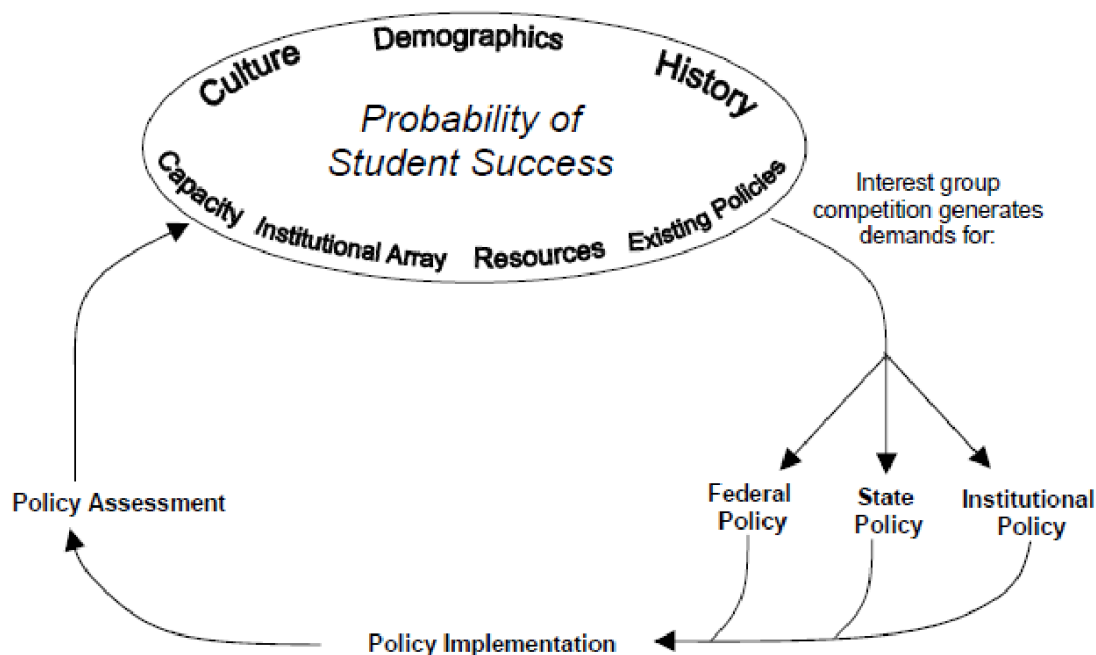


Figure 2.1. Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model by Tinto & Pusser.

Note. Postsecondary policy and student success model by Tinto & Pusser from “Moving from Theory to Action: Building a model of institutional action for student success” by Tinto, V. and Pusser, B., 2006, National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. Retrieved from: https://web.ewu.edu/groups/academicaffairs/IR/NPEC_5_Tinto_Pusser_Report.pdf

Tinto and Pusser (2006) elaborated to define the following key domains of postsecondary policy that can have the most impact on student success.

1. Policies Shaping Student Preparation: P-16, early assessment, teacher preparation, high standards, and alignment of standards and assessments;
2. Finance Policies and Student Success: state support, institutional aid, federal student aid, tax policy, and tuition policy;
3. Access Policy and Student Success: outreach, capacity, articulation/transfer, and remediation; and
4. Accountability Policy and Student Success: assessment, accreditation, state mandates, and market competition. (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, pp. 22-29)

I used the framework of Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) models to examine the literature and assess the data from interviews that I conducted. This is consistent with Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) work which focused on aspects of the institution that impact student success and which can also be influenced by the institutions or policymakers. Much of this model is focused on policymaking

external to the institution itself while the other model, described below, gives more attention to policies that are within the ability of campus or institutional actors to affect.

Figure 2.2 depicts Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Model of Institutional Action, which considers the ways that institutions can act within the campus context to impact student persistence and success.

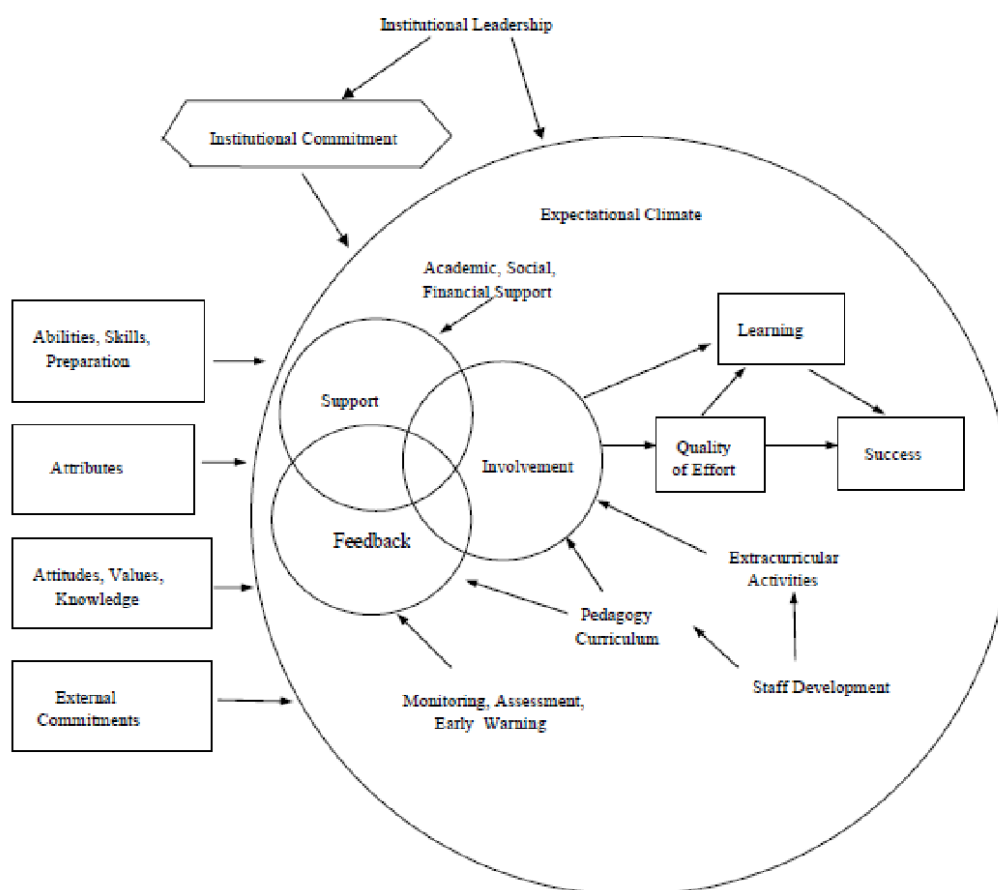


Figure 2.2. Elements of a Preliminary Model of Institutional Action by Tinto & Pusser.

Note. Elements of a preliminary model of institutional action by Tinto & Pusser from “Moving from Theory to Action: Building a model of institutional action for student success” by Tinto, V. and Pusser, B., 2006, National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. Retrieved from: https://web.ewu.edu/groups/academicaffairs/IR/NPEC_5_Tinto_Pusser_Report.pdf

Five conditions that promote student success and are also within the ability of the institution to control or change –*commitment, expectational climate/campus climate, support,*

feedback, and involvement (or engagement) – were identified by the authors. Commitment was noted as perhaps the most important, and is “more than just words ...it is the willingness of the institution to invest resources and provide the incentives and rewards needed to enhance student success” (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 6). *Commitment*, as defined by Tinto & Pusser (2006), focuses on institutional engagement or dedication which is, as the authors acknowledge, “a reflection of institutional leadership” (p. 12). “Institutional commitment to student success in turn sets the tone for the *expectational climate* for success that students encounter in their everyday interactions with the institution, its policies and practices, and its faculty, staff, administrators, and other students” (p. 10). Notably, in a later book, Tinto (2012) dropped institutional commitment from the list of items for consideration of student retention and graduation.

The *expectational climate* or “campus climate” sets the context for expected student, faculty, and staff behavior (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Tinto & Pusser pointed out the importance of faculty expectations in the classroom and the role of the president or chancellor in setting the tone for the institution (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Furthermore, both formal and informal advising are a way of expressing the institution’s expectations of students (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). As described later by Tinto (2012), students’ expectations of themselves are shaped by the expectations of the faculty and of the institution. Further, “[h]igh expectations are a condition for student success, low expectations a harbinger of failure” (p.7). Advice that students receive should help them “[know] what to do to succeed” in the institution, in their program of study, and in the individual courses in which they are enrolled (Tinto, 2012, p. 10). “Expectations” as part of the Model of Institutional Action also include setting the expectations for: the amount of

effort students should put in for classroom learning, student behavior, requirements for degree completion (Tinto, 2012).

Support for students is directly tied to their persistence and success through financial aid, advising, academic support, and social support (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Tinto (2012) particularly stressed the importance of support during the first year and support in the classroom. Academic support can include developmental or remedial courses, tutoring, study groups, supplemental instruction, first year seminars, or summer bridge programs, among others. Tinto (2012) also noted support might include helping students to build self-efficacy, or social supports such as counseling, mentoring, and faculty or peer advising. Support also includes financial support in the form of differing types of financial aid (Tinto, 2012). Social support programs span a wide range of campus programs including advising, mentoring, residential life, career and health services, and services for subgroups of students. Tinto (2012) further elaborated:

To make [support] matter, however, requires that institutions go beyond making it available to those who wish or have time to access it. Institutions must carefully align support to the learning needs of students in the classroom and must adopt policies that facilitate student success in the classroom. (p. 53)

Feedback, for students about their performance, perhaps more relatable as assessment, is also a component of the Model of Institutional Action (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). “Students are more likely to succeed in institutions that assess their performance and provide frequent feedback in ways that enable students, faculty, and staff alike to adjust their behaviors to better promote student success” (p. 7). Feedback can include assessment of students to be used for course placements, assessments in the classroom regarding students’ learning and faculty teaching, early-warning systems, assessment and course redesign, and institutional assessments

of the student experience (Tinto, 2012). Of all of these, “the most effective form of assessment is that which monitors actual student performance in the classroom” (p.63). *Involvement*, more commonly called engagement, or also known as academic and social integration, is also important to students’ persistence and success (Tinto & Pusser, 2006; Tinto, 2012). The emphasis for involvement is critical to be integrated in classrooms and laboratories, especially since that may be the only place that some students are routinely interacting with one another and with the faculty (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). “The more students are academically and socially engaged with faculty, staff, and peers, the more likely they are to succeed in college” (p. 7). Involvement or engagement can take place through structures such as learning communities and service learning. However, it is important to specify that “[i]t is not simply the degree of involvement that affects retention, but the way involvement leads to forms of social and academic membership and the resulting ‘sense of belonging’ (Tinto, 2012, p. 66). Further, Tinto (2012) notes the difficulty that institutions may have with promoting student involvement, especially on campuses where large numbers of students have other obligations like work and family.

Prior studies that utilized Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) frameworks. Most prior studies using Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) frameworks focused on applications of the MIA and therefore on the commitment, expectations, support, feedback, and involvement (or engagement) to improve student success, with limited attention to the PP&SS. My study focused on both models and gave particular attention to policies and institutional practices. By expanding to include both models, I was able to better see the interaction of policy with students’ experiences and also to frame ways that policymakers at all levels could either impede or support the success of part-time undergraduate students.

Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy (2011) used Tinto and Pusser's framework in their study of student attrition. Their findings indicated the important factors in a student's intent to withdraw were different by the year of study and by the university they attended. For students who left or considered leaving the university in the first year, factors of commitment to the course, expectations of the university, and support were significant. For those students, further study and attention needed to be given to Tinto & Pusser's definitions of "expectations" because it may be more about the students' expectations than the institutions' expectations. Their study also found that significant factors for second-year students' likelihood of leaving were different, being more about commitment but rather than institutional commitment, instead it was the students' academic confidence. So, first year students' concerns were more directed towards the university, and after that students shifted toward concerns more about themselves. Based on the results of their study, Willcoxson et al. (2011) cautioned that "institutional actions related to attrition and retention need to represent responses appropriate for the specific institution's demographics as well as the [students'] year of study" (p. 347).

Cigdem (2017) used the Tinto and Pusser (2006) framework as one piece of a conceptual model in a study about former English Language Learners (ELL) in a developmental English program course in a community college. The findings indicated students felt that the academic support was the most important piece to help them persist and graduate. Administrators in the study reported that their institution had the needed institutional commitment and demonstrated that in multiple ways (Cigdem, 2017). McDaniel (2016) used Tinto and Pusser's model as a conceptual framework and focused primarily on the institutional action portion of their model. Due to the fact that affirmative action policies in the state where the study was conducted had been eliminated just prior to the research work, McDaniel did give some attention to the policy

context and found support for an adapted version of Tinto and Pusser's model in her study of institutional actions of a selective public university with successful outcomes for Black and Hispanic students. In particular, the concepts of institutional commitment, financial support, student involvement (engagement), academic support, and social support were important to the recruitment and persistence of Black and Hispanic students. Furthermore, faculty pedagogy was perhaps better explained and more relevant than the original model's feedback concept. In addition, campus climate which McDaniel related to Tinto and Pusser's "expectations" concept was significant for student participants, and McDaniel suggested may be better described as "sense of community" or "sense of belonging" (p. 143). Finally, the researcher found that specifically targeted recruitment efforts were critical elements of success for Black and Hispanic students' outcomes in the selective public university.

Each of these prior studies lend important information to my research. Tinto and Pusser's construct has two distinct parts, one, the PP&SS model, was somewhat less developed and has been less prominent in research. It showed the influence of not only institutionally-controlled policies and programs, but also the potential influence of federal and state policies. For public institutions, there can be significant interconnectedness of federal, state, and campus policies. The second model from Tinto and Pusser (2006) was a MIA. That portion has been utilized by multiple researchers and is focused on the conditions within the direct control of an institution that can influence student success. Willcoxson et al. (2011), Cigdem (2017), and McDaniel (2016) all found support for components of the Model of Institutional Action. I used both models as I endeavored to learn from students what programs or policies they saw as significant barriers or supports to their educational pursuits, which gave additional insight into the models as set forth by Tinto and Pusser (2006).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

Having an interest in knowing more about one's practice, and indeed in improving one's practice, leads to asking researchable questions... In fact I believe that research focused on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's lives. (Merriam, 2009, p. 1)

As Merriam (2009) states above, qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to approach their research questions through the perspective of the study participants, and is an important method for improving higher education practice. Because "a central characteristic of all qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (p. 24), Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that constructivism undergirds a qualitative study. According to Yin (2014), "the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p. 4). Much like other types of qualitative research, in qualitative case studies the researcher is "the primary instrument of data collection and analysis," is on a "search for meaning and understanding" and uses "an inductive investigative strategy" to reach the end product which is "richly descriptive" (Merriam, 2009, p. 39).

A case study was appropriate for this research due to my interest in a real-world, contemporary situation (experiences of part-time students and policies that support or impede their success) and since the context (a public doctoral level university) of the case is important (Yin, 2009). A case study approach is focused on a particular bounded system that is to be studied, described, and analyzed (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and includes multiple types of data such as interviews, documents, observations, and audiovisual materials

(Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, social science research can “critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (Merriam, 2009, p. 34). These descriptions of qualitative research and case studies guided my study.

I used a single site case study design that was bounded by time — participants who had been enrolled part-time during at least one “nonsummer” semester between Spring 2008 and Spring 2019, and place — participants who were enrolled at the same public doctoral level university in the Southeastern United States. I also examined the history, mission, student demographics, and other important information for appropriate context. The site location for the single site case research study was a public doctoral level institution in the Southeastern United States, referred to in my study as “Duncan University” in order to maintain confidentiality. There is some literature to suggest that part-time students may have more difficulty feeling as though they belong at master’s and doctoral level institutions (Kasworm, 2010). Therefore, I chose to focus specifically on a doctoral level institution to explore experiences of part-time undergraduate students in that setting. Student interviews were conducted during the 2018-19 academic year. Duncan University is a public university and was established through legislative action in 1891 and opened in 1892. It was an original member of the state’s public university system. African American students began to be allowed admission in 1956, and the university became co-educational in 1964 (Duncan University, n.d.-e).

Important facts and information about Duncan University are shown below. Additional profile data about the institution is shown in Table 3.1.

- Duncan University had almost 2,400 part-time undergraduates in Fall of 2018.

- 2,100 of those part-time undergraduates were seeking a degree or certificate. Of those 2,100 degree/certificate seeking part-time students, almost 1,600 were continuing students, approximately 500 were transfer-ins, and fewer than 20 were first-time part-time students.
- It is located in a large city and is a doctoral university: higher research activity (Research 2) institution.
- Duncan University's rate of retaining first-time part-time bachelor's degree-seeking students from their first to second year is 30% (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).
- Duncan University has a student population that has a higher percentage of persons of color than the state it is situated in. The university's Fall 2018 student enrollment was 51% non-white while the state's non-white population was 37% in the same year (U.S. Department of Education, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).
- Duncan University's undergraduate population is primarily residential (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2016-17).

Table 3.1. Characteristics of Site – Duncan University, Academic Year 2018-19

	Duncan University
Carnegie Classification ^{1, 2}	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity
Campus Setting ²	Large City
Student Population Fall 2018 ²	
% Undergraduates:	82.8%
% of Undergraduates that were Part-Time:	14.3%
% of all Students that were Part- time Degree/Certificate Seeking Undergraduates:	10.5%
Fall 2018 % of Undergraduates Receiving ²	
Any grant or scholarship aid:	61%
Pell grants:	48%
Race/Ethnicity all enrolled Fall 2018 ²	
White:	49%
Black or African American:	27%
Hispanic:	9%
Asian:	5%
American Indian or Alaska Native:	0%
Nonresident alien:	3%
Two or more races:	5%
Race/ethnicity unknown:	2%
Age of all Undergraduates enrolled Fall 2018 ²	
24 and under:	82%
25 and over:	18%
First to second year retention of first-time bachelor's degree seeking undergraduates Fall 2018 ²	Full-time: 77% Part-time: 30%
Undergraduate Profile ¹	4-year, full-time, selective, higher transfer- in
Size and setting ¹	4-year, large, primarily residential

Note. Table 3.1 adapted from:

¹The Carnegie Classification of Institution Institutions of Higher Education. *Institution Lookup*. 2016-17. Available from <http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/lookup/lookup.php>

²U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *IPEDS data center*. Available from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

Document Analysis – Duncan University Vision & Mission Statement, Strategic Plan and History

Bowen (2009) describes document analysis as a “systemic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic material” (p. 27) “to find and interpret data from documents” (p. 150). Prior to beginning student interviews, I conducted a basic qualitative document analysis of Duncan University’s Vision and Mission Statement and Strategic Plan. These document analyses provided me with a better understanding and contextual framework for my research at Duncan University. In addition, as I deemed it necessary to provide additional context, I also analyzed documents that detailed the history of Duncan University. Merriam (2009) notes the importance of a researcher’s perspective in document analysis “[t]racking down leads, being open to new insights, and being sensitive to the data are the same whether the researcher is interviewing, observing, or analyzing documents. Since the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering data, he or she relies on skills and intuition to find and interpret data from documents” (p. 150).

In my analysis, I gave particular attention to any wording that reflected Duncan University’s perspective towards its students. Part-time students were my particular focus; however, I also gave attention to items generally about students. Since a university’s mission and strategic plan are generally written or approved by its leadership, I reviewed references to students especially to consider how the documents might reveal their attitudes towards students that did not follow traditional enrollment patterns.

Participant Recruitment, Selection, and Data Collection – Student Interviews

Existing literature generally either focuses on all “nontraditional” students broadly or is limited to adult or community college students. Instead, my study focused exclusively on

students who were or had previously been enrolled as a degree or certificate-seeking part-time undergraduate in a public doctoral level institution. The primary data source for this study was semistructured interviews with those students, focused on their experiences, with other data used to enhance and strengthen the study (Yin, 2014). I interviewed individuals who were enrolled for at least one “nonsummer” semester as a degree or certificate-seeking part-time undergraduate from Spring 2008 to Spring 2019. My original request for participants included anyone who had been enrolled part-time for at least one semester from 2003 until recruitment ended in Spring 2019. This timeframe was selected as a way of gathering data from students who had been enrolled recently but also to allow for a sufficient length of time that participants could have completed their degrees. I interviewed student participants who had completed a baccalaureate degree, some who were still working towards a degree, and those who had “stopped out” but intended to return. In this study, they are collectively referred to as “students” or “student participants.” Prior to contacting any potential participants, I submitted my proposed study to North Carolina State University’s (NC State’s) Institutional Review Board (IRB) process for approval and to the IRB office at the institution whose students and administrators were included in the study.

In total, I interviewed 23 student participants which met my goal of reaching saturation. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) reviewed the development of codes within their own previous research study, with a goal of determining the number of interviews that was sufficient to reach saturation. They defined saturation “as the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook” (p. 65). Those researchers found that the first twelve interviews led to almost all (92%) of the thematic discovery. This was the case

even though their study included semistructured interviews of sixty women in two different countries.

Purposeful sampling was used to select student participants (Merriam, 2009). Prior to student participant recruitment, I collected general data for demographic type information about part-time students at the institution. At the time, this was data for Fall 2016 and Fall 2017, which I later updated to Fall 2018. I reviewed data on the number of part-time undergraduate students as well as their age and ethnicity. Furthermore, I reviewed as much data as I could access regarding whether the part-time undergraduate students were transfer students or originated at their campus and what college, program, or degree they were enrolled in. This helped me to frame the research and direct my participant recruitment efforts. Student participant recruitment was primarily done through gatekeepers – faculty or staff at the campus and individuals who studied at the institution. Gatekeepers were identified through email or phone contact to individuals who worked with undergraduate students and especially those who had contact with student populations that are more likely to be part-time or “nontraditional.” This included outreach to academic advising offices, deans, and advisors for specific academic programs with large numbers of part-time students, and student government representatives. Potential gatekeepers were identified through website contacts and through professional contacts that I have at the institution. I asked gatekeepers to contact students directly by email or hard copy handout (Appendix A) and also to share study information to social media or email lists.

I also anonymously posted information on bulletin boards (actual or electronic) in readily accessible locations such as the library and classroom/building bulletin boards. Recruitment information was geared in specific ways to locate and obtain participation from part-time undergraduate students. I also included paid advertisements for participants in the student

newspaper. To be purposeful in locating participation from students who are most likely to be part-time undergraduates, since Flowers (2010) found that part-time students were more likely to be in certain programs, I also particularly targeted those types of disciplines at the campus such as business and management, arts and humanities, and health sciences. For any official campus offices that I contacted, I also offered to interview administrators in that office later and share summarized results of my study with them.

All student recruitment information included the offer of a small (\$25) gift card upon completion of a face-to-face interview. The information presented described the study's purpose and provided a link for potential participants to complete a brief questionnaire. The prescreening questionnaire (Appendix B) was designed for two purposes: to screen interested persons for inclusion in the study and to gather characteristics about potential participants that might be important to the study (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, and others).

After receiving their response to the recruitment and vetting the questionnaire responses, I reached out to potential interviewees via email, and then if that method failed, contacted them again by text or phone, gave a brief reminder of the project, and requested their participation as an interviewee. Identified participants were also asked to share the study recruitment information with other part-time undergraduate students or former students that they knew. While I did endeavor to schedule multiple individual interviews on the same day, they were scheduled at a time and location convenient to the participants. Interviews were conducted in a conference room on campus, in the campus library, and in restaurants convenient to the student participants. I informed the interviewees that I intended to keep their identities confidential. The only place where names could be associated would be by signatures on the consent form. Those files are

kept by the researcher behind locked doors and related data kept in a computer that is password protected and encrypted.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with student participants who responded to the recruitment and met the study parameters (based on responses to the questionnaire). My goal was to have participants that represented the various types of individuals who are likely to be part-time students: over age 24; in varying disciplines; persons of color; individuals considered to be of low socioeconomic status; students who returned to college to complete a degree; and/or were employed full-time. The resulting student interviewees were diverse in their ages, ethnicities, and income levels. Many had returned to college and many were employed full-time.

Student participant interviews ranged in time from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. The questions asked of student participants included those that would allow for further examination of policies at the federal, state, system and campus levels but also institutional practices, policy implementations, and campus cultures.

Literature indicates that part-time students are more likely to be female (Hussar & Bailey, 2016; Snyder et. al, 2016), which was also true in this study. Twenty-one of the student participants were female; two were male. In the fall of 2018, 67% of Duncan University's total student enrollment was female and 66% of the institution's undergraduates were female. Furthermore, the part-time student population at Duncan University in Fall 2018 was 70% female. Students were recruited to participate in the study through postings in campus locations and also through gatekeepers who worked with students who may be enrolled part-time. Students who were recruited to the study through gatekeepers would have had my name given to them for follow up, and, thus, may have surmised that I am female, which could have established a connection with me even before their interview took place.

Before beginning an interview, participants were asked to read, acknowledge, and agree to a consent form (Appendix C). Interviews were recorded after agreement by the participant and I also took notes. According to Forsey, “We interview in order to find out what we do not and cannot know otherwise. And we record what we hear in order to systematically process the data and better understand and analyze the insights shared through the dialogue” (2012, p. 364). The open-ended questions in the interview were designed specifically to explore the part-time students’ experiences at their university (see Appendix D). Questions were also asked to help me get a deeper understanding of their experiences related to institutional practices and policies. Utilizing Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) models, this study endeavored to understand the experiences of these students and the influence of policy and institutional practices in students’ degree pursuits. The semistructured interview questions were designed to get information to test against the framework and get a clear understanding of the actual experience of each participant. I chose to complete only one interview per student participant and conducted any needed follow up discussions via email or phone call so that I could be most respectful of the time of individuals who were already extraordinarily busy. Participating students were asked again to share the study recruitment information with other part-time undergraduate students and were asked if they had ideas of other ways to reach out to part-time students at their institution.

Data Analysis – Student Interviews

Each student interview was audio recorded with the participant’s consent. Interviews were then transcribed precisely. A coding outline and coding summary was developed, with codes generated from both a theoretical, prefigured basis and from an emergent basis. Interviews were hand-coded so that I could have a thorough understanding of each participant’s story. All transcriptions were stored on my private, password-protected computer with a back-up on a

separate hard drive stored in my private home. I coded for the following concepts, based on the data obtained in the interviews:

1. I did a first level review of the data using in vivo coding to understand the data (Saldaña, 2016).
2. I used attribute coding (Saldaña, 2016) to indicate within the coding the student characteristics (based on preliminary questionnaire responses) for the responses. This was to help to isolate any patterns for different types of part-time students.
3. Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19 and 20 were intended to get participants to discuss examples of and describe their experiences with policies and institutional practices. Those responses were used to create a listing of policies and institutional practices to work from that I then coded “good,” “positive”, or “encouraging” as supportive policies or institutional practices. “Bad” or “negative” were coded as barriers. This was evaluation coding as described by Saldaña (2016).
4. Based on the key domains of PP&SS described by Tinto and Pusser (2006), I used concept coding (Saldaña, 2016) to code policies and institutional practices for preparation, finance, access, and accountability. In general:
 - Policies Shaping Student Preparation: P-16 initiatives, early assessment, teacher preparation, high standards, and alignment of standards and assessments;
 - Finance Policies and Student Success: state support, institutional aid, federal student aid, tax policy, and tuition policy;
 - Access Policy and Student Success: outreach, capacity, articulation/transfer, and remediation; and
 - Accountability Policy and Student Success: assessment, accreditation, state mandates, and market competition (Tinto & Pusser, 2006).
5. I then used attribute coding (Saldaña, 2016) to code policies and institutional practices as campus, system, state, and/or federal policies (Tinto & Pusser, 2006), which sometimes required additional work.

6. Further, based on the same questions, since they were focused on things within the context of the institution, I used concept coding (Saldaña, 2016) with concepts identified in Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Model of Institutional Action (MIA): institutional commitment and leadership, expectational climate, support, feedback, and involvement.
7. There were two components, policies and institutional practices, that I coded for, so that I recognized them as both separate and overlapping concepts.

After interviews were coded, I created a “coding summary” with tables for the thematic areas and notations for each instance of the concept in each interview. This summary helped lead to the findings and conclusions. An extraordinarily important part of the analysis was identifying and pulling quotes from the interviews to help define and support any findings. Quotes from individuals are “the essence of qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 545), and help the reader better understand the direct perspectives of the participants.

Document Collection & Analysis—Policies and Institutional Practices

Prior to conducting any student interviews, I reviewed the institution's vision and mission statement and strategic plan for relevant information regarding part-time students. This helped me to be more informed about the campus and prepare to interview students and administrators. After student interviews were completed and coded, I used the interview data to locate and further examine the policies or institutional practices discussed by the students. In essence, this part of the study served to specifically identify and link the items the student participants referenced. The most important use of documents is as corroboration of information from other sources (Yin, 2009). According to Merriam, qualitative studies “are emergent in design and inductive in analysis. Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (2009, p. 163).

For this study, document collection and then analysis was based on an examination of website information and other policy documents, driven by students' descriptions of policies and/or practices (Bowen, 2009). Most of the information that students shared about policies and institutional practices was available as public records, primarily located through online sources. In the document analysis, I was able to better understand students' perspectives of what created supports or barriers. I worked to establish a clear listing of what the institutional practices and policies were by locating a record of them. As needed, I followed up with student participants (generally via email) to ensure that documents I located were correctly linked to their statements. If there was concern or confusion about the documents, I contacted appropriate administrators or followed up in the planned administrator interviews to get additional information on the policies or institutional practices discussed by the student participants. The first goal was to identify the documents, and a second goal was to identify as much as possible about their origin, particularly whether they were campus, system, state, or federally created or controlled. The document analysis was used to establish a set of policies and institutional practices referenced by the students. In a related study, McLendon, Tuchmayer, and Park (2009) were able to use an exploratory analysis of state policy documents to analyze the influence of state policy on student success outcomes.

Similar to the coding for student participant interviews, I used themes or concepts for analyzing the documents (Bowen, 2009). I established whether policies were federal, state, university system, and/or campus-based in origin. This is a part of the model by Tinto and Pusser (2006) since these multiple layers are involved in policy-setting and implementation at public universities. Any supportive practices or policies were also situated within the 5-item framework that Tinto and Pusser (2006) identify as the MIA – *commitment, expectations, support, feedback,*

and involvement (or engagement). If the items did not fit that framework, then that information also added value to the study, although ultimately many of those items also matched up with the administrative action items section that Tinto and Pusser (2006) began to describe but noted was not fully addressed in their work. Furthermore, I reviewed these documents for how they related to the impacts on the student participants' experiences that they relayed to me during their interviews. This helped in identifying particular barriers or supports for policymaker consideration.

Participant Recruitment, Selection, and Data Collection—Administrator Interviews

The addition of administrator interviews at the same campus helped to connect institutional policies and practices to the students' experiences. As student interviews were completed and coded, I also scheduled interviews with administrators at the same institution. The recruitment email is shown in Appendix E. Data gleaned from student interviews was summarized and used to refine questions for administrators. I discussed the summarized results of the student interviews with the administrators so that more specific policy and institutional structure topics were reviewed. I worked through campus gatekeepers and direct emails or phone calls to contact appropriate administrators based on the student participants' feedback and the document analysis that followed. Administrators interviewed included a senior staff person in the Provost's Office, a Financial Aid office employee, staff focused on undergraduate student success activities, and faculty/staff who served as advisors for programs with large numbers of part-time students. These interviews added context and further connected the students' experiences to policies and institutional practices. The multiple forms of data brought greater understanding about students who enroll on a part-time basis at public doctoral level universities and what institutional practices or policies supported or hindered their degree completion.

I scheduled interviews with administrators to be over the same 1- or 2-day timeframe and grouped them together where possible, but they were scheduled when it was convenient for the administrator participant. All administrator interviews were conducted in the Fall 2019 semester and took place in the administrators' campus offices. Before beginning an interview, administrator participants were asked to read, acknowledge, and agree to a consent form (Appendix F). Interviews were recorded upon agreement of the participants, and I also took notes. Appendix G shows the list of interview questions for the administrators.

Data Analysis – Administrator Interviews

Audio-recorded administrator interviews were also transcribed precisely and coded for the same codes as those listed under Data Analysis—Student Interviews, items one through five (in vivo coding, attribute coding, concept coding). Coding was also done to analyze whether and how administrators indicated they did or did not consider part-time students in their campus enrollment planning and as policies were created or implemented. Similar to the student interview data analysis, I worked to pull quotes directly from the participants, to again help the reader understand their perspective (Patton, 2015). My focus in writing the findings from this section and the other data analyses was to take a practical approach focused on actionable recommendations (Patton, 2015) to policymakers who desire to increase the success of students who enroll as part-time undergraduate students in public doctoral level universities.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

This study is bounded in both location and time. The participants (students and campus administrators) are from within the same public doctoral level university. All of the students attended the institution on a part-time basis for at least one “nonsummer” semester sometime from Spring 2008 to Spring 2019. This timeframe was chosen to allow for the opportunity for

more of the participants to have completed their degrees. As with any research study, there are limitations to be considered. The study would be limited by only having true applicability within the context of Duncan University. However, some findings such as federal policy information may be applicable to other public universities, and some may be applicable to other public universities more broadly, or other public universities located in the same state as Duncan University.

In qualitative research, internal validity refers to the degree that a study's findings match reality (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, internal validity is generally a strength of qualitative research since "it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). In this study, the interviews were done with individuals who actually were or had been part-time students at the public doctoral level university [Duncan University] in a Southeastern U.S. state, making validity good as long as proper research procedures were followed. Validity was also enhanced by the use of member checking with the participants (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The member checking was accomplished by sharing a summary of interpretations and findings with the participants to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The summary level information was shared with all 23 student participants; eight responses were received which all indicated the summary was inclusive of and accurate for their experiences.

Triangulation, or "use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroboration evidence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) was achieved, and thus validity improved, by the review and validation of the coding by a third party as well as the

additional steps of document analysis and administrator interviews (Merriam, 2009). The multiple forms of data enabled a more thorough understanding of the students' experiences and create the opportunity for triangulation. When there is a convergence of data and triangulation is achieved, then findings or conclusions have greater accuracy (Yin, 2014). The collection and analysis of multiple methods decreased the possibility that conclusions reflect the biases or limitations inherent in only one type of data (Flick, 2018).

The questions asked were directly related to the purpose and research questions identified. Further, based on Creswell's (2013) description of the validation perspectives from Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle, I worked to understand the participants' meaning and be critical of all aspects of the research to improve trustworthiness. Also according to those parameters, I endeavored to be self-critical with an eye towards reflexivity (Creswell, 2013).

Reliability requires a study's findings to be replicable (Merriam, 2009), and that is a greater issue in this study. I have had a career in higher education in the same state and may have some access or knowledge that would be difficult for another researcher to duplicate. It is less important with qualitative research that it could be duplicated by another researcher but crucial that there is a demonstrated and documented protocol that ensures a consistent and reliable process (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2014). Thus, the study's reliability was enhanced by the introduction of a third-party code reviewer. I ensured clear documentation and stayed very close to the exact protocol and research questions.

The issues of trustworthiness and credibility are always important in a study. I used consent forms (Appendices C and F) to help meet this goal. Additionally, I shared the summarized findings with participants and asked them to identify any areas of concern or disagreement. The summarized findings were shared with all 23 student participants, eight

responses were received, and none indicated any areas of concern or disagreement. Likewise, the audio recordings were critical in ensuring that quotes were done verbatim as stated by the participants. Finally, I had another coder review the documentation to insure intercoder reliability.

Additional Limitations of the Study

There were some clear challenges in getting a good sample of individuals for the study and doing so in a way that accurately represented the diversity of the part-time student population. To minimize this challenge, I used various methods for recruitment, through multiple gatekeepers in direct contact with potential participants and anonymous postings with their institution. I also used the questionnaire to gather characteristics of each participant so that I could identify any variation in data that may be related to the type of part-time students who were interviewed.

Researcher Positionality

It is critical for researchers to acknowledge their own viewpoints and worldviews (Creswell, 2007). My own experiences –professional, personal, and scholarly – were the genesis of this research study, which presents a set of challenges and opportunities. Personally, I have been educated in three doctoral level public universities in two different public university systems as both a full-time student and part-time student. Unlike the student participants in my study, however, I was a full-time student and part-time employee during my undergraduate education. Similarly, I worked part-time and was enrolled full-time during my master’s degree program. During my doctoral studies, I have been a full-time employee and a part-time student. I was able to relate to many of the successes and struggles of part-time students, but I did not have exactly the same experiences as any of them.

My career has included approximately 18 years of employment in both the system office that works with Duncan University as well as eight years as an employee at a different doctoral level research university (not Duncan University) within that system. My professional roles have included enrollment planning, budget and finance, and related policy work. It was after I enrolled as a part-time doctoral student that I began to reflect on the situations of part-time students and the policies that impact their experiences. For example, as an older student returning to pursue graduate work, I had an extremely difficult time getting my immunization records from my childhood, and proving to the university that I was vaccinated sufficiently to enroll in the same institution that I worked at on a daily basis. Eventually through many frustrating processes, I was finally told that as long as I was enrolled for just one course a semester, I did not have to provide the documents or be revaccinated. Beyond this isolated personal experience, I also began to reflect on many days, hours, and possibly months that I had spent as an observer or participant in state budget meetings, system-level board meetings, and campus level enrollment or policy discussions. I realized that a student like myself – older, returning, and part-time – was not the “typical” student that policymakers were considering in their deliberations. Thus, along with a cohort mate in our program, for a course assignment, we examined the literature on state performance-based funding policies for higher education and the effects those might hold for part-time students (Peters & Burks Draughon, 2017). That literature review gave me an opportunity to begin to consider the effects of policy and practice for part-time undergraduate students.

As I interviewed participants for this study, I needed to be particularly sensitive to hear from students who were the most different from me, including persons of color or individuals who returned to school to complete a degree. During the interview process, I was careful to monitor

my own thoughts and responses and was extraordinarily careful not to influence, push back, or question the participants' responses and experiences. I directly used the interview questions as closely as possible to be sure to get the experiences of the interviewees (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ortlipp, 2008).

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter I include a description about the institution at which I conducted interviews of students and administrators as well as information about all of the 23 student participants interviewed. I then use the student participants' words to tell their stories through the creation of four composite profiles. Through those profiles, I hope the reader will get a more relatable and better sense of the actual experiences of the part-time undergraduate students I interviewed. Finally, I include data on the administrator participants whose interviews added to my study.

“Duncan University”

It is important to consider the university where the participants studied and worked – the “case.” Duncan University is a public university and was established through legislative action in 1891 and opened in 1892. It was an original member of the state's public university system. African American students began to be allowed admission in 1956, and the university became co-educational in 1964 (Duncan University, n.d.-e).

In the Fall of 2018,

- Duncan University had almost 2,400 part-time undergraduates in Fall of 2018.
- Approximately 2,100 of those part-time undergraduates were seeking a degree or certificate, which represented an increase of 12% from Fall 2014.
- Of those 2,100 degree/certificate-seeking part-time students, almost 1,600 were continuing students, approximately 500 were transfer-ins, and fewer than 20 were first-time part-time students.
- Of the approximately 2,100 part-time degree-seeking undergraduate students in the Fall of 2018:

- 58% were white,
 - 23% were Black or African American,
 - 9% were Hispanic,
 - 5% were Asian, and
 - 3% were multiracial.
- Part-time Duncan University students in the Fall of 2018 were enrolled primarily in four Schools:
 - Arts & Sciences (33%)
 - Business & Economics (28%),
 - Health & Human Services (23%), and
 - Nursing (9%).
- It is located in a large city and is classified as a Doctoral University: Higher Research Activity (Research 2) institution (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2016-17).
- Duncan University's rate of retaining first-time part-time bachelor's degree-seeking students from their first to second year was 30% (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).
- Duncan University has a student population that has a higher percentage of persons of color than the state it is situated in. The university's Fall 2018 student enrollment was 51% non-white while the state's non-white population was 37% in the same year (U.S. Department of Education, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

- Duncan University’s total undergraduate population is primarily residential (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2016-17).

Duncan University is:

the most ethnically diverse public research university in the state and enrolls many students from rural, low-income, and underrepresented minority backgrounds. Duncan University holds a national leadership position in student success, having been named first in [state] (Who We Are, n.d.)

The institution was also acknowledged with an INSIGHT Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award for its commitment to diversity and inclusion (Anonymous, 2019b).

Student Participants

I interviewed 23 current or former undergraduate Duncan University students during the 2018-19 academic year. All had attended Duncan University on a part-time basis for at least one “nonsummer” semester. Nineteen were enrolled at Duncan University in the semester in which they were interviewed. Three individuals had already graduated from Duncan University. One of those was seeking a second bachelor’s degree but had stopped out from enrollment. One other student interviewee also stopped out during that semester. Table 4.1 provides a broad perspective of the 23 students I interviewed – with their ages, gender identity, race/ethnicity, self-reported household income, and their Duncan University enrollment type (e.g., on campus, online, or both).

Table 4.1. Student Participants (data sorted by age of student, youngest to oldest)

Pseudonym	Age	Gender Identity	Race/ Ethnicity*	Income (self-reported)	Enrollment Type
Lisa	19	Female	white	\$20-30,000	On Campus
Savannah	19	Female	white	\$50-70,000	On Campus
Elleigh	20	Female	2 or more races	\$50-70,000	Both
Julie	21	Female	white	\$0-20,000	Both
Alberto	21	Male	Hispanic/Latino	\$20-30,000	On Campus
Simone**	23	Female	African American	\$0-20,000	On Campus
Allison	29	Female	white	\$30-50,000	Online
Miracle**	30	Female	African American	\$0-20,000	Both
Monique	31	Female	African American	\$0-20,000	Online
Holly	32	Female	white	\$70-90,000	Online
Amie	33	Female	white	\$70-90,000	Both
Ebony	34	Female	African American	\$0-20,000	Online
Katrina	36	Female	Hispanic/Latino	>\$90,000	Online
Angela**	42	Female	white	\$30-50,000	Online
Patrice	43	Female	white	\$50-70,000	Online
Elaine	47	Female	African American	\$30-50,000	On Campus
Chris	47	Male	white	>\$90,000	Both
Tanya	48	Female	white	>\$90,000	Both
Shonda	48	Female	African American	\$70-90,000	Online
Jennifer	51	Female	white	\$50-70,000	Online
Bonita	58	Female	African American	\$0-20,000	On Campus
Deborah	58	Female	African American	\$50-70,000	Online
Valerie	69	Female	African American	\$20-30,000	Online

Note. *The introductory questionnaire used IPEDS racial categories terminology. **Alumni participants. Miracle was working towards a second baccalaureate degree.

Twenty-one female and two male student participants were interviewed. This ratio of female to male interviewees is not entirely surprising, given that in the Fall of 2018, 67% of Duncan University's total student enrollment was female and 66% of the institution's undergraduates were female. Furthermore, the part-time student population at Duncan University in Fall 2018 was 70% female. Students were recruited to participate in the study through postings in campus locations and also through gatekeepers who worked with students who may be enrolled part-time. Students who were recruited to the study through gatekeepers would have had my name given to them for follow up, and, thus, may have surmised that I am female, which could have established a connection with me even before their interview took place.

The ages of the student participants when they were enrolled part-time ranged in age from 19 to 69. The average age of student participants was 37 and median age was 34. Participants were enrolled in four different schools and colleges within Duncan University: the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Business and Economics, the College of Health and Human Sciences, and the College of Visual and Performing Arts. There were no participants from the four other undergraduate schools or colleges in Duncan University. While at Duncan University, twelve of the students always attended on a part-time basis, while eleven had a mixed enrollment pattern, in which some semesters they attended full-time and were enrolled part-time in other semesters. Interestingly, there is a pair of sisters included in the participant group and there are also a mother and her daughter who were both interviewed.

Nineteen of the student participants were employed at the time of the interview, one had recently become unemployed and the other three had chosen not to work at that time. Of those working, ten had full-time jobs and the rest were working part-time, although several of the students who worked part-time regularly worked as many as 30 hours per week. Twenty-one of

the students had, at some point in their college experiences, attended at least one other university or community college, so they had transferred into Duncan University. Most of these had a gap from enrollment in their prior institution to enrollment in Duncan University, so they could be considered “stop out returns” (Horn & Carroll, 1998). Only two had never enrolled in another higher educational institution. Eleven students took all of their Duncan University coursework online, six took all of their courses in person, and six had a mix of on-campus and online courses. On average, in the most recent semester when they were enrolled part-time, the student participants took two courses. To give the reader an opportunity to understand and relate to the student participants in a broader way, I created four composite profiles that are based on the experiences of the student participants.

Composite Profiles

I used the technique of creating composite first person narrative profiles from the student participants’ interviews so that their actual words could be used to tell their stories. As discussed by Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh and Marlow (2011):

Ultimately the goal of using composite first person narrative is to express the insights gleaned through qualitative research in a way that is accessible to others; in a way that will add to the knowledge of a certain phenomenon and increase empathy... (p. 9)

Since traditional full-time students are typically the focus of higher educational research and policymaking, I wanted to create composites that would provide the reader with an idea of the “‘contextual’ human qualities” and make them “relationally alive” (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 1). As the researcher, while I am most focused on the policies and institutional practices that have impacted the educational progress or degree attainment for these students, I also recognize that these students’ stories and experiences are not widely discussed or known. Thus, as a part of my

study, I hope that these composites will begin to provide context and perspective for readers about part-time students, a population who have tended to be marginalized, especially at public doctoral level institutions. In fact, Wertz et al. (2011) note that this is a goal of using composite profiles, to:

...tell something that connects with universal human qualities so that the reader can relate personally to the themes; is a story that readers can imagine in a personal way; attempts to contribute to new understanding about the phenomenon; and is not exhaustive, but allows the topic to be seen more clearly. (pp. 2-3)

From that new understanding and empathy, another goal of mine is to use the composite narratives for what Willis (2019) terms “‘future-forming’ research” – “presenting findings in ways that are useful and accessible to those outside academia” (p. 471).

I also recognize that there is a wide variation in individuals who enroll in public doctoral universities on a part-time basis. Therefore, it is also extremely important to note that by writing these composite profiles, I am in no way intending to represent the experiences of all student participants in this study. I also have not represented the experiences of all part-time students.

The composites are fictional characters based upon the actual students that I interviewed, but quotations are directly from the students themselves. In compiling the composites, I first sorted and grouped the participants based on age. Because students seemed to have different experiences (and also different educational requirements) in different Duncan University Colleges or Schools, I also used the attribute of their college/school to help in grouping similar experiences. Finally, since the family dynamics and employment of participants were also a part of their stories, I did group some statements according to the fictional family dynamics and

employment of each of the composites. For example, I could not reasonably use a quote about a partner or child in an interview of a composite individual who did not have a partner or child.

Using these groupings as a guide, I then pulled quotes that embodied important pieces of their experiences and the themes that emerged during my data analysis process. Each composite is based on student interview transcripts. The wording used is directly from students themselves except:

1. In some cases, I removed or changed information that might identify the participants.
2. As much as possible, I kept grammar as it was from the transcripts but I did remove filler words such as, like and um, to help with readability. In some cases, I also added a few words to bridge between statements or to help the reader understand what the participant was discussing. Since their quotes were in response to interview questions that I asked, in some instances I needed to add minor wording to help the reader understand what the participant was discussing.

I did not use any wording that would impose my own opinions or judgements within the composites, and I did not write in any assumptions of their motivations or feelings. Any such statements in the composites were made by a participant. I reread through the composites multiple times, editing them to remove less important quotes or things that did not fit well for that fictional student profile. I acknowledge that I did have to make choices about what quotations would be used in the composites. All combined, the four composites contain at least one quote from each of the 23 participants.

I have previously outlined the minor modifications that I made in the interests of readability and protecting their anonymity. Otherwise the only modification that I made was to present the data from multiple participants as if it were from a single person. One “actual”

participant may also have quotes included in multiple composites, but they would not be duplicated. Each student participant composite begins with an italicized general description of the student to help the reader contextualize their comments. Following the italicized profile information are the actual composite quotes from student participants.

‘Nora’

‘Nora’ is a composite of seven interviewees and is a traditional-aged student. Nora began at a community college but did not complete an Associate’s degree there. She is working to complete her Bachelor’s in Business Administration degree. She does not have a partner or children. Nora used a strategy of mixed enrollment. She started out part-time at Duncan University (DU) as a way of having fewer school obligations while she worked and commuted to Duncan University’s campus. Nora worked approximately 30 hours per week in an off-campus job because she was trying to not take out any student loans (she did have some grants). She later moved closer to campus and enrolled full-time to try to complete her coursework more quickly. In the semester that I interviewed her, she had become part-time again as she neared the end of her degree, which was a strategy to avoid the tuition surcharge. Nora takes her Duncan University classes on campus.

So I have worked almost full-time, pretty much the whole time I’ve been in school. I started working my senior year of high school, and I’ve worked ever since. Once I graduated, I actually took a semester off to be able to work as much as possible to save up money for college, and then I went to a community college part-time. Then I looked at colleges in the area because I’m from [nearby town], and my mom had actually gone to Duncan University, so I was like, well, I’ve got some friends there, I’ll just apply, and I got in. When my mom brought me to the school, it was really interesting to see all of the different dynamics of the people and how many

students actually go here. I thought that it was going to be an overwhelming amount, but it was actually comforting. I have anxiety, so it was really nice to not feel anxious about being there, and it was a really nice campus. Also, we pride ourselves on being one of the most diverse campuses here in [state], which I really liked.

I guess one policy that helped would be that when I transferred in, some things they were questionable about, like can we use this class as this, but they let it go, so that helped me a lot, otherwise it would take me even longer. It was nice that in the end most things counted. But also I've taken an ethics class and a statistics class in community college that didn't count, so I had to retake them which I wouldn't have...but at the time in community college, I didn't know that I'm gonna have to retake these classes. In my experience, my personal experience, community college is a lot easier than a 4-year university. I was expecting to come to Duncan University, "Okay, I got this". But then taking a biology class and all those other classes I was like, "Never mind." Community college classes are a lot easier than Duncan University's classes. There are less expectations and the policies there [at the community college] are more lenient than Duncan University because it's a community college, I'm supposing.

I did nine credit hours my first semester here, and then the next two after that because I was commuting and working. It made it hard to commit to more than that, with the amount of stuff that I had to do outside of the classroom, or group projects where I'd have to be participating. I was worried that it would be too much, and I was just trying to find the right balance between work and school without kind of compromising either. Part-time seemed like the best way to start that off, especially since I had a 45-minute commute. That way I could commit full days. At that time I was [in] Monday, Wednesday, Friday classes, and I just committed to not work those days, so I could be at school for that amount of time, or I'd come

back and work five to close. That helped to be able to balance things out better to where I could still make the money to pay for going through school. With the grants I could get, other than that I've paid my way through all my school, I haven't had any loans or anything. I worked at Olive Garden though two Decembers ago, and I've been at Chick-Fil-A ever since. I had to find that balance between how much school can I do and afford to pay for, and how much can I also work? That was the biggest thing because I knew if I have to work all these hours, I can't take five or six classes and devote time to homework when I have to work 30 hours a week. I've been taking classes, fall, spring, summer every single semester.

I moved here in March during my first or maybe my second full-time semester. I had just moved up to 12 credit hours and then this last semester I did 15. I also changed my major in that time. I came in as a theater ed major and then switched to business, which has been a little bit of jumping around. The theatre program was just not conducive to being a part-time student. It required a lot, and I really wouldn't have been able to work and do the program, and I had to. I liked the stage management part of theater, and I thought maybe management is a good direction to go. I went over to business, and I knew the School of Business was a huge, very well-respected school on the campus, so I felt that was probably the best next thing for me. I tell my professors that I'm a part-time student because I'm working, and they understand that I have a large workload, and that I have a lot of bills to pay. They will, sort of, help me out or work with me on my assignment due dates when I need to.

Nine [credit hours] was not too few and not too many. I was able to – even when classes required a lot out of me – I was able to still balance it the way that I wanted to. I think some of the harder part was the administration side of it. How long is it going to take me to graduate? How do I figure out financial aid not being a full-time student? I did summer classes and winter

classes to try and help balance it out. That was a harder part, definitely I was in the Financial Aid Office a lot having to figure things out. I don't feel like there's much help given to part-time students as to what you need to do. I felt like that was a little bit harder to figure out. There's verification forms for financial aid, and there's a little tiny section about, if you're not full-time, you have to do this, and you could really easily miss it. It was also hard for me because I wasn't on campus very much except just to go to class. I'm not on campus to get help, and I have a very limited time on campus when I am here. That made it harder when I was still commuting.

I would look to see what was offered, and then try and get everything at once, either all Monday-Wednesday-Friday, or all Tuesday-Thursday, so that I would be able to work those days that I knew I'd be home. There was also a lot of flexibility in what I could take since it was during my earlier years. I can take a couple Gen Eds, and that makes it easier. "It wasn't like you have to take this or you're not going to move on." This one class that I had, it was communication studies, for everyone, but she [the instructor] was very...conscious of hey, I [the instructor] have to commute here too. I understand that you're not gonna be able to do a bunch of stuff outside of class. We'll try to do as much in class as possible. I really appreciated professors that tried to kind of keep that in mind, [that] "this might not be your main thing right now, but I want you to be as involved as possible."

My advisor has just been great about helping me out and making sure that I get everything that I need. I felt my advisor and other staff were very helpful about figuring out what you want to do. I sat down with her, "Tell me what you like." That's the first thing she said. And I told her, she said, "Okay, this is what you need to do."

I think the biggest thing was trying to make sure that I got all my [course] requirements in. There was definitely a lot of availability of what I could take, but once I got further into my

major, it was a lot harder to get all my big, hard classes in, which is part of the reason as to why I went ahead and moved here and became full-time. If I want to graduate within my four years, then I needed to start taking four classes and pile it on a little bit.

Everyone that I've interacted with has been really pleasant. Even as far as the people in the windows at the Cashier's Office. They've helped a lot. I was a part-time student at [Community College]. I like Duncan University so much more than Community College. There's a lot more availability of people here to help you out with things. I think that if you're living here and you're part-time, it's a lot easier than being a commuter and being part-time, because the people on campus are really helpful. With [Community College], you could call in and you'd be sitting on the phone for hours waiting for someone to pick up. There's been a couple of times that I've called here and never gotten someone to pick up, but for the most part, they're pretty responsive. The people in the Cashier's Office were so nice, and the advisors were really helpful. Definitely, with my advisor, she really understood that I wanted to do it. I wanted to be a part of everything, I just didn't have the time. She didn't push me or pressure me to take more classes. She was okay with my timeline, here's what we can do. That was really nice to have, to feel like someone wasn't pushing me to be full-time. It was let's work with what you've got. Most of the counselors, or the advisors, they're students as well, well they're graduate students. They understand the stress of having to go back and forth with Financial Aid, or having your classes messed up, or not getting the classes you wanted. Also, they weren't just an advisor, they were also a counselor in a way, which helped out a lot.

I think one of the biggest things is the stigma about being part-time. Everyone thinks you've got it so much easier because you're a part-time student. They don't realize that you've got just as much pressure as taking 15 hours. Yeah, I think that's ... Oh, you're only in nine

credit hours. I'm taking 15, and it's like but you don't work, and if you do work, you work on campus and it's not as much. There's not as much understanding from people I think. They're like, "It's only nine credit hours, it can't be that bad." I think along with that culture of the school, just of people in general, understanding why you would only do nine credit hours. Because I think a lot of people think, well that's the easy way, you know? You're not doing as much as you can, but I am. I think the biggest thing for me is just trying to normalize it for people. I don't think a lot of people think of part-time as an option when they graduate high school. I think they just assume that they have to take the 12 credit hours, but I think maybe, if there was someone that could help assess and say "hey, it's okay to start off slow. You don't have to jump in full force." I think that would be really helpful, especially for 18-year-old kids that are in a new place and scared it might be overwhelming. It might be better to start off with a couple less and get used to it. I think everyone thinks that they have to put the whole world on their shoulders, and it's good to know that you can just take what you need to take. I wish there was more understanding that being a part-time student doesn't necessarily mean that you're not really working, or you're not a real student. I think there's a little stigma, like, oh, you know you're a part-time student, but that's really just 9 hours. But I do think the professors that I knew would work with you, if you explain stuff to them, but I also think they weren't going to give you that much. Like, "Oh, you have to work, so you can't turn this assignment in late". I had to work, I had to do this and stuff. "Well, you know we gave you enough time. We tell you in advance, so." I think they weren't gonna take that, but I do think if it came down to certain things like, "Hey, this happened. I got called in." Or something happened. "Is there any way I can get the notes? Is there something?"

But, you know the number one bad thing is you just prolong your graduation. And so there's more money out of your pocket. No one wants to push back their graduation date that much, especially not undergrad. When you're an undergrad there's still this mentality of class of whatever year. You know? High school I was class of [year], so it was common knowledge, and once in college I was the class of [graduation year + 4] then right, but it won't end up that way. I feel it a little bit. I feel like a little embarrassment, like, why am I graduating later? When you transfer things get prolonged, but then also just things happen. And then I did choose to take less classes, because I felt overwhelmed. That was the bad, you prolong your graduation and that has a little stigma to it when you're an undergrad I feel. Because when everyone else is leaving, you're still there, and for a whole year maybe.

When I did Tuesday/Thursday classes, I would get here right before my first class started at 9:30. I would have all my classes stacked – I would go straight from that class to another class to another class. I would pack a lunch so that I wouldn't have to spend money, and then I would have [student club meeting] on Tuesday nights, so I would just stay on campus and go and study or sit in the [Student Center] and watch Netflix or something. And then, once I got involved and had friends, I would spend the night so that I wouldn't have to drive home at 10:00, 11:00 at night, and then Monday/Wednesday/Fridays I was working. Usually a 2:00 to close shift, and then I would come back on Thursday and just have my classes in the morning and then leave whenever they finished. It was a pretty consistent schedule.

I know with financial aid you receive less financial aid because you're part-time, but it sometimes felt like I was receiving ... for example, like summer classes were really hard to get financial aid for until this past year. This past year they started a summer Pell Grant, which was super helpful, but previous to that, they didn't. If you wanted to be part-time, but you didn't need

those summer breaks, it was out of pocket because you didn't have a Pell Grant that could help you. That would probably be the policy that did help, was that getting enacted. Also I had a scholarship that I couldn't get for one semester because I had to be a full-time student to get it so that messed me up.

I've seen crazy costs for tuition and I think ... you pay tuition to come here and then you have to pay... if I pay that parking pass to that parking deck, it's \$500 a year. If you pay tuition for a class, in order to do your homework you have to have this access code, and it's like a hundred and something dollars for one code. One I just got was \$130 and that is not the book, not parking, not tuition, it's just extra costs that they just keep adding on. But the access codes being \$100 each and then you have to get them or you can't do your homework. I've never had that before here. And the books, you have to have that. The tuition, you have tuition anywhere you go, but just everything else, like the parking. If that lot is full, I have to find somewhere, and if I don't have that pass, then I can't park in any of these lots and if I do, then I'll get a ticket. I've tried it, and I got a ticket. It's just things that I feel like you shouldn't have to worry about. They don't give you too much stuff [financial aid] part-time. It's really just they expect you to pay all this stuff as college students, which usually we don't have money.

I think these people think that college students, their parents pay for everything, which a lot of them do, they do. But if you're part-time, it is usually because you're working, because your parents aren't paying for your stuff, so all these unnecessary outrageous things shouldn't be there, or they should try to make it cheaper if they could. But that's also why I went to community college first, so I could save money. I could have come straight to Duncan University, but I would just pay thousands of dollars more. I took the same classes. A lot of

people do that. I think that [the cost of everything] is something they could work on. They won't, it's fine, it's normal.

Also I think there need to be more classes available. We had a window of time to register, and if it got filled up, then you get bumped out. It seems like there would be a better way of handling it because then you have to wait another whole semester, which is a long time. Or, you are waiting for the drop add period to see when you can come on, but I remember I used to get very stressed around when it was time to register. I had to be on my computer, had to go, go, go. And then, "Oh no, I got kicked out!"

The other thing that has happened to me – it was around the time that I had to meet with my advisors to see where I was as far as my prospects with my classes and what I needed to finish my degree. I think it was a month or a few weeks before the semester ended. In talking with advisor to see what are my options? What's left? I found out from them – "Oh, geez. You're a student with this many credit hours and being placed in that situation without knowing after all this time." I don't know how other higher ed school systems have it here in [state], but I was at a high amount of credit hours (I don't remember the number exactly) but where if I took the full-time 12 this semester, I would be right at the [tuition] surcharge. Oh, here's all the work that I've done, but also how much I've set myself up for having to know about that. I just had no idea there was such a thing as a surcharge. I just had a few weeks to decide and to call my folks and make all of those appointments with the financial aid office, to talk with them and really think about it. I basically had two options: maintaining the full-time status and being hit with that surcharge or going the part-time route and trying to find a way to balance it out with financial aid. I had to see what the pros and cons of each were. And so, I decided to go back to being a part-time student because I only needed one class.

Honestly, I haven't really used anything [on campus]...I've used the library, but that's really it. I haven't been in many other buildings besides my building and this one now. I went to a basketball game and also my club, my club meetings, but that's about it. But my club meetings are through the Business School, so we just meet in our classroom. I've used the library a lot, especially to meet for studying and stuff. And the [Student Center] which is like a food court and stuff. It's very convenient because when you're here all day studying, you need food and it's really... obviously I didn't have that at community college, but you can just go get food and go back, so that's nice. I didn't really use anything else though besides the library.

It's really, really hard to get involved in things. There's not much that caters to people that have to work a lot, which is not the university's fault. A lot of things are offered at night when people are working, like some of the clubs and stuff. Not being on campus...except for class...I could still do it but it's not my main priority. That was hard, getting involved and feeling like there was a space for people. Just getting to campus is really hard. There's not much parking, and when you need to get in and get out really quick, it's really hard to do. There were many times when I was sitting in traffic, where I was just thinking, oh my goodness. We have a park-and-ride lot that's down on [Street Name]. That's a little farther away, which is usually what commuters do because you can just bus in, and having to wait for the bus if it was late, or just getting out of that parking lot in general, there wasn't anyone to direct traffic, and people were all trying to get out. It was kind of chaotic all the time.

It has definitely taken me longer to get where I need to be and the fact that it's taken me longer, I can't get a job, a nine to five job, because I'm in school so that's why also I switched to full-time some semesters, so I can just get it done and get a job. It will have taken me six years to get a 4-year degree. So I would say it took me a little longer than I expected because I did part-

time some. My mother encourages me. She tells me, “Come on, Nora, you have to really get this degree!” She’s says, “What are you going to do after school if you don’t get the degree? You’ll be working in a job you don’t like.” And I’m like, “Fine, I’ll just keep going.”

‘Crystal’

‘Crystal’ was formed from a composite of eight participants. She is a 32-year-old student who transferred from a community college with an Associate’s degree. Crystal now takes her courses at Duncan University completely online in the Early Care and Education program. The Early Care and Education Online Degree Completion Program is a 2-Plus program designed for students who have a 2-year associate’s degree from a community college. It is a part of the state’s Articulation Agreement program (Early Childhood, 2020). Crystal works in the early childhood field, is married, and has a young child.

I’m in my thirties, and I always wanted to go to school, but financially I was just not able to. I was single, I worked on my own. I met my husband and after we got married I started off at the community college; I did my Associate’s degree. While I was doing my practicum hours for that I was working at [name] Child Development Center. A county employee saw me and offered me a position, and I started working at the county. When I graduated from community college I transferred to Duncan to finish up my Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education. When I chose Duncan University I chose it because it was highly recommended by a lot of my professors at the community college, as well as they took all of my transfer credits. I have been a part-time student because I’m a full-time mom, and I’m working too. My schooling has to adapt to whatever I do with my life. It’s not that I am adapting like an 18-year old, going where the school is, and adapting to it. No, school really has to adapt to my life in a lot of ways. So part-time accommodates my life better than full-time. Also, at this point in my life I really wanted to

do well in school. I am not content with just being an average student or just getting by. I wanted to do well.

For me it's just, economics basically. Financially that was the best fit for me and my family. I still had to provide. And I think that's one of the hardest things about the field that I chose to be in is the requirement for practicum hours. Because I work for the state, the government, they do not allow you the time to leave your job to go and do hours for school. So I would have to either take a leave of absence from my job or use all of my sick time up in order to complete my practicum hours. Thinking it through, if I had to go back, I probably would not choose Early Childhood Education because it's been very strenuous on me and my family, me trying to complete this degree. So right now, doing my practicum, I'm using all of my sick time. Duncan University, they said I had to take a certain amount of hours and it has to be in a separate classroom setting, and I can't work while I do that time. So the county is like, "You know, well, we can't just say you take off every day. So, in order for you to take off you need to take a leave of absence for the semester or you can use your sick time." So I've used up all of my sick time this year doing practicum hours. I know some people who are losing time working at their regular jobs and therefore losing money in order to complete their practicum.

Let's see, positives, I would say the flexibility, especially it being online. The negative is it takes longer to finish because you're stretching it out. Online tutoring is hard because I definitely need help in Spanish, and I feel like if I was on campus, I could just go get that help. I do love the Writing Center online because somebody will call you on the phone; they will walk you through your paper, which is amazing. I'm so glad that it is available. Tutoring, I feel like tutoring is basically you always need to be one-on-one for it. I feel like online tutoring is really

hard because you can tell somebody something all day long, but if I'm not there in person and learning, I'm not going to get it.

I really like my advisor, [name], she's really helpful, she's really nice. I owe her a lot because she really pushed for me to get into this program. She asked me why I wanted to be a student, and she really listened to me, which is another reason I think that's why I really chose to go here. She is very helpful and wants the best for everyone. She lets you know exactly what you need to do and when you need to have it done by. So literally she makes my whole school experience. One of my teachers actually just recently actually, there's this thing called Starfish. He gave me kudos, he sent me an email, and said I was doing a good job. That's been nice. I've never had a teacher do that until this semester, actually.

With working and having a child, you know, I have a photo of me with my computer, in the hospital, doing homework. My son's due date was August 22nd, and that was the first day of classes. He came on the 26th, so classes had already started. There was no break, I was hoping he would come closer to his due date, but it was close to that second week of school starting, and I was on a struggle bus. I don't even remember, honestly. That first month, I'm like, "Did I even do school work?" I know I did, but I don't remember it. I can't tell you what classes I took. I know that my teachers were nice because I remember messaging them, but I don't even know what my grades were, I just know I made it.

I have enjoyed the hybrid piece of the classes where you sit down and see the professor and talk with the other students in the classroom. I've enjoyed the interactive part and the flexibility. Some of the classes that they offer, they offer them during the summertime, and the summer works for me because in the summer I'm out of work. That's something that's a plus, but not all of the classes are offered during the summer. So, I would like to see the practicum

courses offered during the summer. Especially if you have young adults that are trying to become teachers. You know they are teacher assistants with the state. It makes sense to offer the practicum classes during the summer because they are out of work. I also wish that they had more course offerings at night. As opposed to at [Community College], they operated classes throughout the day. There were some times that it would have been more convenient for me to go and to do more at night. I enjoyed the small class size, less busy. Just having my life outside school, that's what my focus is on, and then I also am doing school, as opposed to being a college student. Sometimes I think that that is the identity that you assume.

I understand requiring students to learn working in groups with other students, but online group work – it's a nightmare. And that for me is going to be one of the most negative experiences because at that point, really, I don't feel like I'm paying my money to do that. I'm an older person I don't feel like I need the skills to deal with other people. I know, I understand that if you are 18 and you are first year out of high school, you definitely need that, because you may not have the experience but I definitely do not appreciate that. It's hard because I feel like the other students, especially younger ones, are willing to just do the minimum sometimes or even cheat, and that's not how I want to do it. But still I am relying on them to do their part for a group project. It seems to end up with one or two students doing all the work for others.

There's a lot of things that happen on campus that I don't really get to attend. I get the emails for, but I don't get to attend which sometimes sucks because I feel like that's taking out of the actual college experience, but I'm also older than some of the kids that go. I know there's people of all ages that go to school but I feel like maybe if I was on campus I might feel a little out of place. I asked my sister [who attends Duncan University on campus] how she feels because she's a little older than I am. She said sometimes the maturity in the classroom,

sometimes is hard with students. You know, she also said especially for group assignments. My sister said there's a lot of things where she's like, "I don't have time for going to get with my whole group when I'm busy." Because she's also a mom, so she's like, "That's hard. These kids are like 22," she's like, "And I'm over here like 30 something and I have a kid and I can't just be like 'Yeah I'll come to your house late at night for a project.'" "

I definitely used the bookstore a lot. They've always mailed my books to me, so that's nice for online programs. There was one negative situation with the bookstore. I did return my books on time; I got the mailing sheet to send it back, but I thought I sent it back in time, but I didn't. And they were kind of rude about it. I've also used the library – their research database, and I chat a lot with the librarians when I have to do papers and research. And I have used the writing lab a lot when I was taking writing courses.

The bad part is just the education taking a little bit longer than what I would like it to. I planned from the first class I was taking to the last, so I had it all scheduled out as far as I possibly could without knowing the exact course offerings that they're going to have in a couple of years. For sure, once the spring or fall class offerings came out, then I would choose as far ahead as I possibly could. It was tricky to do and I did that on my own. It would be nice if they had more of that information available easily.

Online, I like it a lot. I feel like I'm in my own element, I feel like I'm learning and doing what I'm supposed to be doing. I do think it would be nice to be able to relate to people that are in school with you, but I mean I really like the online program. But the community college felt more personal. You know, like when you sit down and you talk to someone and you meet them, you know their personality a little bit. I think the computer at times doesn't give you that privilege. At the community college it was just more hands on. It felt like people were seeking to

really help me thrive, to come up with solutions. At Duncan, a lot of times it was pretty much like I was on my own. Even with trying to come up with a way to do my practicum hours. They didn't come up with a solution. They were just telling me, "I'm sorry we can't do anything." So it was me having to figure out how to make it work. I wish that more had been laid out ahead of what I needed. I had to find things out as I went along. I think I would have made different choices if I would have known everything upfront.

I'm reaching the end. I thought I had three classes, and I just learned this weekend after doing some detective work with advising that there was an issue with my [online portal for planning courses and tracking graduation requirements]. There were these two classes that kept popping up. I was advised that I did not need to take those. There were three classes, and you just need to choose one of those classes. I chose the one, I'm taking that one. Now I found out that that was an error, and that I do, indeed, need to take those other two classes. I'm planning to just knock those out over the summer. That was two more classes than what I'd thought. I'm just getting over it today. My advisor has been really helpful and goes out of her way to contact or email me about things. I'm saying that because she's been going back and forth with me a little bit about the whole thing with those two classes. Even on Sunday morning, I wake up and find where she's emailed me early that morning. We both hate for this to happen. I appreciate her taking the time to do that. That means a lot.

There have been a few times that I did have to go to campus and the one thing about going on campus is that sometimes it is really hard when you have to do things on their schedule – you've got to come when the bookstore is open – and that means I have to adjust somehow around work. And then the parking and the amount of traffic can be tough. That's just an experience that I don't enjoy. I scheduled to try to meet with my advisor because I just knew

there was this problem with my [online portal for planning courses and tracking graduation requirements]. I kept saying “I know I need to talk with somebody.” I responded day one or day two as soon as you could respond to the advising thread, I sent all that stuff, I got some things back that I knew weren’t really correct for my situation. I was like “I really need to talk to somebody.” I emailed my former advisor who was also an instructor that I have a bit of rapport with. I emailed my advisor...I kept getting these automated responses back, “You’ll need to respond to the advising thread.” I’ve already done that. Then I responded again to the advising thread, and at this point it told me I was late for advising. Again, an automated response... It took about a week and a half, two weeks before I felt like I was finally speaking with my advisor. I went over to campus at 10:30 this past Friday morning. I left work to go over there. Then just driving around, and around, and around to find a parking spot. It was just crazy. As far as the foot traffic it wasn’t bad, but just finding a place to park, when everybody’s already in class, that’s hard. And it makes it extra hard because here I am missing work to get this done. Same thing when I went to go to the Writing Center, which overall was a really good experience, but here I was getting off work at 5:30 and trying to get over there. I went two weeks in a row. The very first week I went, I managed to snag a parking spot and get there on time. My group was waiting for one of the other young ladies, and they were pretty lenient. Then the following week, I am coming from a full day at work. I’m trying so hard to find a parking spot, and getting there I was a little late and [the person working in the Writing Center said], “Well, we’re gonna let you do it this time, but you arrived five minutes late. Normally if you’re after your time, then we don’t allow you to proceed.” I was like, “Wow.” I know that they have policies in place for a reason but sometimes it would be nice to have a little bit of leeway.

In the classroom for this degree, like I said, I fit in perfectly. But outside the classroom, you don't get certain emails that the full-time students do. If they send out a certain email, sometimes it goes to part-time students and sometimes it doesn't. If your class is online and you're a part-time student, sometimes you don't get emails about events on campus, so you miss out on the campus life. You miss out on certain things that might be going on that could be really useful to you. Homecoming is different, because most part-time students are off-campus. It's, "Oh, we're going to send this email to the full-time students but if you guys show up, you guys show up."

I think that the online program, it works for people who are in my position of life. I've noticed a lot of people in the program are in my position in life or older people or people who have more life under their belt. I think...Financially, it's not as prohibitive. It's not...you're not paying an arm and a leg and you're also not in a degree factory. I think that's important to me. It's financially...you can make it happen. I do wish that for the online courses, that there was more availability to chat face-to-face with the professor, or for even them to live stream a class. I know it's asynchronous, but usually they're only available for a chat maybe an hour a week if you have any questions, which I've never utilized myself. Even the pre-recorded lectures that they had done, I found that really helpful as opposed to just reading everything.

My mom encourages me and helps as much as she can. I sometimes wish my husband would be more supportive. Because he would be like, "Ugh, I'll take care of him [son] because you have school work." Sometimes I try to do my homework at lunch at work so it doesn't look like I'm spending all my time in front of a computer or on a phone, something like that. So definitely using my time wisely was hard, but I wish my husband would've been... I mean, don't get me wrong, he's definitely supportive, he's super proud of me, but sometimes it is hard.

In a typical day when I don't have [practicum] hours and I just go to work. My son has his little karate class so we do that. Then I come home; I cook. I get everyone in their respective places. Then I'm usually up doing homework for about two hours. Two to three hours depending on what the task is. On top of trying to do lesson plans for work. I'm usually up at 6:40 in the morning and I'm in bed probably 1:30 at night, 1:30 in the morning. My practicum hour days, when I was going to [name of childcare center], I would have to take a sick day from my job, and I would be there [at practicum] from 8:30 until about 2:30 in the afternoon. I would leave and go and pick my son up. We'll go to karate and then it would be the sort of same kind of repetition. That left little time for me to do my schoolwork so a lot of times then I was going to the library on Saturday or Sunday. I have had high blood pressure because of lack of rest because I'm doing- I'm being an employee, being a full-time mother, and then trying to be a part-time student. And that led up to my car accident. I fell asleep at the wheel, overworked. So now it's like trying to re-evaluate, trying to find times where I can do homework and not be up so late doing homework and other stuff.

If they could help a little. I guess that the teachers could have been ... Some of the teachers were really very supportive. I really do think they understood that people don't just come out of high school. A lot of people are going back to school in their 30s, in their 40s. So, they're being a bit flexible with their online program. And they offer a lot of online programs which is really good. So I think they understand that, and that we need a little bit more flexibility and not having to sit in a class for two hours because we have a life too. One teacher in particular, [name], she was amazing. She was very flexible with the due dates. She is also getting her doctorate. Her being a student at the same time really made a huge difference. I understand late policies and all that sort of thing, but she was just very understanding, and not inflexible, and

I really appreciated that of her. She got it. Your work-life balance gets really jacked up. I feel like if you just have your job then it is a little easier because if it gets out of control, you can point at it and go well it's that. I should stop doing that. When you've got multiple pieces moving, it's a little hard to pinpoint it. For example, my husband and I have this argument about how much screen time he has because he's always on his phone. He's always on his computer and I fuss at him. I'm like, get off your phone, get off your computer. But then I'm sitting there like ... [typing noise & action]. I'm sure that that's the same for a lot of people who are in school and working. The lines are very blurred. I honestly feel like I'm always working. And if I want to go have any semblance of a life, it's at a great personal cost. I'm going to lose sleep or I'm going to get a bad grade, or I'm going to fall asleep at work or something like that.

It bums me out that it is taking me this long because I feel like I could have been on the more productive side. [Earlier in life] where I had time to be a full-time student, and I had the ability to get the funding that I needed. It makes me sad that I didn't do that stuff. Now it's just a struggle to do a thing that I love and live comfortably. We're not eating ramen, you know? But we're also not doing the things we want to do. Like we want to travel more, but we can't. It just added up to kind of a sadder experience. I don't know if I'm phrasing it the right way. But I feel like the experience could have been better. I don't know if this is just my personality, I feel like an independent person or you don't know that you have resources that exist for you and you're just out there fumbling around. You are wasting a lot of time and money. I think that adult me now knows that resources exist. So I kind of look back at that-how did I not know these resources existed for me to figure out my path sooner rather than later. I kind of struggle with that because I'm happy with where I'm at now. But why did I do this? Why did I make these decisions? I'm like, gosh I wasted so much time.

I would like [University leadership] to go through a study being a part-time student. I feel like a lot of times you can tell people things, but until they truly experience it, because there are so many people who are trying to get more education and they have a lot of odds stacked against them. I don't honestly think universities worldwide look at that as a whole. Just to look at it in a whole different perspective. We need help. We need to feel like we're just as important as your full-time students. Help us do this, because we want to finish just as much as the full-time students do. I mean, the things that would make it easier are the financial pieces of it. Like if the state had programs in place for people...adult people who wanted to go back to school full-time but couldn't afford to do that, that would be something that I think would be a cool policy to see.

In terms of friends who might want to attend Duncan University part-time, I would say it really depends on what the person wants to study. I'm just going to be honest. Our program, yes, I think it works for part-time student... The practicums/internships are the hard part so I'd tell them to be careful of that. From what I've heard, the Business School is amazing. Again, they have to stick to the rules, but if you're studying anything in the Business School, it's worth it. If you're studying media studies, I would say no. I'd say, "Don't do it. Go somewhere else." Human Development and Family Studies, yes absolutely. But certain majors here, no. Kinesiology is a no. Nursing is a no. I know quite a few part-time students in nursing, and they are spazzing. They're freaking out, not only because the material is so hard but it's just a lot of the classes you have to take one with another. Automatically, you're paying \$1,600 for two classes. That's almost a full semester. No. So, it gets tight for them. You have to maintain a certain GPA to remain in the program. So if you get stressed out and you bomb, not only did you waste money but you may not even be accepted in the program anymore, which is a waste of the stuff you did succeed in. They know what they're signing up for but I wouldn't recommend it,

not unless you had a sure fire plan of finishing, and even if you're paying out of pocket, you know that you can handle the \$100 to \$200 a month that you're going to pay to finish these classes because it gets crazy.

'Brenda'

'Brenda' is a composite of eight interviewees, a 45-year-old mother who dropped out of the first 4-year institution (not Duncan University) that she attended as a traditional-aged student. She is currently employed and is enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies (BLS) program. That program is an online program designed for working adults who have at least 60 transferable credits or have already completed an Associate's degree (Duncan University, n.d.-a). She is married and has a child who is a young adult.

I grew up in (town near Duncan University), and I went to undergraduate originally in [year]. I ended up going to [an out of state university] for a few years. Even though I was a full-time student and I lived on campus, after four years I did not have enough undergraduate classes in any one area to earn my degree. I was looking at a fifth year, and I decided "I've got to walk away from this." My GPA was very low, and I just decided to leave school and start working and rethink about, why I was in school, why I needed to study. I didn't want to take any more student loans, so that was a big factor. My perspective was completely different. I was very young and immature when I was a full-time student, and the social aspect was way more important to me than the academic aspect. I didn't have any goals in my head as to what I wanted to achieve, I didn't really know what my interests were, and I didn't know how valuable the undergraduate degree could become for me professionally. Now, my attitude and my experience is completely different because I understand the value of a college education, and understand that I'm going to get out of it what I put into it. And of course, maturing by 30 years and doing a lot of adulting... I

worked full-time until I had my daughter. I did try a couple of college courses here and there but I also had some major health issues and those just didn't work out. In 2015, I started to consider going back to school just to finish my undergraduate degree. I just wanted to complete my degree. Something to bridge the gap between employment I was participating in and knowing that if I had my degree, my options would be greater as far as my pay rate and the type of jobs that I can apply for.

I actually looked into attending [another doctoral level University] and had a really bad experience. I went in and talked to the Dean of the program that I was interested in and showed her my transcripts and she was very friendly and very, "Do what you got to do to get in. We'll make sure you end up in the program. I think you're on the right path for what you want to do," And so I came out of that really excited. I was like okay, awesome. You know, I had talked to the Dean over that school. She was like, "This looks good. This...I can see why," whatever. So then, she was like, "You should walk over to Admissions." And I talked to this Admissions person and she was just...she was very judgey and like "we don't cater to nontraditional students." And was just very dismissive of my higher education goals. Because I didn't have the best GPA from before and I was like, "Well, I have all this work experience here. Does that count for anything? Is there anything I can do to make this better?" She just ended up being really dismissive and kind of ugly. That experience just soured me on that school altogether. That's bad I guess but that's where I really wanted to go – I live closer to there and it is really what I was thinking I wanted to do. I actually went to my car and cried afterwards because it was a weird up and down. I've never felt discriminated against until that moment. I never felt like I experienced discrimination, but in that moment, it was something that I couldn't control. I can't control that I'm an older person wanting to go to school. It felt like ageism. It's hard to say

whether that was a policy or that woman's opinion. But the way the woman's opinion phrased the policy, made it seem like oh, we don't want that around here. We don't want that to be the makeup of our college. I think I said... "I feel like my experience, I feel like I've come around from that." And she says, "That doesn't really count for anything". She told me it didn't count for anything. I said, "I find that kind of hard to believe", and I said "I know I'll be a nontraditional student". And she's says, "Well, we don't really cater to that". I asked, "What can we do to try figure something out and make this work?" Because she told me, "It's very competitive to get in here at [other doctoral level University]." And in my mind I was thinking, "Your engineering program is competitive. Your anthropology program is not that competitive." And she made it seem like I had a snowball's chance to get into there when I had just talked to the Dean who was like, "Yeah, we'll take you." And so it's just...just like flat out, the way she said, "We don't cater to nontraditional students," was dripping with just saying....I can't even... There's no way to communicate how...how hurtful it was to hear that. I mean, that's kind of the summary of how our conversation went. I don't remember the conversation obviously verbatim. It was a long time ago. I don't have hard quotes. I do remember, "We don't cater to nontraditional students." I did not even there apply based on that. Yeah. It was very brutal.

Then I talked to one of my girlfriends. She'd gone to [Community College] and gotten accepted at Duncan University, and I was telling her about my experience. She's like "well, Duncan University I feel like is a little more friendly towards nontraditional students. Why don't you look into the programs that they have?" And so I did. I looked into it. I looked at DU's program, it just seemed to be perfect for me. It was online. I admit that their requirements to be admitted as far as the number of courses I'd already taken and the price of tuition helped me make that decision to attend there. I literally went online and applied and they accepted me. It

was so easy. I feel like because I didn't go through the traditional kind of thing, I feel like I'm still slowly learning Duncan University and how it works and what to do and how to go down the path. Honestly, I feel like it was easy to get into Duncan University. With the demands of life, I'm not an 18-year-old kid that has endless amounts of time. I just think that the application structures for a student like myself – it doesn't make sense for me to go through the same application process that an 18-year-old is going through. I felt like Duncan University's process was much simpler and more friendly to a person like myself.

Because I was so close with maxing out financial aid, it was also really important that with the major I chose that there was a lot of flexibility and they were willing to work with a lot of my existing credits. They did a lot of substitutions (thank God). But there were some good options in the program. Flexibility, I think is the biggest thing.

When I started school, my daughter was still in high school, and I needed to work and I also needed to be available for her. We just financially needed for me to keep working. I went part-time knowing that it was going to be a balance between being there for her and my husband and doing my job. I manage the financial side of a painting company. I wanted to be able to balance my job, raising my daughter, and then doing well in school. I wanted to do very well academically, so all of that is why I started with just two classes a semester. Now I'm at a point in my life where I'd rather get an A in three classes than a C in five.

I feel like their program was tailor-made for my situation, and so I didn't really face any obstacles once I was admitted. I really feel like their program had in mind the kind of student that it wanted to attract, and I met those criteria. There was no...I didn't have to cross any hurdles as far as getting the right courses, the tuition. People on campus are very responsive which has been so helpful. If I email a professor, within a day they're answering me. And I'll get

anxiety and be like, “Oh no, I don’t know what I’m doing, ahhh” and they just say “Okay, take a minute.” All of the professors were there, they were available, they were open, and responsive.

Good things? The education is affordable and they have facilitated the online program very well. I have mostly been able to take the classes I’m interested in. I haven’t had any technical issues. I’ve been able to use the same computer for three years, so I haven’t had to upgrade and spend money on technology just to take the classes. Also, [it is great] getting positive feedback on projects that I’ve completed in the classroom. The interaction from the professors made me feel like I can do this, and I can do well at it, and I can continue on the studies. I felt supported by the faculty. I think they’ve understood that I have to have flexibility as far as when I can do the work. I can work at a time that it works for me. There are deadlines but I have the flexibility to work really hard when I want to, or to put stuff down and come back to it when it works for me. Not having to attend class [in person] is really what’s made this possible. Also, I think at first I would take offense if the professors pushed me but then I realized that they were really trying to help me do better and they wanted me to show good work.

It is a challenge just knowing that doing this part-time takes forever and when you don’t see it step by step and see the length of time you have to go. Because you get impatient and you want to get these things done and you know that it’s taking an extra-long time and money and energy to put forth. I tell people all the time, just take it step by step. If you have this class covered, good. Just do that class well and then move to the next one.

I think the worst probably is in one or two classes. I worked in groups with other students, and it seemed like there were one or two students who were willing to take shortcuts to complete the class. It affected the mood. It really bothered me that there were students that were

basically cheating. It bothered me because I couldn't have expected that and that could have been addressed maybe by either of the professors if they saw it going on.

Also, I think just the process of financial aid. I think there has to be a better system. I think they don't understand that we're on the phone waiting for 45 minutes and by the time they answer we're like livid. I've literally gone to the grocery store and gone shopping and come home and I was still on hold. How is it that 10,000 students [are] calling...freaking out about their FAFSA and there is not a better way?

There's an online orientation, but it didn't really make me feel like I was part of Duncan University. I don't know what its aim was. It seemed like it was more, "These are the rules for the online students. If you need help, this is where you go," and that sort of thing, but it wasn't necessarily...I didn't feel like "now you belong to the incredible Duncan University family and here are all the benefits of being at Duncan University as a student..." I would like the welcoming feel, but I don't remember getting that.

I would recommend Duncan University because of the flexibility of the online program and because of the cost. When I graduated from high school to be honest, the reputation of going to Duncan University for the students was barely anything, and I don't agree with that now. I think that Duncan University fulfills a lot of different needs for the students. I think DU in general really understood that I need to be a part-time student, I think they get that there needs to be a work-life balance, and the classes have to fit into that somehow.

I just think that was a great thing to find and I think really the option to be part-time is so great. I know some programs, part-time is not an option – you're full-time or you're not there - which is understandable given the program, but I know not every program at Duncan offers that.

I think that was probably the thing is that I was able to do part-time. I think the online program has evolved into a viable option.

Working with the Bachelor of Liberal Studies program coordinator or advisor – she has been really the touch point for me with the program in helping me arrange my classes every semester to make sure that I fulfill my requirements and be able to graduate when I want to. She helped me get through that little sticky point of, “Am I going to be able to get the classes?” Both she and the Director of the program were very approachable, very willing to talk with me and have conversations about my degree, my progress, courses, availability in the future, and just trying to balance everything out. Just the perception that they were there, and ready to help people who are nontraditional and trying to fit in part-time studies around whatever else they are trying to do. I just felt like they understood my needs.

I would like to have more campus involvement. I know it’s partly because of my schedule being what it is, but I would like to feel more like a Duncan University student. Maybe they could have some type of program where the part-time students could get together and still be a part of the university. I know we are all...we’re all students, but part-time students are a different breed than full-time. I think a lot of it is because it could be an age difference. But I’ve never let that affect me. I would enjoy hearing other people’s experiences, and maybe we could have a meet and greet. Just to find out what people have been up to, what struggles they’re having. Because sometimes if you meet and talk to people who are going through the same thing you’re going through, you find a little solution for some of the things that are going on. I mean full-time would be invited but we’re in a different setting age-wise and everything else because you’re not going to see me flying around campus on a scooter!

I feel definitely like I have embraced and belong in the online program, and I feel very much part of the Bachelor of Liberal Studies program. I felt like I really belonged in the classroom, maybe not so much coming on campus. I'm going to say the one thing that's good is the tax deduction that I'm able to take, if that's what you mean with policy. That's been a bonus, definitely.

I would like to have received the syllabi and writing assignments before the classes start. It seems like a lot of times we are expected to start working on things when we don't even know what books we are going to use. The descriptions of the classes are, in my opinion, very minimal and they are not helpful, especially when I compare them to what my daughter has access to at her college. I can't go to a professor or a department and say, "Look, I'm going to take this class, tell me what it's like." That would have been great. A longer description and access to the syllabus, and access to the books [and] the required texts to use before the classes started, or even before I registered.

I think one of the tough things was that I'm a people person, and I like eye contact. I like the one-on-one, and I really miss that aspect of it. But I do realize being an online, part-time student that's just something that I'm going to have to get over. I think maybe a hybrid program. I personally would have loved to be able to check in with an instructor once a week in class, or every so often a term, or to have the option to take the class on campus if I just can't handle one more thing at home, in the house, because that was one of my struggles was, I get home and I have to spend two, three, four hours sitting in front of a computer. This was not conducive for me. It would have been nice to have that option, I think.

But if I wanted to take on-campus class, I would have to get permission from the instructor, which was probably the same instructor teaching the online section. It's online majors

taking on-campus programs, or online classes with a whole lot of paperwork to get approved, and that's really not conducive to do that. Unless it's a hybrid class and even then...it's just... I never tried, but that's the thing. I didn't. No, because it was the drop add forms, and tracking the instructor down when they're on campus. It's not worth the time and the effort for me to do this to then have to go sit in class. I wanted to, but I just decided, I will survive. I'll go to the library. I've spent a lot of time in the library.

I just think they should make the part-time option more accessible to students...like make it more where they don't push the full-time thing as much. I know someone who had just started and she had a car wreck where she totaled her car. She was dealing with a lot of anxiety issues and driving and she's just like I can't handle all of these classes, and I think they should let people know that's okay. Not everyone has to graduate in three and a half or four years. Myself personally, when I go to my advisor and talk – like the academic counselors – they will tell you this is your schedule, you need to do this and that to graduate and well, I'm a grown up so I have no problem saying, “Well, I'm not gonna do that.” I have that ability to understand my boundaries and what I can do and what I can't. I'm thinking well that sounds nice but this is how I'm gonna do it because this is what fits with my schedule. A younger student wouldn't really do that. They would think okay, I'm being told to do this, I'm gonna do it but I'm gonna fail because I'm juggling too much. So I would rather colleges say this is what you can do, you can do this, you can go part-time, you can go three-quarter time.

Whenever I've gone on campus to get my books or handle an issue, I've always been treated with understanding. There's been one or two times they're like, “Oh are you here for your student?” “No, I'm here as a student.” I've gone in there and dealt with the bookstore. I've picked up information in different places; I had to go deal with the business office, and I mean,

everyone is just really efficient. I use the online library a lot. If I can download a book I will as opposed to buying it because as you know, it's \$2[00] or \$300 to buy a book and then you go to return it, and it's \$40. The library staff are always so friendly and helpful whenever I've had to chat with them about something, or ask for advice as to how to find some information.

Policies – some of the financial aid restrictions can get rather intricate. The financial aid restrictions can get pretty bad as you approach the end of a degree. Especially if you've had a false start; you've accumulated a bunch of credits that may not apply toward a BLS [Bachelor of Liberal Studies] degree. I can see some students who are trying to make it on part-time work. Even if they're full-time, and they're trying to carry a significant course load with all the expenses that entails; they may run into a financial aid limitation that impedes their progress.

Would I recommend Duncan University to another part-time student? I think it would depend on what they were trying to do. If they are looking at part-time, something on campus, I definitely wouldn't send them to any of the arts majors, but if they were looking at business I would recommend. I would wholeheartedly recommend the online program again and I have, because they really did work with me a lot. I did try to talk with the Education program but the problem was they run cohorts and you have to be in the cohort and go through everything as a cohort. But to want to be out of sequence or on an alternative pathway, they just didn't contemplate that. I think that there has to be some type of a market that isn't being tapped there. There have to be a number of people who would love to work toward secondary licensure and not be a full-time day student. Yeah, I think it's just very bad – the planning, progression of courses, the required internships, and all of the time commitments. My experience with the [School of Education] advising office and trying to get some insight there was just all very bad. I

have actually recommended our BLS program to others who wanted to complete their undergraduate degrees. I've suggested people check it out.

My mom encouraged me a lot before she passed away, and my husband and kid do too. My dad's not very supportive. My dad was a factory worker for years and he just thinks you know, everybody going to college is ridiculous. I don't know if he'll be there when I graduate at all. My mother-in-law laughs at me. She's like, "Oh you're going", she's like, "you're just never gonna get out of school are you? You're gonna be one of those people." I'm like, "I'm not trying to be." I'm just trying to go into the field that I started out doing. There's always people along the way that try to stop you but you have to put the blinders on.

There's not a huge draw to get parents or working adults into the campus setting. I think a lot of older adults see it as intimidating to go on campus and learn. I was just one of those, I just realized that even though I'm going to school with people my kids' age, I'm going. But a lot of parents wouldn't. So it would be nice to make older adults feel comfortable because it's hard to be walking around campus with 18-year-olds. And a lot of times the 18-year-olds will look at the adult student as a parent or as you know, "an other."

Definitely completing something that I've always wanted to finish is important, and I've always felt like it was unfinished business. I'm doing something that I feel makes me more competitive professionally and has allowed me to enter into an area of interest that I didn't know I had before I started the program. I took the classes and based on just the very brief descriptions that I have, that's how I chose the one that I did over others, and now I'm seeing viable professional options for this degree. I don't know if that was serendipitous or it was meant to be, or some sort of invisible direction from the school, but I'm hoping that where I am going next is where the school envisions for students that go through this program.

‘Renee’

‘Renee’ was formed from the stories of eight interviewees. She is a 55 year old who is also working while she takes classes part-time to complete her baccalaureate degree in Business through on campus coursework. Renee began at another 4-year research university as a traditional-aged student but did not complete there. Many years later she completed an Associate’s degree from a community college. Renee has also had some health challenges while she has worked to complete her baccalaureate degree.

I grew up on a farm. Education was stressed as being important, but money was short. My father had actually attended [another doctoral level university nearby] on the GI Bill, but he did not graduate. My mother dropped out in the 11th grade because she met my father. I know she always regretted not at least getting her high school diploma. But she was a smart, smart woman. She read the Bible; she was well spoken. The only thing I knew growing up is that I did not want to be a farmer, and I saw education as my way out. We missed a lot of days in school because some days we just could not afford to go. But when we were there, we always made an impression. I saw education as my way to move forward.

As I got older, and I started at [nearby doctoral level university her father attended], situations got more difficult. I started working and going to school. I thought that I wanted to be a doctor, but I didn’t have the tools that I needed in order to guide me in the way that I should go. My thought was, “I’ll go to nursing school then I will go to medical school, and I’ll be able to pay my way.” I didn’t have transportation. I had to depend on my brother. That was another thing, girls were not really encouraged to be independent. I had to depend on him, if he felt like going.

I ended up dropping out and started working. I tried to go back, went for a few semesters, out again. I found myself working for 30 years. I returned, I went to [local Community College] and my plan then again...Duncan University was not a blip on the radar. I said I'm going to go because I had designed a website for somebody. They liked it but at that point I also found out I don't know very much about doing that, but I liked it. I got introduced to computers at [previous doctoral level university she attended] right after high school. That's actually what I ended up falling in love with, computers. I went to the community college, and I got an Associate's Degree. But it wasn't enough. I still can't do what I really want to do.

I was really looking at going back to [doctoral level university she attended previously] but that just didn't work out. It was odd, the students were all really nice and respectful, but the people in the offices didn't return calls or were just very rude with me. They also still wanted the couple of hundred dollars I owed them from before. So, I see Duncan University billboards and it would make me think about it. So I ended up here even that wasn't my original plan. Duncan is also incredibly multi-cultural and it is within an hour of my house. It just seemed to fit what all I was looking for. They had the course offerings, they had a timeline, and there was some flexibility there that would work for me. Their business program has a great reputation.

I changed my major because I couldn't put the time in. My background in math is weak. I found computer programming has changed. I ended up changing my major from Computer Science when I got here to Information Systems which is how I ended up in the Business School. That's where I am now. Then I was in an accident – somebody side-swiped me, and I tore some ligaments in my shoulder. It was just difficult. After that, the money was a big deal because I had already attended three years at the community college. I didn't have a whole lot of funds left to go full-time, so I started on a part-time basis.

But unfortunately a lot of what I'd taken before did not translate when I got ready and came here. Which also came as a shock to me. Some of the classes didn't transfer because they had basically aged out due to how long it had been. And then again different programs [electrical engineering] too. I got bit by the computer bug. I'd learned several computer languages. Unfortunately in my [number of years] absence from school, I found out that computer programming had changed from being a procedural type of programming to totally math basis. The math that the kids are doing in high school, we didn't do until our first and second year of college. And now it's even worse.

My first advising appointment she just kind of assumed that I was a full-time student. I had to say, "Oh no, no, no I can't do this." I guess they just roll through their initial things with new students, say this, here's what you...then I was like, "No. I said I can't." And that's when she had to narrow it down and say you gotta take these to be here. So at first it was like I was messing them up by being part-time. All of their plans are made for full-time students. There's not a part-time... You know, when you first go in and they give you a suggested pathway where they say you need to take these courses....And even now coming into the School of Business, now you've got your [online portal for planning courses and tracking graduation requirements] and it tells you here's all your courses you have, here's what you have left to take. But some courses are only offered spring, fall, whatever. So my advisor gave me some courses and they all fit right. But when you go to register and they're not all available; I had to do some research on some other courses to take. I had to see if I had the prerequisites and does it fit into my plan for a course I need. I figured it out, but it would have been nice if I could just have had a part-time plan throughout.

The fact that it is school is always going to be overall positive. It's putting me closer even if it is on a slower track. But there are negatives for sure – the first one is, there are certain programs that they do not let you engage in if you are a part-timer. I see that a lot, particularly in the Business School. Financial aid is a whole other issue, but I just realized that because I've maxed out my loans now. I'm attending either on scholarship, or I won't be attending at all. I have found that with this new way that they have of doing, of qualifying for scholarships – I can't say loans, but scholarships, you have to be a full-time student.

When I first signed up for your interview, I think one of the questions on there was how did I feel, what certainty did I have that I would graduate. That's dropped drastically since then. Before I was very confident that I would finish but now with running out of aid, I don't know if I will be able to. In the beginning when I got here I was so very happy. I am on this beautiful campus. But things have gotten difficult and a lot of it is financial. It's hard to admire that shady tree when I've got to put gas in a car or I'm not going to make it back home.

I got federal assistance from FAFSA. If I didn't have that I wouldn't have been at school. It is pretty scary now because once it's gone, it's gone. But still that's a struggle as far as part-time. It's been really stressful. I see campus people that want to help, but there's not much they can do based on how the laws are set up, or just how money works. But then there are other people who I feel like they don't have a connection at all. It's just, "This is my job. I do my job, and you happen to be on the bad side of my job." Learning how to not take that personally and still realize that for the people that want to help me, even though they're obviously not going to pay my bill but they can say, "Hey, look at this," or, "Go talk to this person," or, "Go talk to your department and see if they have a scholarship for you. You're one of our best students here." That made the experience a little better because I realized that they want to help me with this

very limited resource. In that regard, it's been a positive experience on days where it's like, "What do I do?" It's really hard because life has to go on. There's rent and car and all the other [bills], until you're really left with this bill or school. Is school a necessity, or is school a luxury? Right now, it's a luxury.

Last semester, I got [a] scholarship, which allowed me to comfortably attend part-time. I chose to go to school in anticipation I would go ahead and graduate, get a degree, let me make more than 12 bucks an hour even with an Associate's degree. So I guess it's the money and some of the programs that you can't participate in if you're not full-time are the bad things. Still, I'd like to see more resources, and I'd like to see more help from financial aid. The Financial Aid Office people are always very supportive. They were very responsive and on top of it. And I feel like I'm a little bit technical when I want to know how something's going to happen. And they're like, "Okay, well when you do this, it takes this long for the system to recognize that it's happening and then once we get that it takes us x number of days." To me, to have that level of transparency, I felt like it was really important, and I think that that was something that the Financial Aid Office does a really good job of. And they were also very clear like, "Hey as a part-time student, you're going to have a reduced amount but we can plan for that and talk to you about that," and so it was made clear because you're part-time, you're going to have a reduced amount. But it is really hard now that I know that I am out of aid.

One thing that I wish they had done differently is sometimes the majors catered to people who are younger. So, for example, there are study abroad options and that's not really an option for me. I did get to do a trip to Washington, D.C. to the African American Museum of History. That was an awesome experience. But before it started, I got to the bus early. That's one thing about old people...don't want to be late. Got my little seat in the back, set up my little stuff.

People started getting on, they were making announcements and stuff. One of the programmers, I guess they went up to the front and said, "There is a little old lady back there." And so the Dean of the Honors College, [name] came back. He made chit chat. "So who are you?" "Oh my God, I'm Renee, I know you were probably wondering who is this old lady on this bus?" And then he said, "I am so sorry." He did let me know that that was an ageist comment. I find that to be the most, I don't want to use the word uncomfortable, but limiting aspect to my college experience. I'm quite sure it would be the same regardless of what university that I attended. I got a little bit of it, but it was less so at the community college. They saw me as a student first. I think that I was expecting more of that. There are some things that they will put out the notices for, and I would really like to go, but I don't because I know I'm not going to fit in. There are a lot of social things like having lunch with the Dean or the Chancellor, being an ambassador.

Even some of those you have to be a full-time student. For instance, there was an app contest last year that allowed me to engage with professionals from shop.com. It made me see the degree that I'm getting, I can use it for a lot of different things. It exposed me to other languages like mobile app languages. Even with that app contest, we came in second in building this app last year. But the truth is, the people in the audience, they voted our app as the winner. But in order to participate, you had to have at least, I think it was 50%, had to be full-timers. I had to find full-timers to do it. Again, I would be reading, I read all the notices they send from the different programs. That restriction is always there. And that's really something I don't understand. Also, they've got a program that they do every year called Suit Up. They make suits, professional business clothing, available at a crazy reduced price which is fantastic. They have a scholarship program in this Suit Up where you will put your application in and they will consider you for a scholarship. But you are not eligible if you are part-time.

When I talk about the ageist thing, they don't come from the professors. I love my professors because they see me. In the classroom, you are viewed first and foremost as a student. One professor that I had, one day after class we were talking about something, he says "Yeah, education is lost on the young." The instructors, they really seem to be concerned about you. They really want you to succeed. One of my instructors this semester, she sent me an email, and it was so encouraging. It really pulled me over to wanting to come back next semester because I was thinking of taking a break, but I said, "No, I'd better stay, I better just keep trucking." Her words were just so encouraging that she was paying attention to me as an individual, because I haven't missed one class. The professors, again, they look at you, they have all been very helpful and accessible. I had to make a change for a test due to a family obligation, and my professor was very accommodating. He was like, no problem, these things happen.

The school has mostly had the courses that I've needed, at the times that I can take them and...well there is this one thing. They do have online course offerings for some of the ones that don't have a time during the day that I can take them, but they limit some of their online courses to online students only. So sometimes if there's only classes offered during the day at certain times and their online may all be reserved for online students only. I know if it was an online only class, and I had to have that class and it was my only option that I could probably get special permission but it's just an extra step. I wish there was a little more flexibility for part-time status just because I am limited in when I can take classes. That's the hardest part. Like my night class there's a lot of part-time students in my night class. They kind of said the same thing – I tried to get such and such class, but it was online only and the only times they had were during the day when they can't go. Even if they had certain classes offered maybe on a Saturday

or a Sunday, that would be cool because I could take maybe more classes. It's just the limitations. I don't think they understand how you're so limited as to how fast we could finish.

Sometimes I think maybe the school looks at their own interest first. For whatever reason, I don't know if being a part-time students brings down their numbers. That's how I view it. I always assumed that if it took you 20 years to finish that that was a good thing [that you finished], but I found out it's not. What I found out is that if you don't finish school within a certain amount of time, that is viewed negatively on the school. I didn't know that. To me, it's like they discourage you being a part-time student. "Suit up, get in the game. Quit dealing around on the sidelines." But I don't understand. Just from the outside looking in, I would say that they don't have a clue, and I don't think they want a clue. I'm talking about the administration. And again, I don't think it's just Duncan University. I feel pretty certain it's nation-wide. There's a lot involved, there's a lot of politics involved. I wish the goal was just on each individual student getting the degree.

I don't think they understand how difficult it is to be a part-time student. I think we have a tendency to judge people by how we interpret life. I don't think they understand how truly difficult it is. When they raise a price on a credit hour, or they increase a little fee here that might not be much from their point of view, but sometimes that's the straw that breaks the camel's back, and I don't think they understand that. What I have noticed though in the time that I've been here, where when I first started, it was mandatory that you buy your textbooks. And then you'd buy that \$300 textbook and that's the last time you pick it up, when you carry it out of the bookstore. Now, there are professors, bless them, who will go back to the second or third, go back that many editions in order for you to afford that book. Or they tell you they won't use the book.

But there are some negatives like the Financial Aid and the Registrar's Office. I understand what rules are. You can't bend it. I understand that. I don't want you to bend it. But sometimes, some of them seem like they take a pleasure in it. I'm just under the impression that you would want to see people graduate the program. Maybe they just look at you as being dead weight and the sooner they cut you away the better. Speaking of the Registrar's Office, when I had to withdraw from some of my classes that first semester because of my [health issue, injury]. I had to ask them how many credit hours did I have and could any more of them be applied, because I had taken a lot; I've got a lot of credit hours. I was surprised at how few of them did. I was under the impression because I had attended [other doctoral level university], I was in my third year, that those core courses were covered. Then I was going into Information Systems, so I figured okay, I've got all these technical courses. That's going to knock out a lot of them out. No, it was like starting over. I emailed the Registrar's Office I guess about a month or so ago. I'm still waiting for the reply. What I wanted to do was to take some of those base courses at [community college] because it would have been cheaper. To make sure though that they would transfer in. So, I asked them. Because I know that...again, there's rules where if you take a course in the summer or in the winter, that does not count towards you maxing out of your hours. And then any class over 10 years old, you might not be able to have that class credited to you by the same token. I have found the way things work to be kind of confusing. That's one of the things that got me into trouble with my financial aid. Understanding the time limit on when a class goes from good to stale and understanding what classes count with the Registrar is not the same class that counts as financial aid. I did not understand that. Even though they had told me in the beginning that it was close [to maxing out loans], I had a little tiny bit of cushion. But when they told me that certain classes didn't count, that was from the Registrar's perspective. Also,

have you ever heard of the tuition surcharge thing? I've gotten into that because I went to three schools before here. I went through the appeal process so hopefully they'll approve it – it's \$800.

The rules. The federal government. Well, some of the things I don't hold against the university. I don't hold against the Financial Aid office because they didn't make those rules. It's the federal and the state governments who are making it harder, deliberately harder for people to get an education...especially poor people. Remember I told you when I started at [other doctoral level university] back in [year]. Back then, a grant, which was the only way that I could have attended then, was \$500. That \$500 in [year] would cover my tuition for that semester, and it would cover book rentals with maybe \$30 or \$40 left for the semester. That was not a lot. A few years ago when they changed the rules, they made it retroactive back to the time that you first received a grant which is fine if you're going to look at the amount. But I got \$500 a semester in [year]. Today, I could get \$5,000. They equated that \$5,000 to that \$500. When they made it retroactive, that eliminated the amount of time that I became eligible for a Pell Grant. I didn't qualify for loans back then. When I did return I think I could get maybe a year or so, maybe a couple of years of Pell Grant. But after that I was forced to go to loans, and it didn't take me long to max out.

The only services...I'm going to say there are not a lot that I use. I used the library a lot, but then that was me going and hiding in a cubby, writing. Academic One-Stop Office and library are probably the biggest ones. I mean I have zero interest in athletics. I just don't go to that stuff. I keep telling myself I'm going to come to the next homecoming just to experience it, but I'm just not feeling the athletics. I've had my resume in Career Services but I got a little bit of conflicting information on that one. I think they were trying to gear my resume more towards, from a student's perspective, but I do have work experience. But they were still helpful. Again,

some of the things like...maybe it is because I'm a part-time student. I just don't feel they are geared towards...it's like it's a different life. It might be my age, I don't know. I don't see a lot of the services screaming, "Hey Renee, over here!" I do think because they are working with kids at a different stage in their life, and that's what this whole thing is geared towards. Social events, get togethers. They will have movie night. There are things that I would like to do because I would like to decompress as well. If I go and do that or attempt to do that then I'm not going to be comfortable. The Writing Center, the Speaking Center, I would have liked to use. I will probably engage in that a little bit more going forward. Some of the offices have later hours on certain days. Financial aid is open until 7:00 one day a week. I don't think the Registrar's Office was, maybe at the beginning of each term they were open a little later, but I don't know if they still do that. Those were definitely good.

I don't know, the culture is geared towards the young. That is the way that it should be because they have got their life in their hands – their formation. But I do wish the focus was more on the person coming in to get an education. There are things that...whether they intend to or not, they set the agenda for how you are viewed. For a lot of things again, I just don't share.

A typical day? Today I don't have class so I'll get off at 4:00. I will go home and do homework or something. But Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday I work 7:00 to 4:00, and I leave, and I go straight to campus. Two days I go straight to class until 6:15 and then I go home and hope that there's food. If not I'll pick up something, and then I'll go home, and I'll usually do homework. Because of the way our assignments are due I have limited time during the week to do stuff. Then on Wednesdays I go straight from work, go to the business school building, eat a little bit, do math homework until 6:00. Then my class is from 6:00 to 8:50. Then I go home. I usually don't do any homework on Wednesdays because it is later when I am done.

Another thing, I know they are not going to have a discounted rate but, I'd say change one or the other. Either change what a part-timer has access to, or charge us less money. Because we don't have access to everything we would have if we were attending full-time. Things like programs and access to funding. Being in an Honors College, there are dinners and events that you get to attend for free. They pick up the tab. But if this program is only available to full-timers then you are locked out of that exposure. You are locked out of that network and that's not right. I would ask them to please lose the restriction on programs.

Even with all that said though, I would recommend Duncan University to other part-time students and I have. Actually my two sisters – my older sister, she was in the same boat that I was. She got behind. We had some family trials and tribulations. She didn't do well one semester. She was working full-time. Her grades dropped that semester. She had to sit out and she has not come back, although she intends to. My youngest sister, she is one class away from graduating. So yes, I would recommend it. I do love this school, even with everything I've said.

Administrator Participants

To further contextualize the information the part-time undergraduate students provided to me, I also interviewed six administrators (some who also served as faculty) at Duncan University. My goal with the administrator interviews was to add further perspective to the data that students provided and to get the administrators' feedback or reactions to a preliminary summary list of supports and barriers. Thus, administrators were recruited to participate in the study who would be knowledgeable about policies and practices that the students discussed in their interviews. All of the administrator participants were a part of the broader academic part of Duncan University. Three of them were members of the "nontraditional" student task force created by the Provost. Two administrator participants served as gatekeepers to recruit student

participants into the project. Four of the administrator participants were female and two were male. The following table provides additional information about the administrators that were interviewed.

Table 4.2. Administrator Participants

Title	Role & Job Functions
Senior Director	Student Success initiatives, including Orientation, First year Programs, Parent/family Programs, and Community College Partnership
Student Success Administrator	Student Success Initiatives, including Community College Partnership Project, Academic Success Coaching for First Year Students, Summer Bridge program for First Year Students, and Professional Development for Advisors
Financial Aid Administrator	Financial aid awards to students and some policy work with the University system and within Duncan University
Senior Academic Administrator and faculty member	Academic Policy, Academic Resource Management and Allocation, Faculty (appointment, tenure and post-tenure review, due process, termination, phased retirement, and faculty development), Undergraduate Research and Credit activities, Teaching innovations, Institutional Research, Space Management, Academic Program Planning, Assessment & Accreditation, Middle College
Degree Program Director and a faculty member	Teaching, oversight for the program, working with students to try to help them progress, and committee work
Degree Program Director and faculty member	Scheduling, teaching, advising students, also works with the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement as it applies to students in the program, other committee work

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university and how policies and institutional practices impact their experiences. These research questions guided my study:

1. What are the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university?
2. What policies or institutional practices do these students believe impact their educational progress or degree attainment?
3. How do administrators at a public doctoral level university consider (or not consider) the enrollment of part-time undergraduate students in contexts such as policy setting and campus planning?

I also used Tinto & Pusser's Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model and Model of Institutional Action to undergird my study. To report my findings, this chapter will be organized within the following outline:

- Policies:
 - Policy Supports for Part-time Undergraduate Students
 - Policy Barriers for Undergraduate Students Enrolled Part-time
- Institutional Practices:
 - Supportive Institutional Practices for Part-time Undergraduate Students
 - Institutional Practices that Create Barriers for Part-time Undergraduate Students
- Administrators' Consideration of Part-Time Undergraduate Students

“Policies” for the purposes of my study are those items in which I located some type of documented evidence or written evidence. “Practices” are more de facto in nature but still occur within the students' experiences. Those policies and practices will be organized and described based on those that were supportive and those that created barriers. I will present summary-level information of the students' perspectives on the policies and institutional practices that impacted

their educational progress or degree attainment journeys. As I review those policies, I will reference the Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model (PP&SS) and the Model of Institutional Action (IA) from Tinto and Pusser. Document analyses findings are included as relevant within the discussion of each policy or institutional structure. Additionally, I will intersperse related feedback from the administrator participants throughout the findings regarding policies and institutional practices. Finally, a separate section will further elaborate on the administrators' perceptions of how part-time undergraduate students are considered (or not considered) in contexts such as policy setting.

Policy Supports for Part-time Undergraduate Students

In this section I will focus on policies that students indicated were supportive to their educational progress as part-time undergraduate students.

Programs that were designed for part-time students or those that at least acknowledge part-time enrollment may be more supportive for those students. A very straightforward and basic theme was simply that students appreciated the ability to attend part-time and, in many cases, felt as though their programs were designed well for part-time students. Student participants were grateful that they were able to pursue their education on a part-time basis, while they also made the distinction that some other programs or majors at Duncan University were not set up well for part-time students (a topic that I will discuss in more detail later). Students were enrolled part-time at Duncan University for many different reasons, including working full-time or almost full-time, caring for family members, and avoiding debt. Others had experienced health problems themselves or had a family member who had health problems for whom they were caregivers. Programs that were designed for students in these situations seemed to get more positive responses. In fact, many students specifically sought out

programs that appeared to be designed for their life circumstances. In other cases, students changed majors at Duncan University to move into a program that they felt was more supportive of part-time enrollment.

Katrina was appreciative that she could choose the number of classes or credit hours to enroll in the business program and make that work with her family life:

So, I appreciated there's not a minimum requirement for a part-time student – the classes to take. A big positive is the flexibility with the schedule. It is a great opportunity to feel that you're still improving yourself, you can take one class at a time if that's what it takes, and you're still part of an educational system.

Jennifer talked about feeling that the Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies (BLS) program really fit well with what she needed:

I feel like their program was tailor-made for my situation, and so I didn't really face any obstacles once I was admitted. I really feel like their program had in mind the kind of student that it wanted to attract and I met those criteria.

Chris had similar feelings about the BLS program and gave an example of the type of program policy that was important for part-time students:

If I could only mention one thing it would be the BLS program. That is a shining star for nontraditional students within a 50 mile radius of [Duncan University city]. And because they have online offerings, the program can be completed entirely online at a cost that's lower than the usual tuition. As an online program, it's a shining star. Whoever designed this really knew what they were doing. One thing in particular, foreign languages. [There is a] pretty hard core foreign language requirement, you don't get a BA here unless you meet that, and there's an exception for BLS students. Because it's a completion program

that sort of acknowledges false starts at some time in the past, [it is] very difficult to do some foreign language and then come back at the same level and finish it some period of time later.

Katrina was pursuing her Business degree in a fully online program offered by Duncan University (“BS in Business Administration,” n.d.). Jennifer and Chris were pursuing Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies (BLS) degrees, a program that is completely online, asynchronous, and designed for adult learners (Student Handbook, n.d.). These and other students expressed that they felt those programs “worked” for what they needed to complete their degrees. This type of policy support may come closest to being included in Tinto and Pusser’s concept of Institutional Commitment or “the willingness of the institution to invest resources and provide the incentives and rewards needed to enhance student success” (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 6) which is a part of their Model of Institutional Action. Another applicable but not fully developed section of Tinto & Pusser’s model is labeled “Administrative Actions” where they began to describe more specific “types of administrative actions that institutions can take to...promote the goal of enhanced student success (p. 16)”.

Turning to document analysis, there was a statement in the Duncan University Catalog where the Business School acknowledged that many students needed to have jobs to support their college expenses. The School elaborated further to recommend that students who worked in excess of 5-10 hours per week should consider taking a reduced course load. Several student participants were pursuing business degrees and a few had changed from other majors into business because they felt it worked better for their part-time attendance. The preceding statement from the Business School demonstrates some recognition that students may be employed and instead of making it seem difficult or impossible for them to complete while

working, makes a suggestion to help them balance school work with their employment. This acknowledgement of student employment and advice to consider taking fewer courses is evidence that the School of Business is aware of the enrollment of part-time students and even encourages taking fewer courses to help balance coursework with employment. I analyzed the rest of the Undergraduate Catalog and found a similar statement in two other places. One was in a Duncan University overall section and the other was in the description of the Bachelor of Science in Nutrition program. There is an acknowledgement that some students in the University and in these programs also work. The statements are worded in a way to give students an idea of how many credit hours may be reasonable to take while working. While these statements are not geared explicitly toward part-time students, they are relevant to students who are planning to work while enrolled in a baccalaureate program and may also be enrolled part-time.

As stated previously, the BLS program is completely online, asynchronous, and designed for adult learners. While there are no explicit statements about part-time enrollment in the BLS online Student Handbook, there are clear statements about the flexibility of the program, timing, and types of students that are in the program. The following statements show examples of this: “all BLS classes are asynchronous by design”; “even student presentations are asynchronous”; “[t]hese classes are specifically designed for people who cannot attend regularly-scheduled classes; [t]he average student is over 30, and their ages range from the 20s to the 70s” (Student Handbook, n.d.).

Several of the administrators that I interviewed commented most student participants in my study were in programs that were either specifically designed for students who were likely to attend part-time (BLS and Birth-Kindergarten/Early Care and Education) or were known to be more friendly to part-time students (Business). I also interviewed the Directors of two of those

programs and they were keenly aware of the competing demands faced by their students. Those individuals, in addition to serving as program directors, were also faculty who taught students in their respective programs. One program director and faculty member described how they became involved with the program and the students they advise and teach.

I added to my list of commitments these online students. Some of them were going to lose their job if they didn't get a Bachelor's degree because their job requirements changed. Others were just ready to better themselves and their family. So we now have somewhere over 350 students across the state. I have exactly three [students] who don't work full-time. All the rest work full-time and come to school, and my admiration for that is just amazing. I only have a handful of students that take 12 hours a semester and it's because the particular financial aid source that they secured will not prorate and I will tell you they struggle. Many of my students are at or just above poverty level so they also have part-time weekend jobs and they have families too. I bet that I don't have ten students that don't have a family.

Tinto and Pusser noted state support/finance policies are a "key domain" of postsecondary policy. Within the context of providing policies and programs that allow for and support part-time enrollment, state finance policies may serve to incentivize or dis-incentivize universities to have such programs. Duncan University relies heavily on state appropriations to support instruction and would be negatively impacted if the university provided programs that the state did not adequately support. Finance Policies are a part of Tinto and Pusser's Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model. To support student success, those models need to work well for funding programs that allow and support completion for part-time students. The Student Success Administrator at Duncan University discussed funding:

Our funding model – so we are, of course, funded by credit hour generation. When you've got a bunch of part-time folks, you're not generating the same number of credit hours and FTE per head. That makes it difficult for us to go after the part-time student. It's a disincentive. So in a way, yes, that is detrimental to the students because it's closing the opportunity I think for an institution to say, you know what? These students, they are our mission students and this is the kind of student that we want to help. We were recently recognized for being the top institution in [State] for social mobility, public institution. That's a big deal. This is the kind of student that needs that boost and we can give them that. But the funding model is a disincentive to really being able to go all in, if you will.

Many part-time undergraduate students are also transfer students and therefore benefit from favorable transfer-in policies. Twenty-one of the 23 student participants in my study were students who transferred into Duncan University. Many had begun as “traditional” students in another 4-year school and left without a degree. Others had originally enrolled in a community college or attended a community college as a way to reengage in higher education before applying to Duncan University. Several indicated it was important to them that Duncan University was easy to transfer into and also critical that most of their credits were accepted by the University. Valerie was a student in the BLS program, who transferred credits that she originally earned at two other 4-year institutions.

That [transfer process] was very smooth. I was able to use a lot of my credits and it is so strange that a lot of my credits, even having a different major, but it was still in that same area, was able to transfer.

Deborah was in the Early Care and Education program and transferred credits to Duncan University that she earned at a community college.

And when I was accepted, I was accepted as a junior because I already had two years up under my belt.

Transfer-in policies are in the Access portion of Tinto & Pusser's (2006) Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model. Those authors noted the importance of transfer of credit guidelines and articulation of courses for students enrolled in community colleges. Duncan University is part of a state university system, within a state that has an articulation agreement between the universities and community colleges.

Duncan University's 2018-29 University Catalog contains the following section on transfer credit:

The [State] General Assembly, the Board [of the University System] and the State Board of Community Colleges are committed to the simplification of transfer of credits for students and thus facilitating their educational progress as they pursue associate or baccalaureate degrees within and among public post-secondary institutions in [State]. The [name of articulation agreement in the State] is a statewide agreement governing the transfer of credits between [State] community colleges and public universities in [State], and has as its objective the smooth transfer of students providing certain assurances to the transferring student by identifying community college courses that are appropriate for transfer as electives, and specifying courses that will satisfy pre-major and general education requirements. (Duncan University, n.d.-i, p. 674)

This section of the University Catalog, with the statement about the State's articulation agreement, makes it clear that it was the intent of state policymakers to have seamless transfers between the State's community colleges and public universities. It is, however, unclear if policymakers specifically considered part-time students as a group that would benefit from a more seamless transfer process.

I reviewed other sections of the 2018-19 Duncan University Catalog to evaluate what was mentioned about transferring into Duncan University. In most instances, mentions of transfer were about the specific courses that transfer students were required to take, how many courses they were allowed to transfer into Duncan University, the grade point average (GPA) requirements, or the number of courses that they were required to take as Duncan University Students.

The Business School statements seem to show some support for transfer students that is not found in sections from other Schools or programs. Specifically, the statement is made that transfer students could generally complete their degree programs within a usual four-year timeframe. On one hand this statement generally indicates that courses will be counted for transfer and that transfer students can expect to complete their programs within the traditional 4-year timeline. On the other hand, a 4-year timeline typically requires full-time enrollment so this statement does not acknowledge the many students who are enrolled part-time in Duncan University's Business School. From my perspective it does demonstrate a positive view on credit acceptance for transfer students that would help part-time students as well as full-time students. This is bolstered by statements from several student participants who were enrolled in the Business School and noted their positive transfer in experiences.

The Department of Human Development and Family Studies pointed out that it has programs designed specifically for individuals transferring in with an associate's degree in Early Childhood from a Community College. "The Birth-Kindergarten and Early Care and Education concentrations are also available as online programs for students transferring in with an A.A.S. degree in early childhood from a [State] Community College" (Duncan University, n.d.-i, p. 572). At least three other programs in Human Development and Family Studies (Birth through Kindergarten Teacher Education, B.S. and Child, Youth, and Family Development Concentration, Early Care and Education Concentration) say "Transfer Students with 60 s.h. may apply for admission after completing 12 credits at [Duncan University] with a minimum overall 2.70 GPA" (Duncan University, n.d.-i, pp. 573-574).

These programs are the ones that specifically mentioned transfer in policies and transfer students in a somewhat positive way directly in the Catalog. Human Development and Family Studies had the statements shown in previous paragraphs that let prospective students know that programs exist that were designed for transfer students. Compared to other statements in the catalog, the statement by the Business School that students may not lose any time is actually positive. This stands in contrast to statements made in other programs. For example, for Theatre Education:

Transfer students should note that the program is concerned with the maturation and sequential training of the young artist/educator. Thus, enrollment for six semesters (three years) is required, even when students begin study in their junior year. (Duncan University, n.d.-i, p. 466)

Similarly, a teacher licensure section of the University Catalog listed "Transfer students may require additional semesters to complete the undergraduate program" (Duncan University, n.d.-i,

p. 539). Several other programs had similar statements to indicate that transfer students should expect to have an extra semester or more of coursework to complete.

The program directors/faculty members who worked most directly with the part-time students were aware that many of their part-time students were also transfer students. For other administrators, the considerations seemed to be a bit more convoluted. Often their thoughts and descriptions of part-time students conflated part-time students, online students, transfer students, and distance students. Part-time students do often hold these multiple characteristics, and it is worth noting that conversations often included these overlapping discussions.

This intersection of student types was discussed by the Student Success Administrator as they described their role:

I think more and more of my role is moving towards things that will relate to part-time students – such as the addition of this new transfer project, and I was also a member of the nontraditional student working group last year. And I am one of the team leads for our [project name]; our cluster is focused on transfer students. I think we will start to see a shift pretty soon [in our Mission Statement and Strategic Plan] where we are specifically talking about and mentioning transfer students and part-time students. Of course, transfer and part-time are a bit different right? I mean, a lot of transfer students are part-time, right? But yes, there is a lot of overlap...I think by and large, I mean, our average age is probably closer to the traditional side, but we do have a growing number of transfer students over the last five years. That number grew 26 percent and it's growing. So I envision, in the next five years or so, for that average age to look very different. And for the student experience to look very different because

they're coming to us older with some credits. As recently as last year, we had some data indicating that students were taking fewer credit hours, seemingly by choice. What does that mean? We really don't know. Is it by choice because they're taking fewer hours thinking that I can perform better if I take fewer hours? Are they taking fewer hours because I'm working longer hours outside and this is all I can manage? We don't really know the answer to that. But still now, when a new policy or a draft policy comes about we're not considering our transfer students or we haven't to date.

The Senior Academic Administrator indicated the type of institution that a student is transferring from affects the process for credit acceptance at Duncan University. This is an important policy consideration since many states have focused specifically on community college transfer students but those articulation agreements do not cover students who may transfer from another 4-year institution.

That [there were many transfer students in the student participant group] wouldn't surprise me. A lot of them may have had an Associate's degree and come back part-time to finish a Baccalaureate degree...Community college transferring is pretty transparent and there is this articulation there. But transferring from [school name], which is a private institution or some other school they have been to, we have matching through CIP codes but ultimately a department representative – it must be the faculty. The departments have to agree to a transfer. I mean, that's done through the Registrar's Office and we've already established that there may be challenges. You know some of the challenges are sort of the academic credibility gatekeeper – for better or worse, sometimes you choose.

One of the Program Directors who is also a faculty member described a new degree program that had been created that would help transfer students with lower GPAs who may need another route to be successful.

We also have a new Bachelor's Degree in Professional Studies. And you can have a focus area. So the students come in and maybe they could do pretty well in community college. But say they graduated with a 2.0 or 2.1 – university work might be a challenge. And to gain secondary mission in our non-licensure track, you have to have a 2.7. And in licensure track, you have to a 2.0. So now we have a major – 3.0. So this new major that only requires a 2.0 with a focus area where the students who just can't do a 3.0 can put their Early Childhood classes and build their program around it and still get a Bachelor's degree. It's more of a safety net. You can still get your degree and we're going to help you do it. So I think that's a good ... It's a caring thing to do because it's completely online.

A general search for “transfer” on Duncan University's main website shows the first result being a link to the Transfers section of the Undergraduate Admissions page. The Undergraduate Admissions page details that students with more than 24 hours of college credit from an institution accredited by specific commissions and who are eligible to return to the last institution that they attended are considered “transfer students.” Furthermore, a student with fewer than 24 college credit hours from one of those institutions is considered a “freshman transfer student” (Transfers: [Duncan University] University Admissions [Transfers], 2020). In addition to “freshmen transfer students” the Undergraduate Admissions site has information about other Transfer Applicant Types, including co-admission applicants, 2Plus/AAS applicants, and international applicants. Also, the university provides information about its Transfer

Information Program (TIP), which is held several times a year and includes one-on-one appointments with Admissions Office staff, an optional campus tour, Q&A with current Duncan University transfer students, a welcome presentation with admissions, financial aid, and faculty representatives, an “information fair” about what the university offers, and specific sessions tailored to specific types of transfer students such as those with AAS degrees, adult students, Spanish speaking students, online students, and others (Transfer Information Program: [DU] Undergraduate Admissions, 2020). Directly related to the question of course transfers, from the Undergraduate Admissions transfer page, there is a link to a very detailed “equivalency list” where an individual can pick their previous institution and be shown a list of courses, along with the crosswalk of what the course equivalency is for Duncan University. It is stated it is not exhaustive and may change anytime without notice, but there is a quite detailed set of crosswalks included, as well as a link to the general Transfer Student Information page for the University Registrar and the University Registrar Transfer Appeals page (Transfers, 2020).

From the University Registrar’s Office Transfer page, there is further detail on “Degree Plans for [State] Community college students earning [Associate’s] Degrees” (University Registrar’s Office, n.d.). That page describes the state’s articulation agreement between the community colleges and public universities. The description states that the goal of the articulation agreement is to facilitate a seamless transfer for students and assure the transfer student through identification of appropriate community college courses for transfer as electives as well as pre-major and general education requirements (University Registrar’s Office, n.d.). It goes on to state that universities were charged in 2014 with “developing, publishing, and maintaining 4-year degree plans” including documentation of community college courses that would lead to associate and baccalaureate degrees (University Registrar’s Office, n.d.). This is

further evidence that there is a state and a system-level push for enhanced transfer programs; however, this statement also makes it clear that the goal was for 4-year programs, which could potentially exclude part-time students from the related policy and transfer articulation policy considerations.

As a part of the public university system, Duncan University is required to follow both the Minimum Admission Requirements and Transfer guidance of the system. The University System's website does have a "Transfer Students" page that acknowledges all students may not be traditional. The statement (below), however, speaks more to "adult" students than it does to "part-time" students. It would be positive that the statement is made; however, there is nothing to address being part-time.

For decades, the typical university student was 18-22 years old, having enrolled in college immediately after graduating from high school. But as our economy has grown more complex and adults need to pursue more education to meet the demands of the modern workforce, this 'traditional student' profile is no longer strictly the norm... Today, the [University System] attracts and serves a diverse range of transfer students who come into its constituent institutions from the military, community colleges, and other universities... Fostering these pipelines is central to the [University System]'s mission. In its Strategic Plan, the [University System] singles out as its top priority increasing access to its institutions so that all qualified and prepared [state residents] can find a way to pursue, complete, and continue their post-secondary education. In part because these pipelines make it much easier for older students to start or return to college, the so-called 'nontraditional student' has become anything but an aberration. By creating

multiple access points into the University and encouraging older [state residents] to recognize that learning is a lifelong pursuit, the [University System] aims to create a ‘college-going culture’ across the state. (Transfer Students, 2020)

Five of the participants in my study were under the age of 22 that the system office uses to define “typical student” and four of those were actually transfer students. Of the remaining 18 students who were older than 22 during their most recent semester of part-time enrollment, all but one transferred in credits from another institution. The statement above would speak to them as nontraditional students, and importantly, it addresses completion but it does not confine completion to a timeframe that could be impossible for part-time matriculation.

Online programs and courses are generally helpful to part-time students. Many student participants mentioned the fact that their program or coursework was available online as a very positive thing and several searched for an online program. This type of policy support is most closely related to Commitment in Tinto & Pusser’s Model of Institutional Action and also related to Finance Policies in the Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model. The Administrative Action items list that Tinto and Pusser (2006) began could also be expanded to include the availability of online programs as an action item. Online programs and courses could also be a specific, more tangible action item for university faculty and administrators. In the case of Duncan University, some specific online programs such as the BLS and the Birth-Kindergarten/Early Care and Education programs have been designed for students who have completed some postsecondary education and may be working while enrolled. Holly described the importance of an online program and explained her choice of Duncan University instead of another completely online institution:

I think that the online program, it works. It just works for people who are in my position of life. I've noticed a lot of people in the program are in my position in life or older people or people who have more life under their belt. And then on top of that, it's an online program that's not a degree factory. I think that was a big thing for me. I didn't want to go through Phoenix or all of the places that are churning out degrees. I wanted to go somewhere and actually get an education. I think they're doing a good job of that.

Katrina was glad that Duncan University offered an online program and made a point that unlike another program she considered it did not have residency requirement component: I appreciate that they offer a program online and that it doesn't have a requirement to come to campus [residency component].

Duncan University's Online Learning website gives the following as reasons to enroll online: "academic quality," "flexibility," and "student support." The University indicates that its online programs are asynchronous, and students are not required to log on for class at certain times but can instead complete material when it works best for them. According to that website, faculty teaching the online courses are the same as those who teach on campus. Students have access to their academic advisor and to the same student support resources that on-campus students have. The university also has "Ready to Learn" modules that help prospective online students understand more about what it takes to be successful online and explore whether the online option is a good one for them ([Duncan University], n.d.-f).

A document for Duncan University's BLS program lists the following descriptions: "Fully online....No set class meeting times...Year-round learning opportunities...Choose from 7-week or full-semester courses...Three concentrations: Humanities, Social Sciences, and

Professional Studies...[and] Highly customizable” ([Duncan University], (n.d.-a). A document for the Human Development and Family Studies degree program at Duncan University indicates “all classes online...includes courses with set class times and courses without set class times...[and] designed for students who have completed an [Associate’s degree] in Early Childhood at a [State] Community College” ([Duncan University], (n.d.-b). These documents show that these programs are online and offer differing amounts of synchronous and asynchronous coursework. Most descriptions do not speak directly about part-time enrollment but may indicate that they are designed for working professionals or older students.

One of the faculty members who also serves as a Degree Program Director discussed the quality of online at Duncan University:

[I think that we have a] commitment not to let go of quality and pedagogy which can happen in an online environment if you’re not paying attention. [We have a] commitment for alignment. I teach main campus synchronous and asynchronous sections of several courses and they are identical. The material offered, the assessments, the assignments, the feedback is identical. And I think the commitment to ensuring that the students are getting the same high quality education is one of the best things we do here. And we have a lot of support to do it. Training to teach online and everything.

The Financial Aid Administrator at Duncan University discussed the idea that online programs had more part-time students and how the University online programs may be more responsive to student needs.

The online programs probably have more part-time [students] percentage-wise, because they’re very attractive to people who are working full-time, to be able to

go to school part-time online, you know, control your availability, when you can work on things. So my guess would be we have a higher percentage of part-time students in online programs. The online folks could probably tell you more about that. We're actually starting to look at summer as more of a regular term. We work with online learning very closely, I do anyway. We have students that come in and say, "I can't get the courses I need in the summer". I say, "What is it? Let me tell them." And if they can, they'll open up a section. I mean, online learning is much more agile and flexible with summer semester than fall and spring can be in many respects. So we're trying to provide that kind of feedback.

One of the Degree Program Directors who is also a faculty member described the difference in what they heard and knew from students as a faculty member versus a program director. They also described the "stereotypical student" in their online program.

As a faculty member, I always would have part-time students, but you wouldn't know it, because they're taking a class from you and you don't know how many classes they're taking. And you have a few advisees, but most of them are full-time undergraduates. In my role as Director, though, when students are on my radar, it's usually because something isn't working. That means somebody else wasn't able to easily solve it. So, the kinds of problems I get are a little bit bigger, and often, that's when I learn that somebody's a part-time student. When I look at the demographics of the students in my program, they float in and out. Because we're an online program, we're very appealing. The stereotypical student is the sort of 35-year-old mom who had some college, and now the kids are going to school, so they're able to come back. And usually they're working, too, and trying

to complete the degree. That means they will maybe be full-time for a semester, and then disappear for a semester, and then come back for two courses.

Program flexibility in schedule and mode of delivery are important to part-time students and their degree completion. Student participants often mentioned the flexibility aspect of their chosen degree programs. For many students, the key for choosing or completing the Duncan University program was flexibility in when they could complete their coursework. For them this might mean that courses were offered during times that fit around their work schedules. Aside from synchronous classes around work, it could also specifically refer to asynchronous courses through online learning. Students expressed a desire to take courses online or on campus, depending on what worked best for them and for their schedules. The idea of program flexibility fits in Tinto & Pusser's (2006) concepts of Commitment, Access, and also Finance.

Flexibility was a common supportive policy described by the adult students in my participant group who were also employed full-time. Tanya drew a comparison to the difference in her life when she was a traditional-aged student at a 4-year university versus when she was taking courses at Duncan University as a full-time employee and older student.

Well, I wanted something for my work schedule [which] is fairly flexible but only so much. And I knew I wasn't going to - I can't take a 2:00 class. They [Duncan University] had the course offerings, they had a timeline, there was some flexibility there with work that would work with that. I guess it's just class availability and flexibility. That's really the hardest part. There are a lot of part-time students in my night class. They kind of said the same thing, like 'I tried to get such and such class but it was online only or the only times they had were

during the day when you can't go.' Of course I was younger, I had all the time in the world and could take classes any time and had a lot more freedom and flexibility with my schedule. So then even when I went part-time then I worked in retail I could take classes whenever I wanted to, and I could work around my school schedule. Here I have to do school around my work schedule.

Jennifer felt as though the University and the BLS program understood that she needed flexibility in the program and the times when she could attend the asynchronous online classes and complete assignments.

I think they've [program administrators, faculty] understood that I have to have flexibility as far as when I can do the work. I can work at a time that it works for me. There are deadlines but I have the flexibility to work really hard when I want to, or to put stuff down and come back to it when it works for me. Not have to attend class [online only student] – that's what's made this possible. I would recommend it because of the flexibility of the online program and because of the cost.

Ebony was an older student who also worked full-time in Early Childhood Education, had a part-time job, and indicated flexibility and the online programming were positives for her.

Let's see, positives, I would say the flexibility. Especially, it being online, just the flexibility. I think they [university administrators, program administrators, faculty] understood that people don't just come out of high school. And it's just like everybody is going back to school in their 30s, in their 40s. So, they're being a bit flexible with their online program, and they offer a lot of online programs

which is really good. So I think that they understand that we need a little bit more flexibility with them and not having to sit in a class for two hours because we have a life too.

As described in a preceding section, Duncan University's BLS program is specifically marketed as online, with asynchronous classes ([Duncan University], (n.d.-a)). Similarly, the BS in Human Development and Family Studies website shows that all classes are held online, and courses may have set class times or may not have set class times ([Duncan University], (n.d.-b), Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies). The Duncan University Business School's Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration website specifically offers the following statement: "Need more flexibility with your schedule? We offer an entirely online version of the Business Administration degree, complete with the same courses and faculty who teach on campus" ("Business Administration," 2017). These examined documents show the flexibility of scheduling for students in their programs.

The Student Success Administrator confirmed that the programs represented by a majority of the student participants were overall more flexible for students. Similarly, Program Directors who were also gatekeepers in connecting me with students as well as interviewed for my study may have been more responsive due to the fact that they are interested in and supportive of part-time undergraduate students.

One of the Program Directors who is also a faculty member discussed how their program had tried to adapt to the scheduling that students needed.

It is synchronous or asynchronous [for that program's coursework]. So they do their work when they have a chance. And I mean some of my students turn in things at two or three in the morning. But then we also have synchronous courses

and they meet in the evening on programs like Webex or Zoom or things of that nature and so we're on camera and we're interacting. We also have an offering at lunchtime. So we have one synchronous course one day a week at lunchtime, and we have another that's two days a week at lunchtime. And so we try to match with their schedules and we do all kinds of jumping through hoops in that regard, but we have a lot more synchronous courses than we used to because the students have reported that being such a supportive learning experience.

Affordability or reasonable pricing is important for part-time students. Student participants often mentioned that they chose Duncan University due to the relatively affordable pricing at the institution. There is a statement on Duncan University's website that says "[Duncan University] has been recognized nationally for the affordability and value of our educational experience. Our tuition and costs are lower than many other [State] public universities" (Costs: [Duncan University] Undergraduate Admissions, 2020). In 2018-19, fall and spring (academic year) tuition and fees for Duncan University in-state undergraduates were \$7,331 per year and \$22,490 for an out-of-state undergraduate (College Navigator [Duncan University], n.d.). The 2017-18 Undergraduate Bulletin for Duncan University has a small section that discusses part-time students and tuition and fees. It indicates "...Part-time students are those who enroll in fewer than 12 semester hours. Tuition and fees are determined by the number of semester hours taken and by in-state or out-of-state residency" (n.d.-h, p. 20). Tinto and Pusser's Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model – Finance – includes both tuition policy and state support which tend to be tied together in the case of a public institution. Duncan University was heavily dependent on state funding, particularly to support its instructional areas.

Lisa, Amie, and Holly all mentioned the affordability of Duncan University as key to their decisions to enroll at the institution. Holly said:

Financially, it's not as prohibitive. You're not paying an arm and a leg, and you're also not in a degree factory. I think that's important to me. Financially, you can make it happen. Even though I was just talking about the lack of financial support, it's still very reasonable.

Pricing was important for many students including some who were working a substantial number of hours and paying for their education as they went rather than borrowing money to enroll in college. Affordability was mentioned by both on-campus and online students, but it is important to note that Duncan University charges differently for on-campus versus distance learning. On the "Duncan University Online" website, it is noted "Our goal is to provide online education that's both exceptional and affordable. Online courses at [Duncan University] are priced lower than our face-to-face classroom courses. You'll find our costs to be competitive with those of other top-tier universities" (Duncan University, (n.d.-d.). Furthermore, "[d]istance learners who take no courses on campus pay only the Educational & Technology Fee" (Division of Student Affairs: About Student Fees, n.d.). This means that they do not pay the Association of Student Governments Fee, Athletic Fee, Student Activities Fee, Student Facilities/Debt Service Fee, Transportation Fee, Security Fee, or Health Services Fee by process of review of posted student fees (Division of Student Affairs: About Student Fees, n.d.). The board for the public university system of which Duncan University is a part mandates that distance education students are not charged fees for athletics, health services, student activities or debt service (Authorization of Tuition and Fees, 2019). Having this policy that means online students do not pay most student fees. In turn, that helps make their overall program more affordable.

Holly, who was an online student in the BLS program noted being an online part-time student offered her the advantage of not being charged all of the fees.

That's kind of a good thing about being a distance student. I don't feel like I'm paying for things, amenities that I don't use. And actually one of the big things I like about being part-time [and online] is because if I was full-time [and on campus], I feel like I'd be paying for things that....I'm not going to go to games. I don't have time for that. I'm not interested in that. I'm not going to go do intramurals or anything else like that.

One Degree Program Director and faculty member noted "We're ranked in Forbes for affordability." They also confirmed that the students in the online program are not charged most fees. The Senior Director interviewee indicated the new student fee for first-year student programs was not paid by online or part-time students; therefore, those students were not a focus for their office's programming. The Financial Aid Administrator indicated, "It gets very complicated because of the fee structure. It's much cheaper to take the online courses."

Availability of financial support is vital for part-time students and takes two major forms, financial aid accessed through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or financial support through their employers.

FAFSA-based financial aid availability is critical for part-time students. Even though students often indicated Duncan University was affordable, many also stated financial aid was vital to their ability to attend. This type of policy support is included in Tinto & Pusser's Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model under Finance Policies and Student Success. It is also included in their Model of Institutional Action as a component of Support. Allison expressed how very important financial aid was for her enrollment in the university:

I definitely got federal assistance [through] FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid]. If I didn't have that, I definitely wouldn't be at school.

The addition of summer Pell grant funding was emphasized by Lisa as an important policy in the continued pursuit of her degree on a part-time basis.

This past year they started a summer Pell grant, which was super helpful, but previous to that, they didn't, and if, maybe you wanted to be part-time, but you didn't need those summer breaks or whatever, it was out of pocket, fully out of pocket because you didn't have a Pell grant that could help you. That would probably be the policy that did help, was that [summer Pell grant] getting enacted.

Holly indicated how vital the financial piece of college enrollment was for her and made a suggestion that it would help more people to attend full-time if the state had a grant program or incentive for adults to return to college:

I mean, the things that make it easier are the financial pieces of it. If the state had programs in place for adults who wanted to go back to school full-time but couldn't afford to do that, that would be something that I think would be a cool policy to see. I mean, it really boils down to the money piece of it whether it's incentives for part-timers or breaks or deductions for part-timers.

Duncan University's Financial Aid Office site, describes the following:

A part-time student can be eligible for financial aid, if enrolled at least half-time. Undergraduate students must be enrolled at least 6 hours per semester. Students enrolled less than full-time will have their financial aid award reduced (Financial Aid Glossary, n.d.)

While many students indicated financial aid was critical to their ability to enroll in and continue at Duncan University, it is notable that there were also some who chose to enroll on a part-time basis specifically to avoid the use of loans to finance their college education. This seemed to be more prevalent in the group of traditional-aged students in my participant group.

Employer covered or reimbursed tuition can be another method of financial support for part-time students. Two student participants had employers who either covered or reimbursed them for their coursework. Angela was employed by the university and as a benefit was able to take courses for free.

Being an employee of [University System] I was able to take classes for free, which was a huge bonus, because I have already maxed out my financial aid. The free tuition for employees. If that was not a thing, I would not have finished. There is no way, because I couldn't afford tuition otherwise, because all of my financial aid was gone. That was a huge help.

Tanya's private sector employer had a tuition reimbursement program:

[A policy that made it easier to pursue my degree] was that my work pays my tuition.

They have tuition reimbursement as long as I make a C.

Financial aid was discussed with all administrators interviewed but of course was a large portion of the discussion with the Financial Aid Administrator. They indicated the mechanics of making financial aid awards to part-time students, the diversity of Duncan University, and that many students ultimately mixed full-time and part-time enrollment.

We award financial aid to all students that apply for financial aid. It doesn't matter to us if they're part-time or full-time. We award students all as full-time, but we make it really clear that it's okay to be part-time. It's just, you've got to

start somewhere. They're not registered, that type of thing. They don't know how many hours they're going to take. So we just award everybody as full-time. Then, we've got our computer system set up to just automatically adjust for part-time enrollment.

I mean, the university is very aware of its part-time student population. We're really a very diverse campus. We probably are the most diverse of the [number in the University System] campuses. One of those subsets is part-time students. Then, within part-time students you've got nontraditional, traditional, different ethnicities, genders. Some students will go full-time one semester, part-time the next. They'll flip back and forth.

One Degree Program Director and faculty member described the efforts of Duncan University in working to get Pell Grant funding available in the summer. That change specifically helped many of the part-time students in their program. They also mentioned how some financial aid sources were still limited to full-time students.

When [former Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management] was here, he went and met with the people from Pell. I love Pell. I love Perkins. I love all those funds. He went and met with the people from Pell and got them to do a test, a pilot for summer school. Pell never paid for summer school. My students who were on Pell could never go to summer school, which means they were twiddling their thumbs all summer and then having to take too many. So he went and met with them and not this past summer, but the summer before, they did a pilot on summer school and picked it up. And so, Pell pays for summer school now. Which enables my students, especially the ones that are teaching assistants, to

take classes in the summer and not be so piled up during the school year. So that was another thing that we accomplished here. I don't have anything to do with financial aid, but I can recognize the ways that my students are struggling when it is linked to their financial aid. So most of the financial aid sources we have now, most of them will prorate, but not all. [Some] just feel like if somebody's going to go to college and they're going to give them money, they need to take a full load. But Pell has come around. And Perkins I don't think ever required full-time.

The Student Success Administrator (AVP) indicated Duncan University had acknowledged the importance of aid and that the University recently set aside some financial aid funding for transfer students, but the AVP was unaware if there was a requirement of the number of hours to be enrolled for access to that funding.

Policies that Create Barriers for Part-time Undergraduate Students

In this section I will focus on the policies that students emphasized as detrimental to their ability to make progress towards their degrees.

Lack of access to financial aid is detrimental to the continued success of part-time undergraduates. Most student participants expressed a concern about access to financial aid. In some cases, students felt as though they did not qualify for as much aid as they needed, possibly because of their employment. In other cases, students had exhausted their aid availability. Some students also expressed that there were financial aid or scholarship programs they were not eligible for due to their part-time enrollment status.

Holly had gotten married and was previously working full-time. She felt that her husband's income and her previous full-time salary (even though she had changed to working only part-time) was making it hard for her to qualify for sufficient financial aid.

In 2016, I was single, and my income was at a level where I could've gotten financial aid. But now because I'm married and they're going to count his income, they're not going to give me financial aid and that really sucks. They're counting my full-time salary from [previous job] with his full-time salary and the structure of that, I really disagree with it. For people who are in my situation, it really kind of screws me over.

When I interviewed her, Miracle had stopped out of Duncan University with just two courses remaining for her second baccalaureate degree due to, "a mixture of burn out and finances." She went on to describe in great detail her financial struggles, including being food insecure.

By the time financial aid ran out, without interest, I was \$61,000 in debt. I live off campus so the bills get paid by me. Mom and Dad pay nothing. It was a matter of, 'Look, you can't eat your textbook. Your textbook, as beautiful as it might be, is not going to pay the light bill.' It was a matter of, 'You're tired. Take a break. Get it together. Figure out how you're going to do this, and then push through because we're not quitting but you need a chance to gather yourself.' Then from there, it was just a very, very, very tight budget.

I started out full-time, but I ran out of financial aid. I don't like to quit. If I start and I can finish, we finish, no matter how hard it is. It was a matter of okay, can we take one class at a time? That's what happened. FAFSA [financial aid] – once it's gone, it's gone. I don't understand it but it makes it more difficult, because some of us have to live off of it. I had financial aid all the way through the first degree. I got through, I think, the third semester of this degree and they were like,

‘You don’t have any more money left.’ I can’t get a personal loan because the first loan, the financial aid, messed up my credit. It was a thing of how do you do this and still meet your goal? I’ve been doing one class at a time on payment plans, to get it done. We’ve gotten it down to two classes now.

If you’re not offering any kind of assistance to part-time students. There are no scholarships. It’s either you have financial aid, or you don’t. Life has to go on. There’s rent and car and all the other, and my rent and my car is just as much as my classes, until you’re really left with this bill or school. Is school a necessity, or is school a luxury? Right now, it’s a luxury. They’re looking like, ‘So, you’re not going to pay your bill? All right. There is nothing I can do,’ and they’re like, ‘You’re quitting.’ I’m not quitting. There’s nothing I can do. I think they get it, but they don’t get it. Things like a meal plan, I don’t have one. There are many days where I’m just asking a random student, “Hey, do you have an extra swipe to swipe me into the cafeteria?” Then you seem like you get this homeless feeling. You’re bumming a swipe, or you’re counting pennies at the register kind of thing.

Bonita was an honors student in the Business program and recently found out that she was at the maximum of her financial aid availability. She completed several associate’s degrees before transferring to Duncan University to get a baccalaureate degree that she felt that she needed to increase her employability and income prospects. Bonita noted for many scholarships she was finding that she needed to be a full-time student. Importantly, she expressed a drastic change in her perspective from the early questionnaire that I sent to potential participants. Initially, she was confident that she would finish, but the financial aid issue made her lose confidence in her ability to complete her degree.

Financial aid is a whole other issue but I just realized that because I've maxed out my loans, I'm attending either on scholarship or I won't be attending at all. I have found that with this new way that they have of doing, of qualifying for scholarships. I can't say loans, but scholarships, you have to be a full-time student. When I signed up for this, I think one of the questions you asked on there was how did I feel, what certainty did I have that I would graduate? That's dropped drastically since I've been here. Last semester, I got a scholarship which allowed me to comfortably attend part-time. In the beginning I was so very happy. When I got here – I am on this beautiful campus. But things have gotten rough and a lot of it is financial. It's hard to admire that shady tree when I've got to put gas in a car or I'm not going to make it back home.

Tinto and Pusser describe the existence of institutional aid and federal student aid as key domains of postsecondary policy in their Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model under Finance Policies and Student Success. It is also included in their Model of Institutional Action as a component of Support.

To be eligible for Direct Subsidized Loans or Direct Unsubsidized loans, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and be enrolled at least half time and typically must be enrolled in a degree or certificate program (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). Both the Federal Student Aid site of the U.S. Department of Education and Duncan University's Financial Aid Office have tables showing Federal Student Loan Limits (Federal Student Loan Limits, n.d.). Loan limits vary based on each student's classification (freshmen, sophomore, junior/senior) and dependency status (dependent or independent) as well as type of loan (subsidized or unsubsidized). According to that document, in general, a dependent student is

potentially eligible for up to \$5,500-\$7,500 per year in combined subsidized and unsubsidized loans. There is, however, an aggregate loan limit of \$31,000 and no more than \$23,000 can be subsidized. An independent undergraduate student is potentially eligible for up to \$9,500-12,500 per year in combined subsidized and unsubsidized loans. However, an independent student has an aggregate loan limit of \$57,500 of which no more than \$23,000 can be subsidized. Subsidized loans are available only to students who demonstrate financial need (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). The total annual cost of attendance at Duncan University in 2018-19, including tuition, fees. Housing, books and supplies, and other living expenses was estimated as \$21,297 per year (Duncan University, n.d.-c). Tuition and fees alone totaled \$7,331 per year. The Financial Aid Administrator at Duncan University was quick to note that the biggest policy barrier related to financial aid were limits on time or amounts.

Well, you know, at the federal and the state level probably the policies that have had the biggest impact on students in general are the ones that limit the time – the length of time or the number of credit hours that a student can receive specific aid programs for. For example, Pell Grants and it is similar with the state, like, say the [University System] Need-Based Grant. With Pell Grant, there's a 12-semester limit. So every semester is tracked. But if they go part-time, it's only half of that that's counted. So for a student trying to graduate, there are advantages sometimes to being part-time, like if they can't get to classes they might go 6 hours one semester and then 9 or 12 the next semester because of the availability of the courses based on how much eligibility they have left. So there's a lifetime limit on particularly grant programs, but we're also seeing it in the subsidized loan program. So from my perspective from financial aid, those

lifetime limits on the availability of funds is a big impact. It's actually encouraging some students to be part-time part of the time. Those [limits] have been around for probably five or six years. The Pell Grant started out with an 18-semester limit, and then it got dropped down to 12 semesters probably six years ago. So that's been coming on. I mean, that's still 150% of what it takes to get an undergraduate degree. The university is really committed to increasing graduation rates and pace to graduation so it's not going to take as long. But everything takes into consideration if you're part-time, the pro-rates, all that.

The Financial Aid administrator also noted issues with Pell and the state grant:

You're paying the same for six to eight, I don't know. But they use those Pell Grants up faster as a part-time student without as much opportunity for sliding in extra classes. So if you're taking six hours every time, you're going to use that Pell Grant up faster than if you were full-time taking 15 or 16. Well, one of the problems we had was with the state grants, like with the Pell Grants, the schedule is adjusted for full-time, three-quarter time, half-time and less than half-time. So, basically 12 or more, 9, 6, and 3 [credit hours].

Well, state grants are either full-time or at least half time – there's just the two. So it's almost like a cliff effect when you go from 12 or more down to any number. Six, between 6 and 12 or 6 and 11, you get half; whether you're at 11 hours or you're at 6 hours, you're going to get half, and if you're below 6 hours you get nothing. So there's a couple of cliffs there at the state side. The financial aid community would like to see the state grants follow more of a similar format to the Pell Grant in how those are prorated.

Furthermore, as noted previously from the website statement, the aid administrator indicated Duncan University does not award institutional-based aid funds if the student is not at least halftime. So a student taking just one three-hour course would not qualify for institutional-based financial aid or the state aid program since they also indicated the state need-based aid program was structured for either full-time or half-time enrollment.

There's just the two. So it's almost like a cliff effect when you go from 12 or more down to any number; 6, between 6 and 11 you get half; whether you're at 11 hours or you're at 6 hours you're going to get half, and if you're below 6 hours you get nothing, so there are a couple of cliffs there on the state aid.

The aid administrator indicated what was very important was that students apply early, and by the preferred filing date of December 1, "whether you're full-time or part-time. If you apply after December 1, you're not going to have the same access to institutional funds, because we just don't have the funding. So it's really more about when you apply." In other words, the institution has generally awarded all of its institutional aid funding by the December 1 deadline, and "the reality is that there is just not very much [financial aid] available in general. We have a lot of unmet need." The aid administrator also indicated Duncan University was seeing the problem increase with situations where community college transfers were hitting the 12 semester limit on aid because they were coming to Duncan University having already used up a high percentage of their aid availability. Further, they agreed that the issue students pointed out that all coursework would not transfer and apply for graduation yet all coursework counted for aid calculations.

One of the Degree Program Directors/faculty members indicated they thought there would be a way for the university to let students know that they were at risk of running out of financial aid availability before they could complete their degree.

It occurs to me that there's, in what you're doing, there's got to be several key things that institutions just should do that are not resource-intensive, that can help these students...Financial aid plan. Are you going to make it before you run out? Because they have these computer systems, and they can tell you, "You need X number of credits." Well, if X is bigger than Y, what you're eligible for, a flag should go off, and there ought to be a meeting or conversation, because I've seen it. I've had students drop out having met every requirement but one or something. It's because they ran out of financial aid.

The Financial Aid administrator discussed some similar initiatives:

We actually do a lot – we start emailing or sending out notifications at 90 hours and we'll say, 'Hey look at you, you're a sophomore,' or 'you're a senior. Have you got your plans of when you're going to graduate?' If they have everything shy of 120 we'll go, 'Hey, you should be graduating, make sure you have all of your ducks in a row.' Then, they hit 120 or more and we say, 'What's up? You should be done. You're going to run out of money.' We're actually looking, we've done it based on credit hours. We're actually trying to come up with a letter since when they do the FAFSA every year the federal government tells them where they are in their lifetime eligibility and their use and utilization of their eligibility. They'll tell them, 'You've used this much. You have this much left.' We do notify them when they hit – it's a stupid calculation but the federal government came up with it, so bear with me. So the federal government says, 'You have 600% of Pell Grant.' So every semester is 50% of 100%. So if you use one year's worth, you have 500% left. If you use two years, you have 400% left.

This is how it works. We didn't come up with it. This is not a normal kind of thing. But when they had 550%, we start saying, 'Hey, you don't have much Pell Grant left.' We're going to back that up and try to start sending out information to them. And we are working with Students First to come up...we have to be really careful how we share the information about our students' financial aid eligibility. But if we can flag them for professional advisors, non-faculty advisors but professional advisors to say, 'This student doesn't have a lot of eligibility left.' Or especially say they're transferring in; they're advising and they need to come up with a graduation plan. Well, if they've only got three semesters of Pell left, they don't need a five-semester graduation plan. They don't need a minor and they don't need a double degree. They need to get out with a degree in three semesters. So we're working with [the new Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Student Success]. Now there's got to be a way to approach this where we can be realistic and take that into consideration. And it happens in Nursing probably more than anywhere else right now; is somebody will come in and they get admitted into Nursing. They've been doing something else, they've been in the military, they've accumulated all these credits, they've got all this stuff. They've got one semester's worth of aid left, and they have four semesters to finish that program. And here they are, they're finally in this professional program that they've really been working towards, and we're not going to be able to give them enough money.

Assumptions by advisors and advising plans set up for full-time enrollment create awkwardness or other issues for part-time students. Multiple students mentioned their

advisor's expectation they were full-time. Similarly, some mentioned that the university's advising and course planning software platform presumed full-time enrollment. Some students indicated they would not tell their advisors there was an issue, while others indicated they had the conversations with their advisors to get better planning for their course taking. In either case, it often made students uncomfortable or felt like another hurdle that they had to navigate. These types of statements were more common for students who were not a part of the degree programs designed specifically for adult or transfer students.

Tanya was working full-time and had taken courses at the Community College before transferring to Duncan University. She quickly mentioned this issue of the advising plans and formats being designed for full-time attendance.

My advisor in the School of Business is great. She got me on track and said first thing you have to do is this, this, this. But the plans that they have laid out, their plans are all made for full-time students. [Online portal for planning courses and tracking graduation requirements] – it tells you; it has all your courses you have, here's what you have left to take. And I said, my advisor, I went to see her for registering for next semester and she said, 'Hey, here's some that I would suggest for next semester and then for the summer.' So she gave me some and they all fit right on the thing. But when you go to register and they're not all available or fit my timelines. So I had to do some research on a couple other courses to see, make sure I had the prerequisites and all. I can't think of the course name of them, but Econ courses. Okay, but does this Econ course fit into my plan, so it was just kind of [more cumbersome]. And like I said, it wasn't hard. I mean I figured it out. I wasn't at my wit's end or anything like that, it was just inconvenient. If I could

have just had a part-time plan throughout instead of me being the one sitting here figuring it out that would have been helpful.

Amie was a part-time student who had previously been an on-campus student but switched to online courses in the BLS program last year. So her advising experience was both with the Anthropology program on campus and with the BLS program.

They [advisors] would try to give me more classes to take, and then usually I would just be really polite and say, 'Yes, okay.' I wouldn't push back. That's really my fault. I could probably have told them. That's what they would encourage you to do is to be able to say, 'Okay, we want you to graduate.' I would tell them, 'I can do it in the summer as much as I can, but ...' I would appreciate more flexibility. I also know that that depends on the major that you have or when the classes are offered. The advisors are in my major, and depending on if you are an honors student or not, you're assigned differently. I do have to think that it would have been better if they assigned you an advisor who knew you. The advisor that I had, I have not taken her classes. That made a difference, I think, with not feeling comfortable telling her about the different challenges that I have and why I'm taking the part-time classes as opposed to where I just didn't want to...I did tell her the different classes that I'd probably take, and that studying abroad really wasn't an option for me. I felt like full-time, and study abroad was really what she wanted for me. It would be better if I could, but okay we can settle for you're part-time.

Patrice was an adult student in the online Peace and Conflict Studies program who had a relative who was also a part-time student at Duncan University.

I think they should make it (part-time option) more accessible to students. I think they should say it's okay if you take four classes, it's okay if you take three classes. I think

they just need to make that more open and available to let students know that it's okay if you can't do six classes. We don't all want to graduate in three and a half years. You know when you go to your advisor and talk they'll tell you, okay this is your schedule, you need to keep up with this and they basically print out what you need to do. Well personally, I'm a grown up so I'll say, well I'm not gonna do that. You know? I have that ability to understand my boundaries and say what I can and what I can't do. A young student wouldn't do that. They would think okay, I'm being told to do this, I'm going to do it, I'm going to fail, because I'm juggling too much. So I would rather colleges say this is what you can, you can do this, you can go part-time, you go can you know, three quarter the time. It would make it better if they let students know that.

The Duncan University Registrar's Office has a site with "[Portal for planning courses and tracking graduation requirements] Frequently Asked Questions." It states:

[Portal for planning courses and tracking graduation requirements] is a web-based tool to help students and advisors monitor progress toward degree completion.

[Course and graduation planning portal] looks at the degree requirements of the Duncan University undergraduate bulletin and the coursework completed to produce an easy-to-read degree evaluation. The evaluation is divided into block requirements that outline how courses taken count toward degree requirements.

Checkboxes exist within each block to easily outline what courses and requirements are complete. [Course and graduation planning portal] is designed to enhance the academic advisement process and is not intended to replace face-to-face advisement. A [course and graduation planning portal] evaluation is a review of past, current, and future coursework that provides information on completed

and outstanding requirements necessary to complete a degree, major, minor and/or concentration ([Course and graduation planning portal], n.d.).

Tinto and Pusser describe advising within the Support portion of the Model of Institutional Action. It is important to reiterate that for the most part, Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Model of Institutional Action is focused on things that the university controls that can improve the odds of student success. Another applicable but not fully developed section of Tinto & Pusser's model is labeled "Administrative Actions" where they began to describe more specific "types of administrative actions that institutions can take to...promote the goal of enhanced student success (p. 16)."

The students specified issues with the [course and graduation planning portal] and advisors assuming that they were full-time was discussed with administrators during their interviews. Most of the time the interviewed administrators agreed or could see how students might feel that advising and [course and graduation planning portal] plans were set up with the presumption of full-time enrollment. The Senior Director indicated:

That should just be lock step. If you're a part-time student and you come in and we can get [course and graduation planning portal] to say, you can finish these. If you've got a chunk done, here are the degrees that you can finish the fastest. Do you care what the degree is in or do you need a degree? I think a lot of people say, 'I need a degree.' Okay then, this one is going to get you the fastest, the cheapest, and get you on your way. The least amount of debt, the quicker to better pay, whatever. That just needs to be shored up. That doesn't seem that difficult. I can imagine though when the students go in to meet with advisors, if it hasn't been explicitly stated up front 'I'm a part-time student', that because advisors work with full-time [students] all day, and I think they just keep on that

routine and probably most people would say something, but I can see where they already feel a little bit like 'I'm different' and that wouldn't help.

Academic program design can create barriers to completion for part-time students.

Several student participants had changed their majors at Duncan University because their original degree programs did not work well for them as part-time students. Interestingly, most who changed majors had changed to the Business program which was not originally designed for part-time enrollment but students felt the program was accommodating to part-timers. In addition, when students were asked if they would recommend Duncan University for other part-time students, most said they would recommend only certain degree programs or recommend against some other degree programs.

Lisa was a traditional-aged student who took one semester of coursework at a community college before she transferred to Duncan University. She began as a commuter student and then later moved to the city where Duncan University is located. She worked full-time almost all of the time that she was enrolled.

I came in as a Theatre Ed major, and then switched to Business. I've paid my way through all my school. I haven't had any loans or anything. I started as a theatre ed major and the program was just not conducive to being a part-time student. It required a lot out of you, and I really wouldn't have been able to work and do the program, and I had to. Business seemed like, I liked the stage management part of theatre, and I thought maybe Management is a good direction to go.

Miracle, who had stopped out of pursuing her second undergraduate degree at Duncan University, shared her very detailed thoughts about different degree programs:

Oh, man – would I recommend Duncan University to other part-time students? That’s a loaded question. It depends on the program. I’m just going to be honest. The [name of the Business] School is amazing. Again, they have to stick to the rules, but if you’re studying anything in the Business School, it’s worth it. If you’re studying media studies, I would say no. I loved the department, but there were certain professors that told students that they wouldn’t succeed in the field they were studying. It’s not okay. Just because you don’t see me finishing doesn’t mean I can’t do this. If I was talking to somebody like me about doing part-time in that department, I would say no. I’d say, ‘Don’t do it. Go somewhere else.’ As far as the [Name of the Business] School, all day long, ‘go do it.’ Human Development and Family Studies, absolutely. I wasn’t a major there but I almost considered it, just because of how helpful they were. I took two classes there though. But certain majors here, no. Kinesiology is a no. Nursing is a no. I know quite a few part-time students in Nursing and they are spazzing. They’re freaking out, not only because the material is so hard but it’s a lot of classes you have to take with one another. Automatically then you’re paying \$1,600 for two classes. That’s almost a full semester. No. So it gets tight for them. You have to maintain a certain GPA to remain in the program. So if you get stressed out and you bomb, not only did you waste money but you may not even be accepted into the program anymore, which is a waste of the stuff you did succeed in. They know what they’re signing up for but I wouldn’t recommend it.

Angela was an adult student graduate of the BLS program who worked on campus at Duncan University in the Dance program. When asked if she would recommend Duncan University to a good friend who wanted to go to school part-time she said:

I think it would depend on what they were trying to do. If they are looking at part-time, something on-campus, I definitely wouldn't send them to any of the arts majors, but if they were looking at business then I would recommend it. I would wholeheartedly recommend the online [BLS] program again and I have, because they really did work with me a lot. Some of the programs, I feel like if you look at part-time, then maybe this particular program isn't the best here, but look at, you know [listed several other in-state public universities]. Yeah. I've actually sent one of our students from the Dance program. Like me, she wants to just get the piece of paper and like let's go. I actually sent her over to them because she's living in [a different city about an hour away] and she's just started a family, and I said, 'You're going to be here another 10 years if you try to finish this dance degree.' She said, 'What are my options?' I said, 'Go talk to the BLS folks.'

It was difficult to locate specific documents from Duncan University that addressed the issue of programs that may not be good for part-time students. One example that I did locate was for the School of Art:

Only those students enrolled in a degree program with a full-time load of courses may use space, equipment, and facilities of the School of Art.

Part-time students may use only the facilities directly connected with the courses in which they are enrolled. (Duncan University, n.d.-i, p. 418)

Tinto & Pusser's concept of expectational climate in the Model of Institutional Action is most closely related to this idea of program differentiation for part-time students. The cultural expectations that the university, each college, and even department has and displays in regard part-time students can affect the likelihood of student success.

The Senior Director brought up the idea that not all programs would be conducive to part-time enrollment before I introduced it as something that the students told me.

My guess is a lot of our undergraduate programs are not kind to part-time students in terms of the times of day, the numbers, whatever. Like Nursing, I suspect Nursing is very hard for somebody going part-time. Well, I don't know. Unless whatever they're doing in their other part-time life allows them for some real shift work like they're a or I don't know. But there's probably some degrees that scream part-time for women especially, like Nursing, but the classes might not be offered at the right time or in a pace that makes sense for them.

The Student Success Administrator was very interested in the idea that some majors, from the students' perspectives, did not work well with part-time enrollment.

My initial thought was, 'Well we should be upfront with students when they are choosing to study part-time. Look, these are the things that are just not possible part-time.' And I struggle with that because we're basically closing doors on student opportunity, and I don't like that. At the same time, I also don't like us deceiving a student into thinking that it is possible when we know damn well it's not. So what's the balance? I don't have an answer. Some of these programs are also designed for external accreditation purposes. Do we have latitude? Sure. Do we want to lose the external accreditation? Probably not. Is the tail wagging the dog? Yeah.

The overall price of college and the cost/benefit of services are important to part-time undergraduate students. Students often mentioned the importance of the total cost of attendance at Duncan University as being a reason for their choice of the institution, yet many also noted the price of tuition and fees could deter them from progress to graduation. This point may vary

depending on if the student is on campus or online and whether they are able or choose to access financial aid options. At Duncan University, there is a tuition charge and separate fee charges for particular services, yet students do not have a choice of whether to pay those fees except for their choice of being on campus or online students. As documented previously, online/distance students at Duncan University are not charged all fees. “[D]istance learners who take no courses on campus pay only the Educational & Technology Fee” (Division of Student Affairs: About Student Fees, n.d.). This means that they do not pay the Association of Student Governments Fee, Athletic Fee, Student Activities Fee, Student Facilities/Debt Service Fee, Transportation Fee, Security Fee, or Health Services Fee (Division of Student Affairs: About Student Fees, n.d.). Interestingly, several of the students, who mentioned the price of fee-based services and amenities, were also students who had a mixed enrollment strategy. Therefore, they may have been more aware of and sensitive to the fees that they had to pay when they were full-time versus part-time. Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model has Finance as a key domain, which includes tuition policy.

Lisa was a traditional-aged student who was part-time for some semesters and full-time for other semesters (mixed enrollment strategy). She worked and was paying her way through school, with no loans. Lisa worked full-time during the semesters she was enrolled part-time and a little less than full-time when she was enrolled full-time. At different times, she was employed in food service jobs at two different restaurants. Lisa had a mixed reaction about campus amenities and fees.

I used the gym a lot. I really enjoy that being a part of what they offer, because it’s such a nice gym, and it’s available to everyone whether you’re part-time or not, and when I was here over the summer taking classes it was nice, because I

had a freer schedule. Most of the special events happen at night, when there were a lot of things that I haven't been able to attend, because I've been working. Like we have this little fair that happens every year, on a Saturday, and I've always been working. I think that's the main thing, and I know it's probably difficult to offer things during the day, because not as many people can make it. There's definitely the athletic fee, and I have never really gone to basketball games because I work, and I've never really participated in that area. I've always been like, 'I paid a hundred bucks on my bill that I never use.'

Julie was also a traditional-aged student, who was pursuing her degree in Business (taking both on-campus and online courses). She began at a community college and had attended Duncan University as both a part-time and full-time student (mixed enrollment strategy). Julie worked 30 hours a week in a restaurant job. She used loans to pay for her tuition and was very concerned about the cost of add-on fees, like parking, books, access codes, and the graduation fee.

Well, just the cost of college. You have tuition anywhere you go, and I take care of that with loans, but just everything else, like the parking if I pay that parking pass to that parking deck, it's like 500 a year. After I pay my tuition with loans, everything else I do is out of pocket. It's just things that I feel like you shouldn't have. If you pay tuition for a class, in order to do your homework you also have to get this access code, and it's like a hundred and something dollars for one code. So you buy the book, and then you use that and you have to have that code. Anything through like Pearson or Cengage or anything, you have to have a code, and those codes are...one I just got was 130 and that's not the book, that's not

parking, that's not tuition, it's just extra costs that they just keep adding on. Just all the little hidden fees and stuff. It's really just they expect you to pay all this stuff as college students, who usually don't have money. But I feel like if they wanted to they could find a way to make it not so expensive for students, part-time or full-time, but if you're part-time, it's usually for a reason. Oh the graduation fee, I've noticed that. You have to pay a graduation fee which I thought if I'm already paying thousands of dollars that you guys could give someone a ... I don't even know what that fee covers, I don't know if it's the cap and gown or what. So I think these people think that college students, their parents pay for everything, which a lot of them do, they do. But if you're part-time, it's usually because you're working, because your parents aren't paying for your stuff, so all these unnecessary outrageous things shouldn't be there, or they should try to make it cheaper if they could. But that's also why I went to community college first, so I could save money.

Bonita was an adult student who had just started back to work while also trying to complete her Business degree.

I don't think they understand how truly difficult it is that when they raise a price on a credit hour, or they increase a little fee here. That might not be much from their point of view, but sometimes that's the straw that breaks the camel's back, and I don't think they understand that.

Bonita also had felt excluded from some campus programs because she was enrolled part-time.

She indicated:

I would ask to please lose the restriction on programs. Regardless of what your status is. If it is not necessary that you be a full-timer, if you are able to get over here and do and be what they want, to me that restriction is just not necessary in my opinion. For example, being in Honors College, there are dinners and events that you get to attend for free. They pick up the tab. But if this program is only available to full-timers then you are locked out of that exposure. You are locked out of that network and that's not right. Or, I know that they are not going to have a discounted rate, but I'd say change one or the other. Either change what a part-timer has access to, or charge us less money. Because we don't have access to everything we would have if we were attending full-time.

The Senior Director talked about this dichotomy of part-time students maybe not wanting all of the services and that those who were online students did not pay most of the fees that cover the cost of access to various campus services. So there might be a trade-off of what students would want to pay for versus what the administrators might think is the best policy.

Part-time students maybe don't want all the things because they're not here all the time but they probably need some of the things and just by the way that things are structured in terms of fees and such, a lot of services are not afforded to part-time students because they don't pay the fee. The reverse of that is, well do you want to pay the fees because then you could have access but they probably don't want to pay the fees because it's expensive and you probably can't use it a lot because you're only here part-time so I think that one's a catch-22. Although, I think it would be great if we could figure out a way to offer select services and either not charge the fee or not make it so much that it feels wrong. But that's a catch-22 because I would imagine a lot of students that don't want to pay more fees but you've got to pay the fees if you want the services because

those are all fee-funded services. I know the average student probably doesn't understand it or appreciate it. Most people think all the things like, pay all this tuition, where's it going? Unfortunately most of the support services on any campus are not paid for by tuition dollars.

A state policy of tuition surcharge at a specified number of credit hours was detrimental to part-time students' ability to complete their degrees. When they were asked about policies that inhibited their degree pursuits, several students mentioned the "tuition surcharge" policy. This policy would fall as a negative concept within Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Finance – Tuition Policy portion of the Postsecondary Policy and Student Success model. According to the Duncan University Registrar's Office:

In 1993, the [State legislature] enacted legislation directing the [University System governing board] to impose a 25% tuition surcharge on students who take more than 140 degree-credit hours to complete the first undergraduate baccalaureate degree in a 4-year program or more than 110% of the credit hours necessary to complete a five-year program. In 1994, the legislation was modified to exempt students who complete the degree in eight regular term semesters or the equivalent (or ten semesters for a five-year program). Effective fall 2010, the surcharge increased to 50%. (Tuition Surcharge, n.d.)

Following campus and University System advocacy efforts, the law was repealed effective July 1, 2019, applicable with the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year (General Statute 116-143, n.d.). Since policies such as this have been considered or enacted in other states and it is relevant to my consideration of policies that create barriers to degree completion for part-time undergraduates, I chose to include this policy in the discussion of barriers to progress for part-

time students. My interviews with student participants were conducted in the 2018-19 academic year before the policy was repealed during the summer of 2019. Administrator interviews were conducted in the fall of 2019 so those participants were aware it had been rescinded.

Ebony was an adult student who had been enrolled in other universities. She was working both a full-time job and a part-time job to support herself and her young child. She had hit the tuition surcharge because she started at another 4-year public institution in the University System and then went to a community college before enrolling at Duncan University to complete her baccalaureate degree.

One of the worst things has been the tuition surcharge thing. I've gotten into that because I went to three schools. It's like you have to pay money back for going to school. That would probably be the only thing. Especially because I'm not going to school just to get money. I'm actually going to school to finish school. I have this semester and then two more semesters. You know, I guess we'll see. I went through the appeal process so hopefully they'll approve it because it's \$800.

The Student Success Administrator brought up the tuition surcharge when I asked about a policy that had been recently implemented or revised. They indicated the University System had advocated its repeal due to data showing returning students were being negatively impacted by it.

I'm thinking about the tuition surcharge policy. This is one that we, when I was still at the System Office right before I left, we were starting to push to get changed because for the partway home population, you do have students who are stopping in and out who are coming to us from different institutions or just have sort of lost their path. They didn't have a clear path when they were here. They kept trying to complete a degree, and every time they came back there were

different requirements so they're taking new courses, right? And we were disproportionately affecting transfer students and returning adults students with this particular policy. So I'm glad that we were successful in making that case and that the legislature did repeal that policy.

One of the Program Directors and faculty members discussed the difficulty that the tuition surcharge often created for students in their program.

Tuition surcharge, we're glad that's finally gone. That was a huge problem, but everything I've talked about, we have students that get caught completely – usually it's a foreign language, or a Gen Ed, and they'll be sitting at 125, 130, 140, sometimes 150 credits. They're paying surcharges, and they're just caught by some requirement they need, and they can't get into the class, and they run out of financial aid, and the institution basically has no solutions for these folks.

Part-time students felt that they could make better progress-towards-degree requirements if the university did not limit their course offering based on mode of delivery.

Limiting online students to taking only online courses and on-campus students to taking only on-campus courses was detrimental or not helpful to them in their efforts to complete their degree.

The Duncan University Registrar's website section of Frequently Asked Questions has an excerpt, which describes the types of students, and then a description of the policies related to coursework.

Student Types

- [City] Main Campus Student – Students who are not in an online degree seeking program (examples: physically located on campus, visitors, visiting students, consortium, auditors).

- Online Degree Seeking Student – Students accepted into an approved online degree program (see [http://online.\[du\].edu](http://online.[du].edu) for additional information). Students in an online degree seeking program are not eligible to attend courses offered on campus (coded as “[City] Main” under Campus in the Class Schedule). The exception process and associated form, can be found at [<https://reg.du.edu/forms/online-student-registration-exception>].

Online Courses

[City] Main Campus Students and online degree seeking students are eligible to register for online courses (coded as “online” under Campus in the Class Schedule). These courses are well-suited for independent learners that want more flexibility in their schedule. Course sections are delivered in a fully online setting via the following formats:

Synchronous: course includes a specific meeting pattern with “live” interaction

Asynchronous: course does not include a meeting pattern or “live” interaction.

(University Registrar’s Office General Information, n.d.)

This policy clearly indicates that online students may not take on-campus courses without the approval of an exception. It seems to indicate that on-campus students can take online courses, but several student participants indicated a different experience. This particular type of policy does not align closely with any of the items included in Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) models. It may loosely tie to institutional commitment, meaning the ability to review policies that do not serve goals for student success. Or, it may fit into the Administrative Action Items that Tinto and Pusser (2006) did not fully complete in their narrative. While the above from the Registrar’s website indicates that on-campus students can take online courses, there were several on-campus

student participants who indicated there were online classes designated for online students only or that they had difficulty accessing. Their experiences may also have been due to limitations on the number of available “seats” in the course and because, according to one of the Program Directors and faculty members, “online students are able to register 24 hours before main campus students with the same number of credit hours and that’s because we have so many fewer online sections.”

Tanya was an adult student who worked full-time while also taking courses to complete her Business degree in an on-campus format. She mentioned the need to sometimes have access to online courses to keep moving through her program, especially given constraints on when she could take courses around her full-time job.

They do have online course offerings for some of the ones that maybe don’t have a time during the day that I can take them, but one thing they do is they limit some of their online courses to online students only. They don’t do that to all of them. Some have online only and some have online for anybody and then they’ll have on campus options as well. So they’ll have all three options, but sometimes the regular online classes get filled up [by the online only students].

Miracle was an on-campus student who had stopped out due to financial concerns and “burn out.” She noted the difficulty of not having more flexibility in course taking.

Certain classes are only offered to online students. If you are late registering and all of the regular student seats are filled, but you paid your bill, you can’t take the class you need because this is offered to an online student. You can fill out a form to have your advisor try to override that, but it’s not guaranteed.

Elaine was also an on-campus student in the Business program. She was frustrated by not being able to access some online classes. Elaine felt as though she would have benefitted from an opportunity to take some online courses.

I know certain classes you can't take online. They're reserved for distance students. A part-time student is not considered a distance student. Some of the online classes, we're not privy to them. If we were allowed to take more online classes, that would help in obtaining your credits. I enjoy coming to class, but if it's going to help me finish, I wouldn't mind being able to take a couple of classes online.

Angela, a recent graduate of the BLS program (fully online and asynchronous), indicated she would have preferred some in-person interaction or opportunity to take a course on-campus.

I personally would have loved to be able to check in with an instructor once a week in class, or every so often a term, or to have the option to take the class on campus if I just can't handle one more thing at home, because that was one of my struggles. I'm at work in front of a computer for eight hours a day, I get home, and I have to spend two, three, four [more hours], sitting in front of a computer doing homework while my son's blowing stuff up next to me (video games). This was not conducive for me. It would have been nice to have that option. If I wanted to take on-campus class, it would have meant getting permission from the instructor, which was probably the same instructor teaching the online section. It's online majors taking on-campus programs, or online classes with a whole lot of paperwork to get approved. I never tried, but that's the thing. I didn't. No, because it was the forms, and tracking the instructor down when they're on campus. It's not worth the time and the effort for me to do this to then have to go sit in class. I wanted

to, but I just decided, I will survive. I'll go to the library. I spent a lot of time in the library.

The Senior Academic Administrator and faculty member listed the types of formats that the University offered through various programs but then also understood that students were saying that they wanted something else.

We do have hybrid programs, online programs, or face to face programs. And typically those are established based on what we believe to be the market for the program. We look at the Burning Glass report and other indicators. But it sounds like the students want more options.

Other administrators acknowledged the issue of a lack of flexibility in students' ability to choose a course that fit their needs and schedule regardless of the mode of delivery for a particular course. The Student Success Administrator, when discussing the barrier on moving between online and on-campus courses, stated, "That's a big problem. That one's horrible. There's a waiver process, but that's one more thing to do." The Financial Aid administrator indicated, "It gets very complicated because of the fee structure. That's the problem. It's much cheaper to take the online. So if you're an online student and you want to take an on-campus course, you're going to get hit with a whole bunch of fees. It's a very complicated issue." One of the Program Directors who is also a faculty member stated that the policy of students in online programs not being able to take campus-based courses was a new policy:

By policy, online students in online programs are not permitted to take campus-based classes without going through an appeals process. This is a new policy here. It's been a huge barrier for some students. It's a big problem for a few people, and those are the ones that we often don't fix. But when you think of that barrier on

this student who's just trying to finish the degree, to now have to come in and navigate an appeals process, and to do it in a timely fashion so that you don't miss the registration window to get access to that limited-seat course, this is a huge barrier. But that burden is going to hit the part-time people, and the online people more than others.

Some part-time students had difficulty with transferring courses into the university or had courses that did not count toward their degree requirements. As described earlier, some students had a good experience with transferring coursework into Duncan University. However, others had difficulty with that process and had credits that did not transfer. When students used financial aid to complete prior coursework and that coursework did not transfer, the student had essentially lost both the coursework and the financial aid availability. Students found this both frustrating and difficult to understand and navigate. When courses counted against their aid availability but did not count for the purposes of completing degree requirements for graduation, those same students often struggled to be able to stay enrolled or complete. They fell into a gap of hitting aid maximums yet not having the aid available to complete coursework needed for their degrees. It is worth noting that most students who noted difficulty with course transfers were not in programs such as Early Childhood and the BLS program that were designed more for transfer or returning students.

Articulation and transfer are a part of Tinto & Pusser's (2006) Postsecondary policy and student access model. Importantly for my student participant group, Tinto & Pusser (2006) note that problems with articulation and credit transfer:

Are compounded for adult students in many cases by the difficulty in compiling and evaluating dated transcripts and in re-establishing the connection to formal education that may

have been lost in the interval between high school completion and postsecondary enrollment. (p. 26)

Bonita was an older adult student who earlier in her life had been a student at another local doctoral level university for two and a half or three years but did not complete there. In Bonita's story it is also important to note that she had recently found out that she had no remaining financial aid availability. While she was in the Honors program of the Business School, she was unsure if she would be able to complete her degree due to this lack of aid.

I had really made a lot of progress in the electrical engineering program there, but I was dependent on my brother for transportation and if he felt like going. It was very stressful. They don't like for you to miss classes. They don't like for you to be late. I remember, he was supposed to take me. I'd helped him get ready, gotten everything for class. He was in no hurry so I got there late, and I got the most embarrassing treatment from my professor in the program. It's like, okay, that's it. That may have been one of the next to the last days that I actually attended. It's like, I can't do this – I dropped out and started working. I was in and out for a while after that, sometimes trying to restart. Then I went to [local Community College] but I still, even with three Associate's degrees really couldn't do what I wanted to do. But anyway, unfortunately most of it did not translate when I got ready and enrolled at Duncan. Some of the classes didn't transfer because they had basically aged out – it was over 30 years. And then some were because it was different programs.

Julie was a traditional-aged student who began at a community college and transferred to Duncan University. She indicated an ethics class and a statistics class that she took in community

college didn't count for transfer so she had to retake those, something that she did not know when she was taking them at the community college. Simone, an alumna of Duncan University, attended another doctoral level university before enrolling at DU and explained she also had to retake some courses.

My first year at Duncan University, or maybe it was first semester, I think I was only taking one class that was in my department. I had to retake a lot of core things, which I'm mad that I had to retake. I had to take two more French classes. Some of it was just redoing things I already did. I think the hardest thing probably was some of the requirements, extra requirements, and I think going from two years of going from taking a bunch of core classes, you know stuff that you're not into, and then I had to come back and do another year of that. I thought it was a waste of money having to retake history, or art history when you're like, I already took it.

A Director of a Degree Program/faculty member discussed their perspective on transfer credits for their students in a program that is focused on returning students:

I mean, one thing, getting into the transfers, of which significantly impacts the population of part-time students. Faculty determine curriculum, and one of the unfortunate side effects is faculty don't think about these folks. When we have a requirement, why, I mean, in the College of Arts and Sciences, why do we say to somebody who wants to do a history major or a philosophy major, 'Even if you can come in and complete the major, we're still going to add these additional requirements from language and other things on top of you?' If we can look and say, 'You've already done far more college courses than any of our 18-year-olds

are going to do,' why can't we say, 'You know what? That has value, and we're going to accept that value, even if it's not identical to what we require.' As an anecdote, I had a student that had four classes at the 200 and 300 level in biology from another institution, but none of them were matched in the system to a one-to-one with Biology 10Y. So, this student who was ready to graduate, but then was told, 'Oh, you haven't met the general education science requirement, because even though [you] have all these credits, because deep in the bowels of the way the system works, these courses counted for Bio 000, so you got credits, but not gen ed credit.' We do these things that are well intentioned, that just don't adequately capture the impacts on different students. And you get arguments, and one of my least favorites is, 'Well, there's a small number of students that would be affected.' And even if that's true, those are students that we want to also serve, and I know of no other sort of example where it's okay to say, 'Well, just, that's a minority. The minority doesn't count.' But when it comes to part-time students, returning adults, I think that's too often the case.

Internship or practicum requirements can be extraordinarily challenging for part-time students to complete. Student participants in the Birth-Kindergarten Teacher Licensure online program are required to complete a field placement which students typically referred to as their practicum or internship. This program is for students who transferred to Duncan University with an associate's degree from one of the state's community colleges and an articulation agreement exists for this program (Birth Through Kindergarten Teacher Licensure Program n.d.). Part-time students in this program often found it very difficult to complete their required field placements, especially given limitations on where they could complete it versus where they

worked in childcare settings. From a Duncan University administrator, I learned that it is part of their “Practicum Policy” that every student must do at least one field placement outside of their worksite, with the idea being that they will then be exposed to a different philosophy and curriculum. I was advised that it was a Duncan University policy but that much of the program was guided by the state’s policies and requirements for licensure which are through the state agency that oversees public education.

Shonda was an older adult student who worked in the early childhood field while she was working to complete her undergraduate degree. She originally had planned to do the Birth through Kindergarten program which prepares students for licensure but changed from that program to Early Care and Education due to the specifics of the practicum requirements. To complete the Birth through Kindergarten program she would have to quit working at her current center and work somewhere else to complete the internship.

I actually just also changed concentrations because if I’d stayed, stuck with the B-K licensure, I would have had to spend a good part of my work week, pretty much a full workday of working, getting paid somewhere else, and it was gonna be really tough on my family to not work. For the B-K licensure you have to work with a teacher who has a B-K degree. Right now there’s one staff member who has a B-K but she has let it lapse, and she says that she is just not willing right now to pay to recertify. We are a private center. There is a loophole that does allow us to do a paid internship. You can just do one at your place of employment. I will be able to because I switched my concentration. I do have to work in the classroom and have my 4-year degree, and that’s not a problem. It’s just the whole having the licensure.

Monique worked in a state early childhood program, had two children, made some difficult choices in order to stay employed and complete the required practicum.

Because I work for the state, they do not allow you the time to leave your job to go and do hours for school, and I can't count the hours where I work for my practicum. So I would have to either take a leave of absence from my job or use all of my sick time up in order to complete my practicum hours. Really thinking it through if I had to go back I probably wouldn't choose Early Childhood Education because it's been very strenuous on me and my family, me trying to complete this degree. I'm using all of my sick time.

Ebony was working to finish the Early Care and Education program and mentioned multiple internship requirements. She indicated some could be done at her job in early childhood education but others had to be done in different locations.

So there's really only one or two internships that you get to do at your job but the other ones, you have to go somewhere else and it's kind of taking away money to do it. I've been struggling to do that. With not being able to go to work, I have to rearrange my schedule for work and childcare. Right now I'm losing six hours a week every week for four months and that adds up.

In discussions with an administrator, I learned that the requirements around the practicum and internship requirements are Duncan University policy but much of the program is guided by the state policy requirements. The program director knew that their part-time students struggled with the requirements but felt "powerless to change it." The Financial Aid administrator indicated they had conversations with some faculty about the practicum and internship requirements (not just those in Early Childhood Education):

Some of those [practicum and internship requirements] are really challenging. I've had discussions with some department heads about how they are incorporating internships and practicums that are required for licensure in their degree, so that when they finish the degree they can just go sit for the state exam, got the hours in, and they can be licensed. Therapeutic recreation is one of them that has a practicum that I think is – the practicum's not the problem. It is I think 60 or 80 hours, but the internship is basically three months, and it's a real problem. And I can't imagine how a part-time student would be able to do that. I mean, it would take them forever to do that practicum. And I told them, 'I get what you're doing, but it's not required for the degree. So can't they get the degree and then let them work on those?'

Tinto and Pusser's (2006) models do not address the required internships on students and their likelihood of success.

Supportive Institutional Practices for Part-time Undergraduate Students

Part-time students expressed that they had an overall positive experience at the institution which helped them in their degree pursuits. When asked about their overall experience at Duncan University, almost all of the student participants indicated their experience was "overall positive." They indicated feelings of excitement in learning and advancing their educations. In addition, when asked if they felt as though they "belonged" at Duncan University, the students, no matter their age, ethnicity, gender, or program of study, typically indicated they did feel like they belonged. Through follow ups, some shared that they felt more at home in their classrooms/courses and with their faculty than they sometimes did in other campus situations/locations or participating in campus activities.

The analysis I completed of Duncan University's Mission and Strategic Plan is important for context to students' positive experiences. The university's most recent vision and mission statement was approved by the campus and also by the University System Board in 2012. I have paraphrased important information here to protect the identity of the university. The vision and mission statement indicated that the institution was focused on changing the perception of a 21st century research institution into being defined by inclusivity, collaboration, and responsiveness to its students and communities. To create this, Duncan University is focused on learners, accessibility and inclusivity to foster students' learning and prepare them to have lives of meaning and engagement. Furthermore, Duncan University will offer classes on campus, off campus, and online for degree-seeking students and life-long learners. The institution is a research university where scholars collaborate and creativity helps to enhance the quality of life. The institution aims to be a place where innovation and leadership solve social, economic and environmental challenges in [the region and state] as well as beyond. (The [Duncan University], n.d.-g).

From my analysis of Duncan University's vision and mission statement, there is no direct mention of part-time undergraduates, yet there are some signals that the University considers individuals who have not followed a traditional educational pathway. Importantly, the university says that it is both "accessible" and "inclusive" as well as "learner-centered." The institution clearly intends to offer coursework for students in traditional on-campus models but also in off-campus and online models for both degree-seeking students and life-long learners, which may signal more flexibility for a part-time student who needs various ways to meet course requirements or who may be older than a typical student.

Duncan University is:

The most ethnically diverse public research university in the state and enrolls many students from rural, low-income, and underrepresented minority backgrounds. Duncan University holds a national leadership position in student success, having been named first in [state] and in the top twenty among public institutions nationally for social mobility, a measure of graduation rates for low income students. Similarly, Duncan University has closed the graduation gap for African American and Latinx students... (Who We Are, n.d.)

Duncan University also casts a vision of the campus being a source of meeting major social and economic challenges. In fact, the University received an acknowledgement designated for institutions that are “most successful in enrolling and graduating students from disadvantaged backgrounds” or “social mobility” (Anonymous, 2019a). The institution was also acknowledged with an INSIGHT Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award for its commitment to diversity and inclusion (Anonymous, 2019b). Duncan University’s current Strategic Plan was begun in 2014, endorsed by its Board in 2016 and the final version released in 2017 (Anonymous, 2017). The plan casts a vision for the institution’s next five to ten years and includes a focus on three “areas of transformation: transforming students to help them become successful in life and in work; transforming knowledge through research and translation of research to practice; and transforming the region through partnerships that promote economic, social and cultural development” (Anonymous, 2017). Within these three areas, the university further delineated that specific “areas of focus” were:

promoting Health and Wellness defined broadly; building vibrant communities through cultural enrichment, access to high quality education and improved economic and social

conditions; and fostering global connections by bringing people, ideas and organizations together from around the world” (“Core Elements,” n.d.).

Again there is nothing specific in this about part-time students, but there is a focus on diversity and inclusion as well as community-building.

In the “student transformation” portion of Duncan University’s Strategic Plan, the institution defines transformation as students’ acquisition of knowledge and skill development that enable them to be “life-long learners”, engaged in society, and “successful in life and work” (“Core Elements,” n.d.). This section does not specifically address part-time students, but it does indicate a focus on students and some inclination that individuals may be students at varying points in their lifespans or across different life circumstances. Furthermore, the university has stated that “access to all qualified students is critical” (“Goals and Initiatives,” n.d.).

Furthermore, Duncan University has a specific goal to increase its enrollment of low-income (i.e. Pell grant eligible, in-state) students by 15% (“Goals and Initiatives,” n.d.). Since the literature indicates that lower socioeconomic status individuals are more likely to enroll part-time and the goal is not limited to only full-time students, it is possible that meeting this goal may involve Duncan University enrolling more part-time students. In addition, a related goal is for Duncan University to increase the completion rate of its low-income students by 32% (“Goals and Initiatives,” n.d.). Again, this may include increasing the completion rates of part-time undergraduates at Duncan University. While the goal does not say it is for full-time students only, the metric uses a count of undergraduates who received a baccalaureate degree in the current academic year and received a federal Pell Grant within the last five years (“Goals and Initiatives,” n.d.), so there is a limitation of time involved that may not work well for part-time students. There are some student-related goals – 5 year graduation rate and Undergraduate

Degree Efficiency – that specifically count only full-time students (“Goals and Initiatives,” n.d.). Based on the available descriptions of the seven Student Transformation goals, three specifically measure success for full-time students only while the other four limited to full-time only (“Goals and Initiatives,” n.d.).

Within the Strategic Plan documents, Duncan University also included a page entitled “Context” which gives further information on its context in history and place and it specifically describes the institution’s diversity and how it provides support to its students. The university particularly notes that it works to address inequities in areas such as health and education and also focuses on opportunity (“Context,” n.d.). Further in that same document, Duncan University expresses something that is most closely tied to the experiences of part-time students. “Student-oriented...and a focus on all aspects of students’ lives – both within and outside the classroom – (“Context,” n.d.). Regarding the implementation of the Strategic Plan, Duncan University made a specific statement that its climate and culture would be developed to be “open, inclusive, and civil” (“Paving the Way,” n.d.)

I did not find any evidence that part-time students were specifically considered in Duncan University’s Vision and Mission or Strategic Plan. However, many statements exist that acknowledged the diversity of the campus and described the plan for the university to be both inclusive and focused on students. The Mission and Strategic Plan of Duncan University indicate that the campus seeks to be accessible and inclusive to all students, which mirrors the positive expressions the part-time undergraduate participants stated about the diversity of the institution.

The students’ expression of an “overall positive experience” fits well with Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) Model of Institutional Action and its components of expectational climate and institutional commitment. Expectational climate, or campus climate refers to what expectations

the institution has for student, faculty and staff behavior. Institutional commitment speaks specifically to the commitment of the institution to student success, which is reflected in the documents from Duncan University. In this case, Duncan University has expressed the expectation of being accessible, student-focused, diverse, and inclusive.

Patrice expressed that she chose Duncan University as an older transfer student because “it’s incredibly multi-cultural, it is just one hour away, and it just seemed to fit what all I was looking for.” Alberto framed his experience as the following:

We pride ourselves on being one of the most diverse campuses here in [state] and I’ve always thought that’s great. For the most part, I do see that as I walk through campus. I’ve seen a lot of other LGBT students, and I’ve seen a lot of bicultural students.

Ebony noted even though she was an adult online student, when she went to campus to meet with someone or to go to the recreational center she did not feel like an outsider, she felt like she belonged there.

During the course of my campus interviews, I learned that Duncan University had begun paying more attention to this group of students. Several conversations and efforts by the University may indicate reasons that the part-time students were having positive overall experiences at Duncan University. Clearly the University has a new interest in these students and in supporting them. My research leads me to believe that Duncan University is doing a fairly good job of creating a supportive environment for part-time students but that that the campus will continue to focus and improve on that. The Senior Director specifically said:

I could say it has been part of conversations and part of future strategies and understanding obviously that the full-time, traditional, first year student is

declining. Their enrollment will be declining for a while. Not solely because of that, but I think when the bottom line is hit you start looking at different populations. I know it's been on the radar; I know it's been mentioned. I've heard various faculty members, I've heard the Provost, other people saying 'What about part-time students? How are we going to account for part-time students?'

In December of 2018, the Provost convened a "Nontraditional Students working group."

As my research project was known to the campus, I was given the opportunity to discuss my research project and some of the early indications from student interviews that had been completed at that time. The group understood that changing demographics meant there was a need for the institution to focus more on "nontraditional" students, and was beginning some work for a report to the Provost. That group was also continued with some additional work from two more committees expected in the fall semester of 2019 or spring semester of 2020. In addition, the university had recently reorganized several units to focus more clearly on student success and created a new Dean-level position to head those units. In a news article about the new unit, the new leader indicated "a major goal of the division is to better serve nontraditional students" (Anonymous, 2019d). The Student Success Administrator (who is now a part of this new unit) indicated they felt their role and in fact the university was beginning to shift to focus more on transfer students and perhaps also on part-time students specifically.

We talk about first generation, low-income, underrepresented minority, and rural students, and by and large, all of those groups tend to start at community college at higher proportions than white students. So yes, I think we will start to see a shift pretty soon where we're specifically talking about and mentioning transfer students, part-time students [in the campus Mission and Strategic Plan].

Positive faculty interactions are critically important, can help part-time students feel like they belong in the university, and can keep them encouraged to continue their degree pursuits. The vast majority of student participants commented on positive interactions with their faculty members. It may be that the faculty interaction is typically through the “feedback” or student assessment in Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) Model of Institutional Action. However, in this case, the concept of faculty interaction for support and encouragement is most closely reflected in Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) involvement section of the Model of Institutional Action where they state “simply put, the more that students are engaged with other people on campus, especially student peers and faculty, the more likely it is that they will persist (p. 15)”. Tinto and Pusser (2006) go on to address the involvement of “commuter students” who

...given their obligations, the classroom may be the only place on campus where they meet other students and the faculty. If engagement does not occur there, it is unlikely to occur at all. (p. 15).

Lisa appreciated faculty being understanding of her situation:

I felt like she was very conscious of like, I have to commute here too. I understand that you’re not gonna be able to do a bunch of stuff outside of class. We’ll try to do as much in class as possible, and I really appreciated professors that tried to keep that in mind, this might not be like your main thing right now, but I want you to be as involved as possible.

Elaine indicated the importance of an encouraging email sent from a faculty member in a time that she was considering stopping out and how she felt that the faculty understood students who also worked full-time.

The instructors, they really seem to be concerned about you. They really want you to succeed. One of my instructors this semester, she sent me an email and the words she said...It was so encouraging. It just really pulled me over to wanting to come back next semester because I was just leaning on just taking a break next semester. But I said, 'No, I better stay in here.' I better just keep trucking. Her words were just so encouraging that she was paying attention to me as an individual, because I haven't missed one class. I think most of the instructors here, they take into consideration that when you're a part-time student, you're working full-time. They realize that you've got a life outside of just student work. They've got compassion.

Monique who was working in early childhood education and had two children of her own indicated about her current faculty member (also the online program coordinator/advisor)

"Spring Break is different in college than it is in traditional school. So next week I will not be able to be in class, and so she has switched up presentation days to meet the needs of just one student." Jennifer directly stated "the interaction from the professors made me feel like I can do this, and I can do well at it, and I can continue on my studies. I felt supported by the faculty."

The Senior Director said, "I think we have some really good faculty who understand that our students are not the traditional student." The Senior Academic Administrator and faculty

member gave a more mixed review with regard to the faculty support of students:

Our faculty are in this regard like so many others and I probably know our faculty as well as anybody. I can think of those real champions of students, and I can think of these jerks who could care less about their D, F, and W rates, [who think] 'but students, they can suffer. It's up to them to do this, I'm not responsible for their student success.' Yeah, you kind of are.

Advising or similar support is also critically important for the success of part-time students and may be enhanced when students have a single point of contact in their program with whom they connect personally. The majority of student participants listed advising generally or named their advisors personally as a positive part of their experience at Duncan University. One advisor and one program chair were mentioned by name quite often by students in those programs which are both online (BLS and Birth-Kindergarten Early Care and Education). The students had clearly developed a rapport with those individuals and called on them often for help and support. Advising is covered by Tinto and Pusser (2006) within both expectations and support portions of the Model of Institutional Action. They do note “formal advising remains a ‘hit and miss’ affair; some students are lucky and find the information they need, while others are not” (p. 6). Tinto and Pusser (2006) also mention that there is the idea of informal advising, a method through which students, faculty and staff may share information through informal networks.

Allison described how important her advisor was in helping her decide to enroll in the BLS program at Duncan University and in encouraging her when she had her child.

My advisor was amazing and was like, ‘Look, we’re going to get this done together. I don’t care how long it takes you. Don’t stress about it. You’re going to do awesome. Your child is your life and your child is more important for you right now.’ She was really amazing and really helpful. I think she was really helpful when I decided I wanted to go there. I think she helped my admissions processes along a lot. She was very kind and caring and cared about my story and she was the one who called me before I got my letter in the mail, because I think she was just as excited as I was to get accepted to Duncan University. She’s definitely really amazing, she’s really one of the reasons I’m

still there, probably. I literally call that lady all the time. Every time I called, she's like, 'Hello Allison.' And I'm like, 'Hi, it's me.' And she's like, 'I know. I know who you are.' She's always been so positive. I've even messaged her during the summer when she's supposed to be on break and she gets right back to me. We're excited to meet in person in May. But she's definitely been the most amazing part, she was the one who said, 'It's fine. You're still going to get to the finish line no matter if you're doing full-time or part-time. Sometimes you just have to do part-time. It's not a big deal. You can do this. Slow and steady wins the race.'

Valerie talked about the consistency of caring from her advisor:

My advisor – it's like you can feel the caring even communicating via email and telephone. I met her when I came to a meeting they had about the program, like an open house. I brought my prior coursework information with me and she looked that over and she looked at my grades and she said 'of course we have a spot for you.' And she has not changed one iota. She is interested in what I do, she is knowledgeable. If something is not right she will say 'well now I don't think we want to do this, I think we want to do that.'

Shonda mentioned how helpful the chair for online students in the Birth-Kindergarten Early Care and Education program had been for her: "really helpful, and goes out of her way to contact or email me about things." The same individual was mentioned by Ebony who said:

I just noticed that she was very helpful and she wanted the best for people. And she let you know exactly what you needed to do and at the time you needed to do it. Like I said, I'm online, so I don't really come into contact with people, but that would be the one that really stood out for me, was my advisor.

In my discussion with the Senior Director, I explored the process at Duncan University for student advising. They indicated, “All students start with professional advisors and then by their junior year they’re spun off to a faculty advisor.” This was echoed by the Senior Academic Administrator in our discussion. The Student Success Administrator indicated again, they felt that the programs that I had student participants from had impacted the responses and that faculty and advising in those programs they felt were very supportive of the students. So advising is also key for programs that are designed for returning students or others who may be more likely to enroll part-time.

Part-time students also feel supported through positive interactions with academic support and institutional support services. Student participants often mentioned academic and institutional support services as helpful to them. The part-time students in my study were far more likely to mention these types of services than any student activities. These services fit most closely into the concepts of expectational climate and institutional commitment and leadership in Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) Model of Institutional Action. They may also fit well with section on Administrative Action items.

More than half of the part-time students in my study mentioned that they often used the library and how helpful library staff members were to them. Even for students who took classes online only, many still came to campus to use the library or mentioned using the online resources the library offers. Students appreciated the library’s hours, the staff’s willingness to assist students with various needs, the meeting spaces available, and even the quiet spaces in the library. Chris was an online student who also took courses on campus. He used the library for doing homework and meeting with a tutor.

Just in general, I love the library. I mean, I know the library's ... certainly bookshelf stack-type libraries are maybe going out of style, but just to me it's a tragedy. I've used the library heavily. But I just like being in the library. Both for actually getting work done, and for sort of loafing a little bit. I really like being in the library. Even though I'm an online student, since I'm local I do come over and use the library a lot. It is a good place for me to work. I've really liked the various spaces that can be reserved for collaboration. I did use Spanish tutoring heavily and it was very convenient to be able to arrange with a tutor who was a DU student. We'll reserve the space in the library and we do our tutoring there. I sort of perceived campus meeting spaces as a very safe arrangement for meeting up with somebody for a session purpose. I was very glad that you could use or reserve a space with a computer, fairly quiet, sort of separated from the noise. I don't do well with sort of the millennial buzz of collaboration sometimes. But it was good to be able to get a quieter space.

Elaine was an on-campus student who made similar comments about the library:

I utilize the library a lot. Most of the time I just go there to do my work because it's quiet. Sometimes I check out some books. One of the ladies helped me to understand how to go through a website and pull up different articles. She showed me how I can reserve one of the study rooms.

Beyond the library, students mentioned offices such as the Financial Aid Office, the Cashier's Office, Students First, the Career Center, and Writing Center as places that they had received services and felt supported. Somewhat surprisingly to me, several students also

mentioned the Cashier's Office. Miracle, who had recently stopped out of Duncan University, described her experience with that office.

The Cashier's Office, it definitely has been a positive to know that I can say, 'Hey, how are you? This is a question I have,' and them not hesitate or them not feel like, 'Oh, I've got to answer this question,' because I have experienced that in some places with other things where it's just like, 'I don't want to deal with this,' but it hasn't been that. It's been, 'Anything we can do. You understand our limits, but anything we can do to keep you in school is what we want to do.' The Cashier's Office is actually more helpful than the Registrar. The Registrar is just like, 'It is what it is.' The people at the Cashier's Office are very forthcoming with information. They give me ideas on how I could try to do things. 'If it's not working this way, try it this way. Again, I can't tell you that your refund check is coming on this day, but I'm saying that your refund, if you get one-' I went through a really tough semester when I couldn't physically get to classes and they were going to suspend me from classes and all kinds of stuff. People in the Cashier's Office were like, 'No, honey. Appeal it. Appeal it. Don't quit.' That's nowhere near their expertise but they are still able to say 'We see you. Don't quit.' Things like that really, to know that you're human and you're not just a number. As far as the Cashier Office's is concerned, stuff happens. You may not get to finish consecutively, but they encourage you to finish. They let you know, 'Listen. Your credits do not start falling off until seven years. So as long as you finish this thing within seven years, you're okay.' Nobody wants to take that long, but just that encouragement in realizing hey, it's not any less of an achievement because it took you longer, because I've had moments where I break down like, 'Y'all, this is taking me so long. I feel so bad right now,' and they will say, 'Honey,

nobody is going to ask you that. Nobody is going to ask you, how long did it take you to get your degree? As long as you're good at what you do, nobody even cares.' They have been encouraging in that regard and, again, saying, 'Stuff happens, and it's okay not to fit the traditional mold. Just get it done, because at the end of the day you of all people are going to be proud of yourself.'

One of the degree program directors noted the library created "Lib Guides" for their students "and they can watch the video to know how to do almost anything on campus, from how to get on Webex to everything. They are a huge support and always have been." The Student Success Administrator indicated the library was open 24 hours a day and librarians were also accessible through a chat box feature online. Both were confirmed through the Duncan University Libraries website (Cox, n.d.).

Part-time students may rely on a different set of support individuals while pursuing their degrees. The student participants that I interviewed, when asked who they received support and encouragement from, most often responded that it was a family member. The type of family member might be different for different students, but it was most often a spouse, a parent, a sibling, or their teen/young adult children. Leaning on family supporters was most common for adult students and slightly less common for students of traditional age who were a little more likely to report relying on peers, roommates or friends. If adult students reported relying on friends, those friends were commonly described as coworkers or other adults who were enrolled in college on a part-time basis. While this is not something that is necessarily within the control of the institution, it may be worth some further consideration by the university.

Ebony was a student who was employed in a childcare setting and another part-time job, who had a young child and was pursuing her degree in Early Care Education. She stated her

supporters were “my mom, my boyfriend, my best friend, and my co-worker – another teacher in our classroom.”

Holly’s encouragers were her husband and her boss:

My husband is really supportive. My boss is actually really cool. He [boss] goes ‘Oh hey, you have exams coming up, why don’t you take some time off and go work on your exams?’ My boss gave me exams week off which was really nice. It happens to fall during a slow time in real estate so that’s perfect. It’s good for him and good for me. My husband – I’m like ‘Babe, sit here. I’m going to read this to you. It’s really boring but I got get through this’. And I’ll read him some very dry thing about something he’s not interested in at all. But he knows that it helps my brain to say it out loud, and he’s so supportive.

Valerie was an adult student who was working full-time and had recently stopped out from the BLS program but intended to return. Her sister was also enrolled at Duncan University. When I asked about who supported her she stated:

My sister, well actually we encourage each other. She’ll stop by and she’ll say, ‘Okay, how’s it going?’ She’ll say what’s going on for her, and I’ll say so and so on and so. I tell you she said, ‘I tell you what, step back, regroup, and tackle it again,’ and I’ll do her the same way. ‘Okay sissy, how’s it going?’ ‘Well I just don’t know.’ She has a difficult major...I’m not in the same planet that she’s on when she does that. But we encourage each other. That’s my support system. And my adult children – ‘Mom, we don’t know how you do it.’ I do it, I don’t think about it, it’s just something that I want. It’s a pursuit for me and I just do it.

While I discussed the supporters and encouragers with them, there was very little follow up from the administrators about this difference for consideration with part-time students. Occasionally, it led to some conversation about the possibility of including families in campus activities, but overall there was not much further discussion.

Institutional Practices that Create Barriers for Part-time Undergraduate Students

Students had negative or non-responsive interactions with other institutions that led them to choose Duncan University where they found a friendly and inviting “front door” experience. Multiple students in my study mentioned negative or non-responsive interactions with other universities that ended up leading them to choose Duncan University. Part-time student participants noted difficult experiences with other institutions that they considered for their degree pursuits. Those negative experiences at other institutions factored into their decision to apply to and enroll in Duncan University. The exchanges that students mentioned were sometimes very negative interactions and other times were more where individuals did not respond to them or assist them in pursuing enrollment. This is not something that was covered specifically in Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) models but may loosely fall within the concepts and expectations of their Model of Institutional Action. This theme contrasts with the earlier finding of positive institutional and student support experiences that helped students on their degree journeys.

Shonda described an experience at another doctoral level university nearby that she actually wanted to attend more than Duncan University because her husband had gone to college there.

Everyone has been very pleasant here. But when I was looking into [another nearby doctoral level university], I went over to some of their offices. I thought that their

students were the most well behaved, nicest... 'Excuse me ma'am.' But the people in the offices were very rude. Any time I've gone over to Duncan University, they've been great.

Holly detailed an experience that she had at another public doctoral level university where she initially wanted to attend more than she wanted to go to Duncan University.

I actually looked into attending [another doctoral level University] and had a really bad experience. I went in and talked to the Dean of the program that I was interested in and showed her my transcripts and she was very friendly and very "Do what you got to do to get in. We'll make sure you end up in the program. I think you're on the right path for what you want to do." So then, she was like, 'You should walk over to Admissions'. And I talked to this Admissions person and she was very judgey and like, 'we don't cater to nontraditional students.' She was just very dismissive of my higher education goals because I didn't have the best GPA from before and I asked, 'Well, I have all this work experience here. Does that count for anything? Is there anything I can do to make this better?' She ended up being really dismissive and kind of ugly. That experience just soured me on that school altogether. That's bad but that's where I really wanted to go – I live closer to there and it is really what I was thinking I wanted to do. I think I said... 'I feel like my experience, I feel like I've come around from that'. And she says, 'That doesn't really count for anything'. She told me it didn't count for anything. I said, 'I find that kind of hard to believe, and I know I'll be a nontraditional student'. And she's says, 'Well, we don't really cater to that'. I asked, 'What can we do to try figure something out and make this work?' Because she told me, that woman said, 'It's very competitive to get in here at [other doctoral level University]'. And in my mind I was thinking, 'Your

engineering program is competitive. Your anthropology program is not that competitive.’ And she made it seem like I had a snowball’s chance to get into there when I had just talked to the Dean who was like, ‘Yeah, we’ll take you.’ And so it’s just...just like flat out, the way she said, ‘We don’t cater to nontraditional students’ There’s no way to like communicate how hurtful it was to hear that. I actually went to my car and cried afterwards because it was a weird up and down. I’ve never felt discriminated against until that moment. I never felt like I experienced discrimination, but in that moment, it was something that I couldn’t control. I can’t control that I’m an older person wanting to go to school. It felt like ageism. It’s hard to say whether that was a policy or that woman’s opinion. But the way the woman’s opinion phrased the policy, made it seem like oh, we don’t want that around here. We don’t want that to be the make-up of our college. I did not even there apply based on that. Yeah. It was very brutal.

While it was not at another 4-year institution, several students also mentioned lack of service at the community college that they were previously enrolled in. Lisa said:

I was a part-time student at [nearby Community College]. There’s a lot more availability of people here to help you out with things. I think that if you’re living in [city] and you’re part-time it’s a lot easier than being a commuter and being part-time, because the people on campus are really helpful and with [Community College] you could call in and you’d be sitting on the phone for hours waiting for someone to pick up, and there’s been a couple of times that I’ve called here and never gotten someone to pick up but for the most part, they’re pretty responsive.

The experiences of these students are important to include as a contrast for and explanation that the students did not have these negative “front door” experiences at Duncan University.

Administrators at Duncan University did not have strong responses in this regard but seemed to generally agree that their office staffs and initial contact points for interested potential students were friendly and helpful.

Part-time students indicated feeling a “stigma” of being part-time. In responses to a question about what things were challenging or what the institution could do differently, multiple student participants described a feeling of stigma or feeling embarrassed about being enrolled part-time. This feeling was more frequently described by students in programs such as Business that were not designed for returning students but were on-campus programs that students chose to attend part-time. Some students also contrasted their part-time enrollment with what they have heard emphasized as university goals. This concept is difficult to relate to Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) models since their model is geared to things to help students succeed so an absence of a stigma for part-time students is difficult to place. However, it might be linked within accountability policies in the Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model which is where they place efforts of federal and state governments for things like performance-based funding that is often geared to 4- or 6-year graduation rates. Furthermore, Tinto and Pusser (2006) do include “expectational climate” in their Model of Institutional Action, and one discussion in that section indicates that campus climate and micro-aggressions can impede student success by the effect they can have on students’ sense of belonging.

Lisa, a traditional-aged student who worked full-time during her college enrollment, was one of the first to express this and she specifically chose the words “stigma” and “culture” in her description.

I think one of the biggest things is the stigma about being part-time. Everyone thinks you’ve got it so much easier because you’re a part-time student. They don’t realize that

you've got just as much pressure as taking 15 hours. I think along with like that kind of like the culture of the school, of like, just of people in general, understanding more like why you would only do nine credit hours, or...because I think a lot of people think, well that's the easy way, you know? You're not doing as much as you can be, and it's like, yeah I am. I am.

I think the biggest thing for me is just trying to normalize it for people. I don't think a lot of people think of part-time as an option when they graduate high school. I think they just assume that they have to take the 12 credit hours, but I think there was someone that could help assess and say like, hey, it's okay to start off slow. You don't have to jump in full force. I think that would be really helpful, especially for 18-year-old kids that are in a new place and scared it might be overwhelming. Let me start off with a couple less and get used to it. I think everyone thinks that they have to put the whole world on their shoulders, and it's good to know that you can just take what you need to take.

Simone was also a traditional-aged student and described the "stigma" she felt:

When you're an undergrad there's still this mentality of class of whatever year. You know? High school I was class of [year], so it was common knowledge, and once in college I was the class of [graduation year + 4] then right, but it won't end up that way. I feel it a little bit. I feel like a little embarrassment, like, why am I graduating later? When you transfer things get prolonged, but then also just things happen. And then I did choose to take less classes, because I felt overwhelmed. That was the bad, you prolong your graduation and that has a little stigma to it when you're an undergrad I feel. Because when everyone else is leaving, you're still there, and for a whole year maybe.

Bonita, who was an adult student, expressed the idea that she did not feel like Duncan University personnel always understood what it was like to be a part-time student and also felt that students taking longer to finish was a negative for the university.

I think maybe they look at their own interest first. I don't know if me being a part-time student brings down their numbers. I always assumed that if it took you 20 years to finish that it was a good thing, you finished. But I found out it's not. What I found out is that if you don't finish school within a certain amount of time, that is viewed negatively on the school. I didn't know that. To me, it's like sometimes they discourage you from being a part-time student. 'Suit up, get in the game, quiet dealing around on the sidelines.' But I don't understand. I would say, just from the outside looking in, I would say that they don't have a clue [what life is like as a part-time student] and I don't think they want a clue. I'm talking about the administration. I don't think it is just Duncan University, I feel pretty certain it's nation-wide.

Katrina, also an adult student, drew a very direct connection to campus graduation goals versus her part-time enrollment. "So, sometimes that's what I think, they probably have a graduation grade. They have goals. They have things that I feel like in my condition, I'm not very helpful with them in that regard." Several administrators were interested in what it was students were feeling related to this. The Student Success Administrator asked more about it:

So they're pulling the campus down kind of thing? I'm really intrigued by this internalization of the stigma of being a part-time student. That is really intriguing and not in a good way. I can see the part-time students thinking 'I can't do that, I can't do that [graduate in four years or '15 to finish]' and that's just one more thing of being reminded of what you can't do versus talking about maybe what

you can do. We've recently talked about, on campus, there's a lot of discussion. 15 to finish is a big thing right now. So a lot of institutions that are incentivizing and even some states have been incentivizing students to take 15 credit hours a term. And if you do that, you get so much off of your tuition or whatever the case may be. And when I was still in the Provost's Office, we had talked about this a little bit and I said, 'You know, I get the sentiment behind this, but man does it hurt our part-timers and we're seeing an increase in students choosing to attend part-time.'

Most part-time student participants indicated they did not participate in existing campus activities or those things were not of value to them yet when asked, most said they would like way to participate more. Most student participants in the study did not participate in student engagement type activities on campus. There were many scenarios and reasons that students gave but it is also interesting to note that many students expressed a desire to be more connected to campus in the form of some type of student activity. Students who began at a 4-year institution right out of high school but did not graduate and had returned to Duncan University to try to complete often indicated they were much more active in campus activities when they originally enrolled. As returning students they either felt out of place or had so many other things to do that they were not involved. Traditional-aged students sometimes participated in one activity but none described participation in more than one student activity.

Some of the students expressed frustration that they may be paying for these things through tuition and fees yet did not find value in them. This is particularly important for the Duncan University on-campus students who would be paying for fee-supported activities, many of which are designed to expand student engagement. Students who are charged those fees and

may also be paying with financial aid or working to pay their student bills while in school were particularly affected by paying fees for services that they do not find valuable or that they do not have time or interest in. The online students at Duncan University do not pay most student fees and particularly do not pay those geared to student activities so this is not as much of an issue for them (although they do still see the activities advertised and perhaps are not clear about how they are funded). Interestingly, when asked about their desire for these things, student participants did express a desire for additional connection to campus but often also indicated what they wanted were activities or options that connected them to other students like them.

Involvement (often referred to as engagement) is included in Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Model of Institutional Action, relying on earlier works by Astin and Tinto that describe involvement as a condition for student success. According to Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model, "[t]he more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely they are to persist and graduate." Part-time students, based on my interviews, are more tied to involvement in campus academic situations rather than campus social situations.

Tanya said she had wondered about the value of the clubs and activities to her. She indicated she really did not have time for them, since she worked full-time and was mainly on campus for class or to be in the library to work. "I still could do it but it's not my main priority."

Similarly, Amie mentioned:

There is a lot that I didn't use, and I wish I didn't have to pay for it because it wasn't applicable to me. I wish that there were things you could opt out of instead of having to pay. I did use the rec center for a while.

Simone, who had begun at another 4-year institution and then transferred to Duncan University expressed the difference in her involvement:

Being a freshman and a sophomore at another college, I think I got more of my social requirements. I was very active on campus, as far as socially. When I was at [other doctoral level university], I was even hanging out, I met my friends, I lived there. I lived on campus two years. And I was more involved in student activities, like all the clubs and stuff. When I came to Duncan University, I was a junior and I lived off campus. I had two roommates, and I went to class and I went home. I wasn't really interested in being involved on campus. I had passed that point. I was older, I had already experienced it and I was pretty passionate about doing well in my classes. I never went to one athletic event or anything. I was still very attached to the other school when it came to sports or extracurricular activities. I did go to some lectures [at DU] when there was a visiting speaker, that was about it.

Angela, who was recent graduate of the online BLS program had a perspective on participation in activities and commencement:

All the emails that I received, the student events emails, it just felt, they read to me like they were geared towards the people that were full-time on-campus residents. I never saw anything about, 'Hey commuters, let's have a thing for us,' or, 'Hey online students, if you are in town, let's have a meetup.' There was nothing. I never saw anything towards that. I didn't felt ignored, but at the same time, I could see other students maybe dealing with that too, like no engagement.

As far as the online program, there were a lot of us moving through together. I know because at the beginning of every course we would do intros, and it got to be very redundant after a while. I was running with the same cohort. Everything was to the message board, so there was no face-to-face interaction. There was no in-class, anything,

obviously, but a lot of us were local, and I would have loved to have seen even if it just went out to our program, ‘Is there any interest in doing a monthly meetup?’

Even with commencement – there are so many of the departments on campus, they have departmental commencement ceremonies. Ours doesn’t, because of its nature (online) I guess, and there were a lot of us saying, ‘Hey, are you going to be at commencement in December? We should meetup and at least say hi to each other or something,’ which never happened. Things like that. Just to engage a little more. We’re all busy, we are all adults, we all have lives, but it just seems like it would have been nice if somebody would have said, let’s all meet at Panera and have coffee, you know, like a tradition.

Patrice discussed a specific barrier for an online student to participate in some campus activities – the lack of a campus card.

There are emails all the time for going to basketball games or go to this and that, and I don’t actually have a student card because you don’t have to if you’re an online student. So even if wanted to go to the game I can’t. I would have to go get a student card and wait for that and you know, whatever. So there’s things that make you feel less connected being an online student.

In other cases, students noted there were activities that they would like to participate in but felt that they would not fit in if they went or they did not feel it was open to part-time students.

Bonita expressed that sentiment:

They will put out the notices and it’s like, I would really like to go to that but I don’t. I don’t because I know I’m not going to fit in. There are a lot of social things like having lunch with the Dean or the Chancellor, being an ambassador. There are a lot of things like that I would like to do, and even some of those you have to be a full-time student. That age

thing, yes. But also, part-time is really restrictive in some regards. I just don't feel they are geared towards... it's like it's a different life. It might be my age, I don't know. I don't see a lot of the services screaming, 'Hey Bonita, over here!' I do think because they are working with kids at a different stage in their life, and that's what this whole thing is geared towards. There are things that I would like to do [previously mentioned social events, get-togethers, and movie nights] because I would like to decompress as well. If I go and do that or attempt to do that then I'm not going to be comfortable.

Valerie was also an adult student who had stopped out from an online program but lived in the local area. She expressed a similar sentiment about a desire to be more connected to campus.

One thing that I miss is the on campus interaction. I don't know the programs that are offered, but nothing has stood out at me. I would like to have more campus involvement. And I know that's partly because of my schedule being what it is. But I would just like to feel more like a DU student. Maybe they could have some type of program where part-time students could get together and still be a part of the university. I know we are all... we're all students, but part-time students are a different breed than full-time. And I think a lot of it is because it could be an age difference. But I've never let that affect me... I don't know if they would be interested in anything like this, but I would like to have book club meetings. I don't know how many people would be interested in that. But that, for me, is a great way to de-stress. I would also enjoy hearing other people's experiences and maybe we could have a meet and greet. Maybe every quarter or what have you. And just to find out what people have been up to, what struggles they're having. Because sometimes if you meet and talk to people who are going through the same thing you're going through, you find a little solution for some of the things that are going on. And I

think they [campus units] try but I think this is new to them also. And this would really help. Yeah because even though I'm part-time, I would come to certain activities but there haven't been any that have really interested me.

Lisa was a traditional-aged student but noted how difficult it was for her to get involved in things due to her work schedule. "It's really, really hard to get involved in things. There's not much that really caters to people that have to work a lot."

I interviewed administrators in the fall after interviewing students during the preceding fall and spring semesters. During the Spring of 2019, I was invited to discuss my student interviews, which I was in the midst of conducting, with a Provost-named committee evaluating the Duncan University service to and perspectives on Nontraditional Students. During that meeting and in later discussions with administrators, it became clear that there were ongoing discussions about how to better engage or involve these students in campus life. For example the Director of a Degree Program and faculty member said:

Which is where I am doing the advocacy on the work I do here at the university for the students. With another core group of online directors, we have just a ton more services now than we did in 2012 for these students. The Provost is having the assessment, the Vice Chancellor in charge of Assessment is coming to our next meeting. They're going to fix a landing page where all of the online students can put the services that they're receiving and the services that they need. And they're going to...from their office, they're going to get these things in place for them. Instead of us having to go tell them everything. So far as the university is concerned, that shift to actually getting the finger on the pulse of the students themselves instead of people like me having to advocate all the time, they have

done lots and lots and lots of small things. But things from being able to do name and gender changes online instead of in person to a completely amazing, huge online orientation. Now Duncan University Online is using a studio and all kinds of bells and whistles and that is a very big shift for them to recognize that all this money that goes into our main campus orientation, they are now putting major bucks into being sure that the online students are prepared when they come in.

Conversely, the Senior Director noted programs (or lack of) for part-time students may be due to the funding mechanisms. The student fee that funded their office was only paid by full-time undergraduate students for example, so they had not done much for part-time students.

Part-time students – Not really because that's not our charge. The technicality of this is that the way we are funded, not the course because that gets funded by state funds but everything else to include salaries come from the new student fee. The new student fee is paid only by full-time students, undergrad. We have done a little bit of work with online, Duncan University online. We crafted an online orientation for online students a few years ago, but we just now transitioned them fully over to Duncan University online to manage it themselves but no, for lack of another way to say it, it's not our charge to work with part-time students. That is one of the things that our nontraditional work study brought up, is that part-time students don't really have an entity looking out for them as a population. They get all the services that a part-time student gets, but it's not coordinated for part-time students. I guess my cheap answer is, because we're not funded through any fees that part-time students pay, we don't serve part-time students. The bigger answer

is, I guess, just strategically and priorities, that's just not been put in front of us as something to focus our time on.

The Senior Director also mentioned the campus card and window clings as a recent change and effort to make online students feel more connected to Duncan University. They also mentioned some discussion of creating an orientation program but also indicated there were resource constraints with that and it may require another fee.

Lack of course availability, lack of flexibility, or courses unavailable at needed times can create barriers for part-time students in making progress towards their degrees. Part-time students often mentioned difficulties with course availability and sequencing. Tinto and Pusser (2006) did not have any similar concept included in their Postsecondary Policy and Student Success Model or their Model of Institutional Action. It may also fit into the incomplete “Administrative Actions” component of their model. For a public university, it may be possible that state support for instructional offerings plays a role in this issue, and that concept is mentioned by Tinto and Pusser (2006). Tanya was working full-time while she pursued her baccalaureate degree in Business. She indicated one of the worst things about being a part-time student at Duncan University was:

...class availability and flexibility. That's really the hardest part. In my night class there are a lot of part-time students and they kind of said the same thing. ‘I tried to get such and such class but it was online only and the only times they had it on campus were during the day when I can't go.’

Similarly, Jennifer had trouble with getting needed courses in her online program:

There was a point where I was concerned that the area that I was interested in – geography – that I was going to run out of classes, so basically there was a

limitation. I actually started to focus on economics and the classes that I wanted to take certainly were not available. It was almost kind of a misrepresentation as an option because the classes that I was supposed to take were just not available online. There was some point where I really wanted to take economics but I couldn't even get into the first class so I opted to take geographical economics and that is part of how I ended up just focusing in that area.

Angela often juggled her graduation plan due to classes being unavailable:

Classes were a little hard to find, I don't know why that was, but I got used to rearranging the graduation plan that I had to do. I was scheduled to take one class, one semester, but I had to take it another semester. I also did a lot in summer.

Monique had difficulty because not all of the courses were offered during the summer and particularly the practicum courses were not offered during the summer. Since she did not work during the summer [she worked as a teacher assistant] it would have been an easier time for her to do coursework. Ebony also expressed a desire that classes could be offered on Saturday or Sundays since she worked Monday through Friday. Ebony felt like that type of situation would allow her to take more courses and move through the program more quickly.

There was not a lot of input from administrator participants about the issue of course availability. Most generally seemed to agree that it could be a problem. The Student Success Administrator noted the course schedule comes out just before the beginning of each semester which could make it hard for students to plan ahead. In fact, several students mentioned difficulty planning due to lack of that information. Amie had gone to great lengths to look back at course offerings in prior years to understand patterns of fall and spring courses. She then used that information to plan from the first class to the last. Amie wished that the course scheduling

information was released a little earlier so that she didn't have to rely as much on referring back to prior years for her own course planning. One of the program directors who was also a faculty member said:

...what's interesting there, how it works here, it's probably the same as everywhere else, I will have my entire year roughly planned out in February, for the whole following year, because by February I have to ask for all of the money to run my program. But the courses don't show up in a listed schedule until...the fall won't show up until late spring and the spring, they don't input until just a couple of weeks ago [October].

Similarly, the Senior Academic Administrator and faculty member stated they felt that providing a planned course scheduling layout was "particularly significant and something I hadn't thought about [but] that's something that we could be doing." Several administrators agreed that this type of course planning information should be considered for future opportunities to assist students.

The Financial Aid administrator also pointed out the need for a long-term plan for part-time students and the difficulty with appropriately sequencing courses:

I want them all to have a graduation plan. Not just that, 'Oh, you know, here's what you need to take and here's what you've taken,' but, 'Here's what you need to take. And when can you take it?' So to acknowledge that part-time attendance pattern at the very beginning, because if you're going to be part-time then you really do have to make sure you sequence these things. Because if you have things that have to be done sequentially and you don't take them, you don't start that sequence at the right time, you're going to be sitting out there with no financial aid for your last two classes.

Group work can be a struggle for part-time students. Several students in the study mentioned difficulties with completing group work or how they struggled with their groups. In most cases, the reasons students gave for this were difficulties in finding a meeting time that worked with their schedule or feeling like other students in the group were not as interested in doing a good job on the project. This concept is not included in the models as described by Tinto and Pusser (2006). Jennifer indicated:

I think the worst probably is actually in one or two classes, I worked in groups with other students, and it seemed like there were one or two students who were willing to take shortcuts to complete the class. It affected the mood. It really bothered me that there were students that were basically cheating, and that really bothered me.

Similarly, Katrina felt as though her grade in a course had suffered because of an assigned group project.

Well, I understand the whole Business program in the requiring of students to learn working in groups with other students, but online group work it's a nightmare. And that for me is going to be one of the most negative experiences because at that point, I was telling you that the teacher was very inflexible and I had to sacrifice my grade for other people. And really, I don't feel like I'm paying my money to do that. I'm an older person I don't feel like I need the skills to deal with other people. I know, I understand that if you are 18 and you are first year out of high school, you definitely need that, because you may not have the experience but I definitely do not appreciate that. It is part of the requirements for this one class but I know there's going to be other classes that will be the same. There's a lot of pushing one or two students to do all the work for others. You

don't have individual grades; you have a group grade and so whatever you do or don't do affects everybody.

Lisa mentioned that when she was a commuter student (she later moved to the city), it was difficult to take more than nine credit hours and still participate in group projects. One of the Degree Program Directors who was also a faculty member responded on the topic of difficulty with group work. They said:

Yes, they tell me all about that and I tell them how when they get into the workplace, they're going to have to figure it out so they might as well practice with me. I turn a completely cold shoulder to that complaint. I do think it helps them in the long run. But yes, I think it is true, and I'm not going to change.

The Senior Director noted difficulties with group work might be an issue that would be tough to resolve.

I think probably part-time students in classes that are made up of mostly traditional-age students have a very hard time with group projects. I don't know how you work around that but when you might be one of 25 in the class which say 12%, 13% so if you're one in a class and everybody else can meet at 11:00 at the library but you can't, what are you going to do? Well, can we meet at a different time because I have work or a family... 18 year olds are going to be like, yeah no. That's just hard. I don't know how you do it.

The Senior Academic Administrator and faculty member indicated they had not previously thought about the difficulties of group work for part-time students but as we discussed it, they realized the possible issues part-time students might have (overlap with family time or work schedules, for example).

Lack of on-campus parking options, while it seems like a minor logistical issue, can create real difficulties for part-time students. Several part-time student participants noted going to campus for necessary tasks, especially during business hours created a hardship due to parking. Parking does not show up in concepts from Tinto and Pusser (2006). It may be something that would be included in the incomplete section about Administrative Action items. Lisa, who began at Duncan University as a part-time commuter student, noted the difficulties students would face in commuting to campus.

Getting to campus is really hard. There's not much parking, and when you need to get in and get out really quick, it's just really hard to do. There were many times when I was sitting in traffic, worried about trying to get to class or to work on time. We have a park-and-ride lot that's down on [street name], that's a little farther away, which is usually what commuters do because you can just kind of bus in, and having to wait for the bus if it was late, or just getting out of that parking lot in general was just kind of chaotic all the time.

Amie went so far as to say that parking issues led her to try to take courses online whenever possible.

Parking was particularly challenging. If you didn't take a class that was first thing in the morning, that was the biggest struggle. Really, that was pretty much what also guided me to do online as much as possible. Because if you're there part of the day for classes that you're taking, being able to park on campus and get to class without having to ride around for an hour looking for a spot would be huge.

Shonda mentioned how difficult it was to need to park on campus to access campus services.

For me, one of the worst things has been parking. The times I go over to the campus and maybe feeling like I'm not really in the know about how to do some things. Some things I just need to get over it and just do it but it's like, 'Oh my goodness.' I think the amount of traffic and parking that can be tough. I'll have to go over there at I guess odd times. So one time I scheduled a time to meet with my advisor, I really went through a lot to get an appointment because I felt like I was missing something. I kept getting automated responses online and so finally I knew we had to meet in person. I went over to campus at around 10:30 on a Friday morning, I left work to go over there. Then just driving around and around and around to find a parking spot. Finding a place to park when everybody's already in class, that's hard.

Another time I was getting off of work at 5:30 and trying to rush over to campus to get to the Writing Center with my group. We went two weeks in a row. The very first week we went, I managed to snag a park and get there on time. We were waiting for one of the other young ladies and they were pretty lenient. Then the following week, I got there a little late, and it was like [the person working in the Writing Center said], 'Well we're gonna let you do this time but you arrived five minutes late. Normally if you're after your time then we don't allow you to proceed.' I was thinking 'Wow.'

Most administrator participants had some amount of empathy or understanding for the students' difficulties with parking logistics. They could certainly understand the difficulty presented if a Duncan University student needed to come to campus briefly. The Financial Aid Administrator noted:

If you're part-time and you've got to come and go, it's not easy. I get here at 7 a.m., and I park in the deck, and I always get a parking place. But if I leave like I did today for lunch and came back then I might not have a spot, or if I do, it will be up on the top of the deck where there are almost no spaces left.

The Senior Academic Administrator and faculty member originally stated they disagreed with some of the comments about parking – that they had the option to take the bus and park somewhere else. But then later noted required time that part-timers may not have.

For some part-time students, advising was quite difficult and created negative experiences. While many students had positive advising experiences as noted previously, others had negative situations to emerge from advising. The main difficulty students had with advising was feeling like they were given poor information about their coursework. In particular, when part-time students were using financial aid, poor course advice resulted in a potential waste of both time and money, things that were already scarce resources for many of the student participants. Miracle gave an example of how this affected her.

I know that I've taken courses that I thought I needed because they told me I needed them. I took them and they told me that they were the equivalent, but then when I got the grades back, and I got a wonderful grade in a course now that's not an equivalent. So, I wasted time and money for a class I didn't need, where I could have been taking whatever I needed for that.

Shonda found out very late in her program that she needed some additional courses:

I thought I had three (left) classes, and I just learned this weekend after doing some detective work with advising that, there was an issue with my [course and graduation planning portal]. There were these two classes that kept popping up. I

was advised that I did not need to take those. There were three classes, and you just need to choose one of those classes. You can take the other two. I chose the one, I'm taking that at the community college. Now I found out that that was an error, and that I do, indeed, need to take those other two classes.

The most significant feedback regarding the negatives of some advising experiences was the Senior Academic Administrator (also faculty member). They indicated the institution had recognized some areas where advising was falling short of ideals; thus, the majority of some new tuition funds were going to be aimed to improving academic advising. They were hopeful that those increased funds would be helpful to improving the overall experience of academic advising.

Administrators' Consideration of Part-Time Undergraduate Students

One research question I wanted to address was how administrators at a public doctoral level university consider (or do not consider) the enrollment of part-time undergraduate students in contexts such as policy setting and campus planning. Although it has been alluded to in earlier sections, it was not fully addressed there. Each of the interviews conducted with administrators included related questions. For context, it is important to state that Duncan University is a public university and part of a state system of higher education. Therefore, administrators' comments and associated policies must be considered within that framework.

According to the administrators I interviewed, Duncan University has not historically focused much on part-time undergraduates but there does seem to be a growing recognition of the declining numbers of traditional-aged college students in the pipeline and therefore interest in "nontraditional" students. Furthermore, University administrators have been influenced by campus leadership, such as the Provost's charge of a workgroup to focus on "nontraditional"

students at Duncan University ([Provost's Office], personal communication, December 3, 2018). As stated by the Provost, "the outcome goals are to better understand the types of nontraditional students we currently serve, anticipated growth and patterns of growth for nontraditional students, and to assess any gaps we may have in meeting the needs of those students." Amongst those who were included in the characteristics that the university considered "nontraditional" were students who were characterized by having "long-term post-secondary part-time enrollment." Eight other sets of characteristics were also included within the "nontraditional" student considerations. While I was able to attend a meeting of the group early on in my study, I learned later from a few of the administrator participants that the expected outcomes of that group were not met. However, the work did raise levels of understanding about "nontraditional" students at Duncan University and additional workgroups were in the process of being formed as I was completing my interviews with administrators.

In discussions with the administrators, also I learned that even if Duncan University has an interest in part-time students it is somewhat confined within its funding models and performance metrics. It may be difficult for the university to push the issues of part-time students. With that said, however, it is important to contextualize again that part-time students that I interviewed at Duncan University characterized their experiences as overall positive. While they may have had challenges and frustrations, overall they were pleased with their experiences at Duncan University and with caveats based on programs, would generally recommend it to others for pursuit of their undergraduate degrees on a part-time basis.

The administrators whom I interviewed did seem to concede that the part-time undergraduate population was not one that received much attention or consideration overall. The Senior Academic Administrator and faculty member specifically said, "I think it's a population

that is rarely expressly talked about outside of the push to generate more college degrees.” The Student Success Administrator spoke to potential difficulties with considering these students for delivery of services but also to a hopefulness that these students were beginning to be a part of the mission of the institution:

Yes, we have opportunities for them to take courses if they want to go online. If they want to be here face to face, perhaps that’s less. If they’re looking for specific services, even fewer opportunities. So I think we’re welcoming and we want them here. I don’t think we’re serving them well.

I don’t think our service hours are probably conducive to what they need except for the library. They do a fantastic job of providing equity of services, what they call it. But outside of the library, I don’t think our services are aligned or structured in a way that really gives students what they need. For instance, we don’t have a testing center on campus. That’s a big deal. So if you’re a part-time student, the odds are you’re taking many of your classes online. So where are you going when you have to have proctored exams and how much are you having to pay because you couldn’t come to campus? That’s a big deal. I think the good news is we have, as an institution, a heart for students that find themselves in these categories. So I think they are part of our, what we started calling our mission students. We just have to figure out, as an institution, how to organize ourselves to better serve them.

Part-time students are only indirectly included in Duncan University’s Mission Statement and Strategic Plan. In administrator interviews, I asked each if they felt as though part-time undergraduate students were reflected in Duncan University’s Mission statement and Strategic Plan. In general, most leaned toward saying either an outright no they were not or said

there might be an indirect reference to other types of students who might also be enrolled on a part-time basis. One of the Program Director and faculty members indicated:

So, my initial answer is no, but that's not because they're not covered. It's just, when you mention our strategic plan, the first thing that comes to mind is, Oh, well, that's the thing where we talk about health and wellness, and we talk about vibrant communities, and we talk about global engagement, and then, we talk about local, national, international student transformation. Digging a little deeper, we talk about the sort of agreement that the institution has with the [university system], where we're to increase our graduation rates, retention rates, which are always measured in 4- or 6-year terms. So, right away, my students aren't reflected. Or, we talk about increasing rural student populations. So, it's not a headline goal to deal with part-time students. They're an afterthought.

My program, to give you an anecdote, when my program is reviewed every six or seven years, and I've participated as a faculty member before, but last year, as a director, there's a standard form that you get. 'Make sure you write a 70-page self-study addressing all of these things, and here's a whole bunch of data from institutional research on your program.' My data was almost less than worthless, because when you look at, what's my 4-year to 6-year graduation rate, they would say, 'Well, we don't have enough. There's not enough of a cohort to even measure that.' This is because so many of my students, being these mostly older, working people, took gaps. They're on an 8- or 10-year graduation plan. So, the graduation rate is some abysmally low percentage, but then, when one realizes that the starting percentage for these folks was zero, because they'd already left the University, the fact that they're getting through is a positive. But Institutional Research doesn't even track our kinds of students. They don't even track that

we took somebody who had 60 credits on a full-time job, and came in, and being a part-time student, managed to become a graduate. And then, moved up in their workplace, which is another common scene, is they're trying to complete a degree to move up at work. So, institutionally, we don't really talk about it enough. I'm sure somewhere they are, it's just, it's not a headlining thing, and it needs to be.

The Student Success Administrator indicated some of the types of students that are mentioned in the Mission Statement and Strategic Plan might also be part-time students.

We talk about first generation, low income, underrepresented minority, and rural students, and by and large, all of those groups tend to start at community college at higher proportions than white students. So yes. I also think we will start to see a shift pretty soon where we're specifically talking about and mentioning transfer students, part-time students. And transfer and part-time is a bit different, right? I mean, a lot of transfer students are part-time, right? But yes. There is a lot of overlap.

Consideration of part-time students in enrollment planning, policymaking, and admissions decisions, is at best, mixed. Administrators gave a somewhat varied indication of whether and how part-time students were considered in enrollment planning, policymaking, and admissions decisions. Several administrators indicated there was some consideration of part-time students in Duncan University's enrollment planning, which from their additional conversation seemed to be most specifically related to tracking numbers of part-time students in general university data. In addition, several indicated there was a growing understanding of shifting student demographics which led the institution to be somewhat more thoughtful about part-time undergraduates. The Senior Director, for example, noted:

I'm sure if you went on IR's [Institutional Research's] website and we can track for a decade back, part-time. I don't know if it amounts to much but it's there. I think what I could say is it's been part of conversations and part of future strategies and understanding obviously that the full-time, traditional, first year student is declining. That enrollment will be declining for a while and not solely because of that but I think when the bottom line is hit you start looking at different populations. Graduate student enrollment and recruitment has been looked at a little bit more carefully. Obviously transfer students and I assume in that mix that there's been more and more conversations about part-time students, not only how we serve them but how can we recruit people who are looking to change careers, looking to finish up a degree that's been lingering out there, whatever the case is. Yes, I know that it's a topic of conversation, but I don't know that it's formally written into our strategic plan and maybe it is and I should know that but I don't know.

On the other hand, the Student Success Administrator and Financial Aid Administrator both indicated they did not think part-time students were considered in enrollment planning and admissions. This was attributed partially to thinking that students were not required to identify themselves as part-time for admission and that admissions was generally recruiting and counting headcount, not full-time equivalent (FTE) students or student credit hours. However, the Senior Academic Administrator and faculty member indicated:

Certainly in resource planning you think about a part-time versus a full-time FTE.

Well, I'm sure you're aware that academic planning and financial planning are closely tied to enrollment management [inaudible] planning. And so we are aware of students who are accepted as to whether they're applying as a full-time or a part-time student. We, therefore, record acceptances and yield of both populations because having that

information is essential to put it into our student credit hour projection model and subsequent revenue planning. But in no way that I'm aware of, certainly has never entered my mind to think this way as to discourage a part-time student but we are aware of it.

One of the Program Director and faculty members made the immediate transition to program review and the evaluation of their program:

How you measure things and what you measure, determines, in large part, what becomes important. As a program, in program review, we were evaluated on retention rates, graduation rates. The graduation rate is four or six years. Not five, not three, not seven. Four or six. If it doesn't fall within that, it's not tallied. Retention rates are often year one to year two, and I think, now, we're looking at year three to four, or one of the others. Part-time students are off the radar. And since they're off the radar, they, without anyone's intention, will matter less in decision-making. Another initiative we have that's, I think, a good one, it's a 90-80-70 plan. You want 90% retention from year one to two, and then, I think it's 80% retention two to three, to three to four, but 70% is the 4- or 6-year graduation rate. I'm fuzzy on the details off of my head. It's a great goal, but once you look at that goal, you say, 'Where do part-time students who are going to... They don't count in the retention numbers, they're not going to make those graduation numbers. They are not a priority.'

Administrator participants were also asked if or how part-time undergraduate students were considered in the process of setting new policies or revising existing policies. There were mixed responses in regard to this question. One administrator indicated part-time students were considered as policies were set but not explicitly, others indicated they were not considered, and

some indicated this was an area that seemed to be shifting from no attention towards some consideration. The Senior Academic Administrator and faculty member said:

I can tell you that from my perspective we do consider policy impacts on part-time undergraduates, and I have a significant role in policy, but we don't have a checklist that says, "Have you thought about how this impacts x, y, or z?" I think it's incumbent upon all of us to just to think about our roles and the population we serve. So I would say yes but not explicitly stated.

However, a Student Success Administrator had a different perspective:

We probably are not considering part-time undergraduates when new policies are being discussed. Probably not, because we're not considering our transfer students or we haven't to date.

One of the Program director and faculty members stated they did not feel that part-time students were considered and they felt particularly that this was the case at the level of the University System Board where their experience was that board members considered policies within the context of how they experienced college:

I cannot think of a case where that has come up. And when you look at, when the [University System Board] wants to... When I've interacted with the few of them that I have, they've been perfectly fine people, but they don't have this in-depth understanding. Their understanding like colleges, like most people's, which is, what did they experience when they went to college? And most of them would have gone to college when you showed up as a freshman and you were done four, or five years later. That's what you did. They don't understand how many students fall off of that train, or track, and they're off of that track, often, for reasons that are financial and otherwise. Locally, I cannot

think of one meeting I have been in, and I'm on a lot of committees, where a significant attention has been made to particular needs of part-time students. If anything, it's a, 'Oh, and this would help part-time students, too,' but they're just not.... Maybe the way to put it is a bumper sticker: Part-time students are like part-time employees. They have the same amount of sort of rights and say, and that's unfortunate.

The other Program Director/faculty member also pointed to the role of the University System board in policymaking but also indicated they felt consideration for part-time students was improving. Interestingly, that Director and faculty member also noted how policies were being set by people based on their own experiences which may not align with the experiences of part-time undergraduate students.

That's another one of those things that needed improving and it's improving. I don't think we're there but I think we're getting there. This is the type of thing that somebody way up here [motioning hand above head] had to have an epiphany, way above our pay grade. And it's way above our ability to recognize and act. It had to come from here [higher level]. And it's starting to. Because the people who are way up here - their families always had the expectation that they would go to college more than likely. They had funding in hand or were able to secure funding. They were not seen as a population for which financial aid was a risk. They were able to do all of these things. Very few of them had to work. So their ability to 'go wait a minute, it's going to be 2020. These times, they are a-changing. We need to get with the program.' It had to take a few retirements and a few other things but I think they're starting to get it. But it used to be frustrating; it still can be frustrating. I am also talking about the [university system board]

quite honestly. That's been a problem in the past, getting them to understand and pass something.

Administrators were able to describe some specific recent examples of attentiveness (or lack thereof) to part-time students. Some administrators were able to cite specific examples of situations where part-time students had been considered. There were also mentions of specific challenges or issues with how the institution considers part-time students. One Director of a Degree Program and faculty member noted recent efforts to involve students from their online program (most of whom were also enrolled part-time) in campus activities and programs.

We started a student group with campus activities and programs and we would not do it until they told us that we could have it be online students and main campus students together. So it's anybody in our major, [program names], online or main campus. We meet in a videoconference room. We have the usual slate of officers, plus an online liaison. At the last two meetings, we've had over 80 online students attending. And one of them even drove to campus for one of the volunteer activities here. The online liaison, whatever we're doing here, like a food drive or whatever like that. She helps find an equivalent in [state capital] and [large metropolitan city] and different places across the state so that our students can be benevolent and learn to volunteer. We don't do fundraisers and stuff. Our focus is service. They really come to the meetings and to hear the speakers. So I think that's helping some. We did t-shirts for the online students. I do think it's hard for them. How can they resonate with homecoming? I'm never going to be able to give them access to a soccer game unless they want to drive. But we are working on that. Some students are more receptive than others. But one

of the things we do to promote that is we record. And we give students access to recordings so if they really wanted to hear a speaker, but maybe their child had a football game then that [conflicted with the time]. So we're trying to think creatively about access.

The Student Success Administrator noted some discussion with Duncan University's Provost around programs labeled "15 to Finish" which encourage students to take 15 credit hours per semester to graduate within four years.

We've recently talked about, on campus, there's a lot of discussion. 15 to finish is a big thing right now. A lot of institutions that are incentivizing and even some states have been incentivizing students to take 15 credit hours a term. And if you do that, you get so much off your tuition or whatever the case may be. And when I was still in the Provost office, we had talked about this a little bit and I said, 'You know, I get the sentiment behind this, but man, does it hurt our part-timers and we're seeing an increase in students choosing to attend part-time.'

The Senior Director noted a recent shift in providing campus id cards for online students.

This is more for online students but a lot of online students are part-time. They used to not get [student id] cards and one of the things they also told us was the lack of [student id] card also didn't let them get some student discounts at places. Some of them needed their number to join a professional association or to show that they get the student rate, whatever but it's also an identification, right? My picture on the [student id] card so we started producing those for online students and mailing it to them and then we also included in this little welcome letter, a window cling, [crosstalk] put this on your car and drive around your town, wherever you are. Most of our online students are pretty local. I

don't know that that makes you feel part of a community but it was an effort. All right you get a [student id] card and here's a window cling.

The Financial Aid Administrator indicated they had been involved in a system-wide group looking at aid policies. In that, the group recommended reconsideration of the state need-based grant which makes funds available to students at only the full-time (12 hour) or half-time (6 hour) rates and creates "cliffs" at 9 hours (get 6 hour aid level) or 3 hours (get zero state aid). The group's work had stalled with leadership changes but the aid administrator indicated there was the expectation that a new group would be named. In addition, the Financial Aid Office and some other campus offices were moving toward using a mobile app to push notifications and information out to students rather than relying on emails sent to students.

One of the Program Director and faculty members discussed Duncan University's recent review and implementation of a new General Education curriculum. They indicated none of the online programs were represented on the task force and what came out of it "was a whole lot of ideas that sounded great, if you were assuming that people were first-year, 18-year-old freshmen, full-time students." They went on to describe an example that would be for diversity and equity in the humanities or global and intercultural engagement in the social sciences but stated:

Nobody in 2005 in [the university system] took a class that was diversity and equity in the humanities. It's just like, you might have had a diversity... So, structurally, this means that we can expect a lot of these courses that students will have, if they won't check every box in the category, they get nothing. And then we're telling people who have a lot of credits and are just trying to finish out, 'Well, you didn't have a Welcome to College foundational course in 2005, so returning mom, you need to do that because what could be better than to have you with a bunch of 18 year olds learning about college?'

They indicated they attempted to express this and the responses were to the effect of “some of them will need it, or best practices say...” and also “transfers should not drive gen ed. And of course they don’t realize two in five of our students are transfers.” Additional responses were that they would work with the community colleges to offer new courses, but the program director noted what the community colleges changed today would not help students who had previously taken community college courses and may want to transfer to Duncan University now or in a few years.

That’s what I think of. We do these things that are well-intentioned, that just don’t adequately capture the impacts on different students. And you get arguments, and one of my least favorites is, ‘Well, there’s a small number of students that would be affected.’ And even if that’s true, those are students that we want to also serve, and I know of no other sort of example where it’s okay to say, ‘Well, just, that’s a minority. The minority doesn’t count.’ But when it comes to part-time students, returning adults, I think that’s too often the case. And a great example would be this, what we’re calling now this foundational seminar. The idea is that every new student to the University, including transferred, will be taking this small, foundational course on just perfectly fine, wonderful stuff that best practices say to do. Just like they say, have a capstone at the end. But when we would point out quite clearly, ‘You just added three credits to the time to degree, because none of our students from 10 years ago would have had that class,’ they would start saying things like, ‘Well, we can waive it if they come in with over a certain amount of credits,’ except, of course, that would never really appear in writing, or it would get overridden, because of the, ‘We want a simple plan, and it needs to cover everyone, and we think they would benefit,’ and it’s like, I would threaten some of them

mildly with the, 'I'd be happy to give your office hours to any of my students who are going to be subject to this, and have them explain to you.'

The Student Success Administrator described work recently undertaken by the newly organized Student Success unit and the Provost's role in academic policies.

We have done an amazing job of providing periphery services or wraparound services for students. And we have some really stellar programs that are serving students very well.

There's only so much you can do on the outside.

Where the rubber meets the road for every student is what happens in the classroom and what those curricular structures are. And are your courses sequenced in the right way? Are they offered, and at the times when they need them to be offered because of the sequence that's required, right?

All of that kind of structure, policy, procedure stuff. And we are starting to have conversations now about that. And yes, the Provost is holding our Deans accountable.

This is important. We must do better. You must figure out how to make it happen in your unit. If you're not paying attention to things like high DFW courses, you should be. And now, as a Division of Student Success, our job is to partner with those academic units when they say, "Hey, we've got this challenge with these five courses and, frankly, we don't really have the support we need to make them better or provide tutoring. We know that we're lacking in these areas." Well, now, that's our job to figure out how do we get you what you need. So you've identified the problem or maybe we've showed you that there is a problem through data that you didn't know existed.

The Senior Director alluded to the increased discussions around part-time students, particularly by academic leadership at Duncan University.

I know it's been on the radar, I know this past year I've spent more time than I ever have before over at Faculty Senate because the Gen Ed revision was happening. That impacts our work greatly so I've been paying more attention and that has come up a few times. I've heard various faculty members, I've heard the Provost and other people saying, 'What about part-time students? How are we going to account for part-time students? What about Gen Ed?', kind of relating it to Gen Ed and what does that mean? In the Gen Ed change meetings we had faculty saying things about students, not derogatory but just uninformed like totally, totally tone deaf that our students have to work, that our students don't have leisure time go do all these [extra things]. We need to think about our students. Our students are at work, our students are down the road waiting tables. You're reflecting not only on your own time like the '80s, the '90s, wherever it was but you're also reflecting on your experience which I'm gathering you didn't have to work.

Summary of Findings

Policy Supports for Part-time Undergraduate Students:

1. Programs that were designed for part-time students or those that at least acknowledge part-time enrollment may be more supportive for those students.
2. Many part-time undergraduate students are also transfer students, and therefore, benefit from favorable transfer-in policies.
3. Online programs and courses are generally helpful to part-time undergraduate students.
4. Program flexibility in schedule and mode of delivery are important to part-time undergraduate students and their degree completion.
5. Affordability or reasonable pricing is important for part-time undergraduate students.
6. Availability of financial support is vital for part-time students and takes two major forms, financial aid accessed through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or financial support through their employers.
 - a. *FAFSA-based financial aid availability is critical for part-time students.*

- b. *Employer covered or reimbursed tuition can be another method of financial support for part-time students.*

Policies that Create Barriers for Part-time Undergraduate Students

1. Lack of access to financial aid is detrimental to the continued success of part-time undergraduates.
2. Assumptions by advisors and advising plans set up for full-time enrollment create awkwardness or other issues for part-time students.
3. Academic program design can create barriers to completion for part-time students.
4. The overall price of college and the cost/benefit of services are important to part-time undergraduate students.
5. A state policy of tuition surcharge at a specified number of credit hours was detrimental to part-time students' ability to complete their degrees.
6. Part-time students felt that they could make better progress-towards-degree if the university did not limit their course offering based on mode of delivery.
7. Some part-time students had difficulty with transferring courses into the university or had courses that did not count toward their degree requirements.
8. Internship or practicum requirements can be extraordinarily challenging for part-time students to complete.

Supportive Institutional Practices for Part-time Undergraduate Students

1. Part-time students expressed that they had an overall positive experience at the institution which helped them in their degree pursuits.
2. Positive faculty interactions are critically important, can help part-time students feel like they belong in the university, and can keep them encouraged to continue their degree pursuits.
3. Advising or similar support is also critically important for the success of part-time students and may be enhanced when students have a single point of contact in their program with whom they connect personally.
4. Part-time students also feel supported through positive interactions with academic support and institutional support services.
5. Part-time students may rely on a different set of support individuals while pursuing their degrees.

Institutional Practices that Create Barriers for Part-time Undergraduate Students

1. Students had negative or non-responsive interactions with other institutions with that led them to choose Duncan University instead, where they found a friendly and inviting "front door" experience.
2. Part-time students indicated feeling a "stigma" of being part-time.

3. Most part-time student participants indicated they did not participate in existing campus activities or those things were not of value to them yet when asked, most said they would like way to participate more.
4. Lack of course availability, lack of flexibility, or courses unavailable at needed times can create barriers for part-time students in making progress towards their degrees.
5. Group work can be a struggle for part-time students.
6. Lack of on-campus parking options, while it seems like a minor logistical issue, can create real difficulties for part-time students.
7. For some part-time students, advising was quite difficult and created negative experiences.

Administrators' Consideration of Part-Time Undergraduate Students

1. Part-time students are only indirectly included in Duncan University's Mission Statement and Strategic Plan.
2. Consideration of part-time students in enrollment planning, policymaking, and admissions decisions, is at best, mixed.
3. Administrators were able to describe some specific recent examples of attentiveness (or lack thereof) to part-time students.

Building from these findings about supportive policies and practices as compared to the policies and practices that create barriers for the degree progression of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university, the following chapter is a Research to Practice Report. Chapter 6 uses the information that student participants provided, combined with the information from administrator participants, to evaluate the types of changes that policymakers and practitioners could make to result in better supports (and fewer barriers) for part-time undergraduate students in Duncan University.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH TO PRACTICE REPORT

This chapter is written as a research to practice report to offer a more accessible set of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. As the numbers of high school graduates decreases, there will be a direct impact on the traditional enrollment pools for colleges and universities - “beginning in the mid-2020s many colleges will enter an extended period of shrinking enrollment pools” (Grawe, 2018, p. 14). Yet, almost 70% of today’s jobs require some amount of postsecondary education or training (Carnevale et al., 2019). For the United States and individual states to remain competitive, policymakers and campus leaders will need to recognize and adapt to decreases in the “traditional” student population and adjust to different types of students, such as those who enroll part-time (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). Similarly, for universities to maintain their existing student populations (and not decline in enrollments which come with decreased revenues), this recognition and adjustment will be necessary for financial reasons.

As indicated by Hossler et al. (2008), students’ experiences in institutions are impacted by policies and practices but institutions have been lacking in “research evidence on the complex yet concrete realities of how these policies and practices affect student persistence” (pp.4-5). This study provides insight into this phenomenon. Thus, rather than a traditional final dissertation chapter, this section offers recommended “action areas” for various changes in policy and practice. Each of these provides guidance for leaders who want to increase retention and degree attainment for part-time undergraduate students.

This research study resulted in 9 key “Action Areas” for policymakers and practitioners:

- **Action Area 1: Improve data and data analyses to “see” part-time students and bring them “out of the shadows” to expand recognition of their existence and individual situations.**

- **Action Area 2: Use “student portraits” and other techniques to examine current and potential policies with part-time students in mind.**
- **Action Area 3: Reform policies and practice to better support part-time students through financial assistance options.**
- **Action Area 4: Evaluate revenue streams such as state funding models and charges for tuition and fees for incentives and disincentives related to part-time students.**
- **Action Area 5: Reconsider academic policies, programs, and practices to better serve part-time students.**
- **Action Area 6: Encourage and train faculty in best practices to influence persistence and completion of part-time undergraduates.**
- **Action Area 7: Train advisors about the differences in the university experience for part-time undergraduates and remove presumptions of full-time enrollment from any advising tools.**
- **Action Area 8: Design new models of engagement and invite part-time undergraduate students to take part in campus life in new and different ways.**
- **Action Area 9: Reinforce the positive impact that all faculty and staff can have on the experiences of part-time students through campus training and communications.**

This chapter will elaborate on each Action Area and focus on these implications for policy and practice. The significance of this research will be described and throughout the chapter there will be suggestions for future areas of research.

Introduction

Almost seventy percent of today’s jobs require some amount of postsecondary education or training (Carnevale, Garcia, & Campbell, 2019) and to meet those workforce needs, the

United States will need to dramatically increase degree production (Grawe, 2017). However, the number of high school graduates is expected to decrease, which will have a direct impact on the traditional enrollment pools for colleges and universities (Grawe, 2018). It is estimated that 32 of the 50 U.S. states cannot meet educational attainment goals by having only traditional-aged students gain in earning postsecondary degrees (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2008).

How can overall postsecondary degree attainment increase within the boundaries of these changing demographics? According to Grawe (2018), there are two potential ways: “reaching beyond traditional students or by increasing attendance rates within the traditional student population” (p. 103). Part-time students are a “beyond the traditional student” population that is growing rapidly and could help the nation meet postsecondary completion goals (Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013; Bombardieri, 2017; Falk & Blaylock, 2010; Hussar & Bailey, 2016). However, since 1970, the overall proportion of part-time students enrolled at public universities has decreased (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Achieving baccalaureate degree attainment for this group will require addressing related policy issues (Cooper, 2015).

Most policies at the campus, state, and federal levels were built around the “traditional student” and research about impactful policies for “nontraditional” students is lacking (Ziskin et al., 2010). Policymakers and institutions who are interested in that population would have difficulty using research-based strategies to change policies or practices. This qualitative case study addresses that gap by examining the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university and how policies and institutional practices impacted their experiences. This qualitative case study focused on students enrolled at “Duncan University” in an undergraduate degree program for fewer than 12 credit hours in any “nonsummer” semester

(Hussar & Bailey, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015 & 2017). Students and administrators at “Duncan University”, a public doctoral level university, generously shared their experiences and insights, which has led to the recommendations of nine “Action Areas”.

Significance for Theory

Tinto and Pusser (2006) formulated two models to focus “on the conditions within institutions rather than on the attributes of students themselves. We do so because it is too easy to see the absence of student success as solely the responsibility of students” (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 5). Indeed, in many previous studies, the attributes of students are the focus as to reasons why they do or do not succeed. In this study, I instead focused on supports and barriers for part-time students’ degree progress that are within the control of policymakers and practitioners. Tinto and Pusser (2006) had two primary components, both of which were used in my study. Their PP&SS Model examined the importance of postsecondary policy formation at campus, state, and federal levels and their MIA focused on how institutions can act within the context of their campuses to increase student persistence and success.

Most prior studies using Tinto and Pusser’s (2006) frameworks focused on applications of the MIA and therefore on the commitment, expectations, support, feedback, and involvement (or engagement) to improve student success, with limited attention to the PP&SS. My study shows that components of both models are important to consider for making a difference in the experiences and success for part-time undergraduate students. With the use of both models, I was able to better see the interaction of policy and practice with students’ experiences and also to frame ways that policymakers at all levels could either impede or support the success of part-time undergraduate students.

The PP&SS focused primarily on four key policy domains that impact student success: preparation, finance, access, and accountability. In this study, the policy domains most impactful to success for part-time undergraduate students were finance (i.e., state support, student financial aid, and tuition policy) and access (i.e. articulation/transfer). There was less support for their position on preparation; it may be that the students felt prepared for their college work at Duncan University. With regard to accountability, it may be considered impactful; however, it generally created barriers, such as the focus on 4- to 6-year graduation rates. An area for further research is how assessment, accreditation, state mandates, and market competition might be expanded to frame accountability for student success to include part-time students.

The more campus-based impacts on student success are described in Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Model of Institutional Action. Many of my findings follow their concepts of institutional commitment, campus expectations, support (i.e., financial aid, advising, academic, engagement), and feedback. Each of those has been noted previously in Chapter 5. For example, as posited by Tinto & Pusser (2006), feedback provided in the classroom clearly encouraged students to persist and created scenarios that inspired confidence in themselves and their abilities.

In addition to these four items within the MIA, Tinto and Pusser (2006) included a section entitled "administrative action items" that they noted was important but complete. Tinto and Pusser (2006) wrote "[i]ncreased institutional rates of student success do not arise by chance. They are the result of a series of intentional institutional actions, policies, and practices that are consistently applied over the long term" (p.16). Their model summarized the potential for administrative actions in two main ways, "incentives and rewards" and "faculty and staff development programs" (p. 17). Many findings of this study fit into those two areas, but there are others that could be added to the "administrative actions".

The Project

This qualitative case study explored the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level university and how policies and practices impacted their experiences. The site location was a public doctoral level institution in the Southeastern United States, referred to in my study as “Duncan University” to maintain confidentiality. This study at a doctoral level institution is important since some literature suggests part-time students may have more difficulty in those institutions (Kasworm, 2010). A qualitative case study format with interviews was used as the primary data source, to understand the real-life experiences of these students. Twenty-three current or former undergraduate Duncan University students were interviewed during the 2018-19 academic year. Students qualified for the study by having been enrolled part-time for at least one semester. Nineteen were enrolled at Duncan University in the semester in which they were interviewed. Three individuals had already graduated from Duncan University. Two students (one of whom was seeking a second bachelor’s degree) had stopped out during that semester but intended to reenroll.

For additional context to the information the part-time undergraduate students provided, six administrators (some who also served as faculty) at Duncan University were also interviewed. The goal with the administrator interviews was to add further context to the data that students provided and to get their feedback or reactions to a preliminary summary list of supports and barriers. In addition, document analysis was used throughout the project to identify policies, add context, and elaborate on items shared by the participants. Document analysis included a review of the institution’s Vision & Mission Statement, Strategic Plan, history, and policies. Document analysis was primarily done as a means of locating, exploring, and analyzing policies, and institutional practices referenced by the student participants (Bowen, 2009; McLendon, Tuchmayer, & Park, 2009). The multiple forms of data created the opportunity for

triangulation and enabled greater understanding of the students' experiences. With the convergence of data and triangulation, findings or conclusions have greater accuracy (Yin, 2014). The collection and analysis of multiple methods also decreased the possibility that conclusions reflected the biases or limitations inherent in only one type of data (Flick, 2018).

The study has several limitations. First, it has true applicability only within the context of Duncan University. However, some findings may be applicable to other universities and public university systems. As a qualitative case study, there was rich engagement focused on the single institution. The voices are not meant to represent all part-time student voices. The study is also subject to interviewer bias since there was only one interviewer. There is some selection effect as well, given that most participants were recruited through gatekeepers who were staff and/or faculty for certain Duncan University programs. However, this was mitigated somewhat through the use of additional strategies to recruit students.

Key Action Areas for Policymakers and Practitioners

Action Area 1: Improve data and data analyses to “see” part-time students and bring them “out of the shadows” to expand recognition of their existence and individual situations (four recommendations).

As described by Bombardieri (2017):

...even though they are a large proportion of the college population, part-time students have often been relegated to the shadows from a data, research, and policy standpoint. As a result, it is difficult to even identify the bright spots where part-time students are more likely to graduate, let alone figure out what those communities or institutions are doing differently. The effects of this limited knowledge extend to a broader difficulty with policy. (p. 17)

Interestingly, most Duncan University administrators could not readily say how many students of their student population were enrolled part-time. There are many students who are not captured in “first-time-full-time” data because they have stopped out of college participation and returned later to continue to pursue their degrees. This reinforces the unstated expectation that persons who want to enroll in a university will do so on a full-time basis, regardless of the cost to them of doing so (e.g., disrupting a career, giving up income, inability to continue a caregiving role, student debt). According to Zerquera, Ziskin, and Torres (2018), “[t]o understand and support the academic success of nontraditional students broadly, campuses and researchers need to orient to a norm incorporating these student experiences” (p.42). As stated by a Duncan University administrator, there is a tendency for policymakers to think of today’s college students and their experiences being exactly the same as how the policymaker experienced college (typically as a full-time residential student).

Recommendation 1.1 - The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) survey information is the central national source of student data and reflects insufficient information about part-time students. IPEDS generally reports data and tracks graduation rates for just those students who begin the fall semester as first-time full-time students and then graduate within four or six years from the institution where they first enrolled (Bombardieri, 2017). This evaluates completion in a very traditional format for a very traditional set of students while excluding students who transfer, begin part-time, or enter college at a time other than the fall term (Cook, n.d.). Due to the focus of the data on traditional students, with marginal attention to students who do not follow a traditional pathway (Adelman, 2007; Bombardieri, 2017; Lipka, 2012), there is some

difficulty in understanding the paths of part-time students and they can be left out of policy discussions entirely.

While more recently IPEDS includes “Outcome Measures” data that has some information about part-time students, the data are not disaggregated by students’ age, race/ethnicity, or gender, which creates significant challenges to further analysis and understanding (Soares et al., 2017). Disaggregation of data would also be useful to examine how different types of students enroll, persist, and graduate.

The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) was originally created to monitor the usage of federal student aid and can also be used to track individual student migration between campuses (Cook, n.d.). The data from “the Clearinghouse” also includes students enrolled part-time and those who begin during any term (Cook, n.d.). NSC data, however, do not include all institutions. Furthermore, since the data are owned by the individual institutions, the NSC can only make data available at the aggregate level, with institutional-level data released only with a university’s consent (Cook, n.d.). However, the NSC data do provide an additional useful tool in the examination of student enrollment, persistence, and completion for the part-time students and the institutions that serve them (Cook, n.d.). Cook’s (n.d.) analysis showed that IPEDS data did not have an available 6-year graduation rate for all students at 4-year public institutions. NSC, however, showed that if all (including part-time and transfer) students at 4-year public institutions were evaluated, that 75% of students were either graduates or still enrolled six years later (Cook, n.d.). Specifically for part-time students at public 4-year institutions, NSC data show that in six years more than half had either earned a degree or were still on track to earn a degree (Cook, n.d.).

Within each institution, campus staff, usually in institutional research or a similar unit, have a great deal of information about students at their institution. Campus leadership should work with those staffs to drive the formation of more robust tracking models to show and understand how different types of students enter and then progress or drop out of their institution. Understanding pathways of existing students better might uncover additional details about the specific populations that are most likely and least likely to graduate, as well as where the stumbling blocks might exist along the path for different students.

Further data availability and analysis could also help policymakers and practitioners catch emerging trends. For example, several student participants at Duncan University were “traditional-age” but chose to work while being enrolled part-time for some or all of their college coursework. These students commonly expressed that they did this to decrease or avoid debt for their college educations. This is particularly intriguing given the simultaneous policymaker push for graduation in four years. It is possible that due to increased costs of college, part-time enrollment is an emerging trend even among “traditional-aged” students. Further data availability and analysis could help evaluate that possibility.

Recommendation 1.2 - State and public university system policymakers and practitioners should analyze their statewide college completion goals alongside state demographic trends. A state-level college completion goal without an associated analysis of the state’s demographics sets a state up for failure to meet the goal. Who are the potential students that the state needs to enroll, retain, and graduate? Policymakers who establish a goal should further analyze the population trends and types of students who will need to complete college for those goals to be met. This would include an analysis of the state’s demographic trends, such as expected high school completion numbers. If expected high school completion numbers are not

sufficient to meet the state's college completion goal, what types of individuals will need to complete college for the state to meet its goal? As described by Bosworth (2012), in many states, the analysis will show that the need cannot be met solely through the pipeline of "traditional" students, but this is an important recognition. States and institutions will also need to reach out to individuals who have complex lives – working adults, parents who might desire to return to school, and traditional-aged students who need to work a substantial amount of hours while they are attending college. Since most states have specific goals to increase college completion, university systems could also model what would be needed for their systems to help the states reach their goals. It would be important for a state and university system to evaluate which institutions could best serve the individuals that will be most likely to enroll and persist. Understanding this and making needed adjustments to policies, practices, and programs will be critical for making progress.

University system boards and staff could assist campuses in analyzing demographic data and surveying their surrounding regional areas to estimate the numbers of individuals who might be interested in part-time programs. University system boards should evaluate how many more part-time undergraduate students could be accommodated and how their institutions could serve part-time students better. Hagedorn (2015) noted:

[i]t is not surprising that for-profit colleges have recognized a void in the adult market and have utilized it to their advantage. For example, the proprietary University of Phoenix, clearly states on its website that the university is specifically designed for working adults (p. 315).

Interestingly, most of the student participants in my study lived within an hour drive of Duncan University and even if enrolled online, the students placed high value on the relative affordability and physical presence (not solely online) of Duncan University. Holly stated:

...it's an online program that's not a degree factory. I think that was a big thing for me. I didn't want to go through Phoenix or all of the places that are churning out degrees. I wanted to go somewhere and actually get an education.

University systems should also evaluate the degree programs available to meet the areas of high need in the state and whether the programs were manageable for all types of students, including part-timers. In the case of Duncan University, many students indicated the nursing and education programs were difficult to complete as a part-time student, yet those are programs where the state needs more graduates to meet workforce demands. There may be particular areas such as this where a population of potential part-time students could emerge to meet an area of high need in the state, if there were part-time programs designed for these students.

Recommendation 1.3 - Campus-level data and communication about part-time student enrollment are key for building awareness of and acknowledging part-time students. At Duncan University, an evaluation of the existing student population and demographic shifts led the Provost to establish a committee to consider “nontraditional” students on their campus. All institutions should review their existing student populations, the population changes in their states, and consider their enrollment goals. Attention should be given to the “feeders” of the institution in terms of student enrollment – is it the local area, local high schools or high schools in other areas of the state, local community colleges, and are there potential student populations that are not being considered currently? Data should also be disaggregated to evaluate whether part-time students are concentrated in particular programs, not able to complete

certain programs, or if they have different characteristics than the general student population of the institution. Community college faculty and staff know a good deal about the students they serve and about the students who intend to transfer to universities. Information could be shared with universities to provide context to the types of students that universities will need to prepare to serve. This could include faculty to faculty discussions as well as official dataset sharing between offices of institutional research.

Recommendation 1.4 - Strategic plans, mission statements and other campus publications should address part-time student enrollment. In my review of Duncan University’s Strategic Plan and Mission statement, there are some areas of indirect inclusion of part-time students. Universities who want to grow and enhance experiences of this population of students should consider addressing them directly in these documents and other campus publications. Jacoby (2015) indicated:

[s]tudents’ early impressions of the degree to which they will ‘fit’ at an institution are influenced by the ways in which the institution chooses to portray itself in its publications and on its website. In this vein, print and online text and photographs should represent all types of students and a variety of lifestyles. (p. 297)

Action Area 2: Use “student portraits” and other techniques to examine current and potential policies with part-time students in mind (one recommendation).

Recommendation 2.1 - State goals, combined with demographic trends and analyses of existing undergraduate student populations should be used to create “student portraits” as proxies for different types of students. Given that there is frequently a wide gap in the type of students considered by policymakers and practitioners (more “traditional”) versus those who are enrolled as undergraduates in higher educational institutions (more “nontraditional”), a

recommended strategy is to create “example student portraits.” Using the data and analysis of current part-time student populations and potential part-time student populations, the example student portraits could be done to match a state, system, or institution’s existing student population and other types of students that should be enrolled. Having example student portraits would be useful to the evaluation of current and potential policies and practices. They could also increase the understanding and knowledge of the diversity of types of undergraduate students. This is an “easier said than done” recommendation that will take some deliberate change for implementation. Until the complexity and diversity of student populations is more ingrained, the student portraits may serve to aid in developing this practice. Student portraits that mirror today’s students in higher education could become a “yardstick” for evaluation of policies and practices that would work across a more diverse and complex student population.

An example of this would be the following “Four Student Profiles”:

Example Portrait 1: just graduated from high school and enrolled full-time in the university for the first time, works a part-time job on campus;

Example Portrait 2: a mother who stopped out from a 4-year institution, took a few courses at the community college and has returned to complete her baccalaureate degree, has teenagers at home and works full-time, part-time student;

Example Portrait 3: transferred from the local community college after completing an associate’s degree and works 30 hours per week to pay for her living expenses and minimize debt while she is in college; and

Example Portrait 4: a father who has young children and works full-time, transferred from the community college in a 2+2 program.

There are certainly other types of students who could be represented by example portraits; this recommendation is that each level of policymaker and practitioner use data to establish good examples based on their populations. The portraits should be based on their existing student populations and the additional types of students they need to enroll to meet enrollment targets and overall college completion goals.

It was not done by using the concept of student portraits, but at Duncan University, the tuition surcharge repeal came about as a result of a better understanding of the complexity of the current student population. The state's tuition surcharge policy was created to move students through their degree programs and have them complete without an excess of credit hours. However, in practice, the policy was harmful to students who were part-time, may have stopped out from their previous degree pursuit, or were transfer students who arrived at the university with a large number of credits. Instead of incentivizing students to complete their degrees, it created an additional barrier, often near the end of their required coursework. The advocacy effort that helped to eliminate the surcharge focused on the unintended punitive effect it had on veterans, older students, and community college transfer students (Quillin, 2019). The establishment of a systematic way to review existing and proposed policies for impact to different types of students (not just focusing on "traditional" students) would help create more nuanced perspectives of and consideration for various undergraduate student populations.

As policymakers and practitioners evaluate existing and proposed policies with a more complex view of students who will be impacted, an important consideration should also be to remove policies, slogans or terms that might stigmatize part-time students. Many Duncan University student participants, both traditional age and nontraditional age, indicated feeling a stigma about being enrolled part-time. When asked more about this, sometimes they described

feelings of inadequacy compared to their peers, but more often they mentioned graduation rate goals and other policies that they had heard about. Emphasis on 4-year graduation rates and slogans like “15 to finish” can create negative feelings amongst students who cannot enroll on a full-time basis. Even the use of the term “nontraditional” may convey a message that these students do not fit into the college environment. This feeling of stigmatization or “othering” based on terminology should be examined with further research.

Action Area 3: Reform policies and practice to better support part-time students through financial assistance options (four recommendations).

Recommendation 3.1 - Federal financial aid, while critically important for part-time undergraduate students, can be a source of great frustration, particularly those who hit aid maximums. Federal aid policies may disadvantage part-time students less than other policy areas but when students have an issue it is often a critical one. Financial aid was noted by student participants as a great positive or a drastic negative. Many of the students benefited immensely from aid programs such as Pell grants or low/no interest loan programs that they qualified for through FAFSA. However, for those who hit their aid maximums, it could be a devastating blow that slowed their progression to a halt or created an insurmountable barrier to completion.

Federal Student Loan limits vary based on each student’s classification (freshman, sophomore, junior/senior) and dependency status (dependent or independent) as well as type of loan-subsidized or unsubsidized (Federal Student Loan Limits, n.d.). In general, a dependent student is eligible for \$5,500-\$7,500 per year in combined subsidized and unsubsidized loans. There is, however, an aggregate loan limit of \$31,000 and no more than \$23,000 can be subsidized. An independent undergraduate student is potentially eligible for \$9,500-12,500 per year in combined subsidized and unsubsidized loans. However, an independent student has an

aggregate loan limit of \$57,500 of which no more than \$23,000 can be subsidized (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). The total annual cost of attendance at Duncan University in 2018-19, including tuition, fees, housing, books and supplies, and other living expenses was estimated as \$21,297 per year for a full-time student (Duncan University, n.d.-c). Tuition and fees alone totaled \$7,331 per year.

A Duncan University financial aid administrator was quick to note that the biggest policy barrier related to financial aid was these limits on time or amounts.

... at the federal and the state level the policies that have had the biggest impact on students in general are the ones that limit the time - the length of time or the number of credit hours that a student can receive specific aid programs for. With Pell Grant, there's a 12-semester limit. So every semester is tracked, but if they go part-time it's only half of that that's counted. So there's a lifetime limit on particularly grant programs, but we're also seeing it in the subsidized loan program. So from my perspective from financial aid, those lifetime limits on the availability of funds is a big impact. Those [limits] have been around for probably five or six years. The Pell Grant started out with an 18-semester limit, and then it got dropped down to 12 semesters probably six years ago. With the Pell Grants, the schedule is adjusted for full-time, three-quarter time, half-time and less than half-time. So, basically 12 or more, 9, 6, and 3 [credit hours].

The aid administrator also indicated observed an increasing problem with situations where community college transfers were hitting the 12 semester limit on aid because they were coming to Duncan University having already used up a high percentage of their aid availability. That was the case with at least one student participant who recently found out she had hit her maximum

aid eligibility. That had changed her perspective from being sure that she would graduate to an almost desperate sense that she would not be able to finish. This student was a returning adult honors student who transferred from a community college and had just a few courses left to complete. Future federal policy should consider extending aid maximums by a limited number of semesters or courses for students who find themselves in this situation.

Recommendation 3.2 - Campuses should work with students to establish plans for their required coursework combined with a projection of their remaining aid eligibility.

Course pathways could be matched to expected or remaining financial aid over the same semesters. The financial aid administrator at Duncan University indicated they were beginning to have some discussions with the student success offices about how to help craft graduation plans for students that would match their aid eligibility up with the coursework they needed to complete a degree. Or, if those did not match up, that would provide students with that information very early. There are some difficulties noted by the aid administrator about sharing information outside of the financial aid office, but they were hopeful that there was a way to do this successfully. For students who begin at a community college, staff should work collaboratively with staff at 4-year institutions to help reduce issues with students reaching aid maximums prior to being able to earn their baccalaureate degrees.

Interestingly, the availability of summer Pell grants was not targeted to part-time undergraduates, but was mentioned as a positive by several students in this study. They were able to make substantial progress on coursework during summer courses that may have been less available to them before they had access to Pell grant funding in the summer. Lisa indicated the enactment of summer Pell was a policy that helped her to progress. Previously, without summer Pell, she would have had to pay fully out of pocket for summer courses.

Recommendation 3.3 - Policymakers should consider increasing the incentives for employers to cover or reimburse students' tuition and fees. Two student participants were beneficiaries of programs in which their employers covered their costs at Duncan University. One was a private sector employee and another was an employee of Duncan University. Conversations with those participants, as compared to those with other student participants, had a stark lack of concern about financial aid or finances. These students (one of whom was a recent graduate) knew that the financial portion of their coursework was covered and expressed loyalty and appreciation to their employers. One had previously maxed out financial aid limits, and she indicated employer assistance was the only way she was able to graduate.

Currently, individuals who receive this type of assistance from their employers can exclude up to \$5250 of those benefits each year from their compensation totals for tax purposes (Tax Benefits for Education: Information Center, n.d.). This can include payments for tuition, fees, books, supplies and equipment. Employers may also deduct these costs as a business expense (Tax Benefits for Education: Information Center, n.d.). This is a policy which clearly benefits working (therefore “nontraditional”) students. To incentivize employers to offer more education assistance, Congress should increase the maximum allowable amounts or incentivize educational assistance through tax deductions.

State governments often work collaboratively with companies based in their states. States could offer tax benefits or other incentives to companies who invest in their employees' educations as well as help companies understand the benefits of offering such assistance. A 2016 study of Cigna Corporation's Education Reimbursement Program (ERP) found that every dollar the company put into the program created a 129 percent return on their investment (CIGNA/ROI with a Human Touch, 2020). The same study also showed

[the] ERP program increases career opportunity and employee retention, which drives financial payback. Program participants are 10 percent more likely to be promoted, 7.5 percent more likely to be transferred within Cigna, and eight percent more likely to stay at the company, reducing across-the-board talent management and recruiting costs (CIGNA/ROI with a Human Touch, 2020).

Recommendation 3.4 - State aid programs should be evaluated and modified to work better for all types of students. State financial aid programs should be analyzed for what types of students they benefit. If there are gaps in the types of students helped by existing programs versus the students who are enrolled or that the state needs to enroll, then new programs may need to be created. For example, from the experiences of part-time Duncan University students, there is a need for programs that would provide grants or additional loans to students who were very close to completion but who had maxed out of their federal financial aid availability. There were “cliff effects” for part-time students in the state’s aid program, as described by a financial aid administrator:

The state grants are either a full-time or at least half-time – there’s just the two.

So it’s almost like a cliff effect when you go from 12 or more down to any number. Six, between six and 12 or six and 11, you get half; whether you’re at 11 hours or you’re at six hours, you’re going to get half, and if you’re below six hours you get nothing. So there’s a couple of cliffs there at the state side...

Jacoby (2015) recommended “[s]cholarships specifically for adult learners and part-time learners should be established, and eligible students should be strongly encouraged to apply” (p. 298).

Campuses should establish scholarship programs for getting across the degree completion line even if they have maxed out of their federal or state aid eligibility. This might be done through

advocating for federal or state funds for such a program, working with potential donors to fund grants, or setting aside other campus resources for this purpose.

Action Area 4: Evaluate revenue streams such as state funding models and charges for tuition and fees for incentives and disincentives related to part-time students (two recommendations).

Recommendation 4.1 - State models that fund public universities should be analyzed and potentially updated to provide better funding for today's complex student populations.

State funding models for universities have traditionally been based on student enrollments.

Where those models are still in existence, they should be evaluated for impact to institutions who enroll large numbers of part-time students. Duncan University's Student Success Administrator stated "our funding model really make[s] it difficult for us to really go after [the] part-time student. It's a disincentive." For example, funding models should adequately support online or off-site education and the delivery of student and institutional services as essentially 24/7 operations. Students do not benefit from services that are not open when they need them, so funding models need to be sufficient for important services to be provided essentially "around the clock." Similarly, sufficient support of advising and summer or other "non-standard" term instructional terms is an important part of providing adequate state support. One specific portion of funding that could be evaluated is how funding is aligned for advising and other student support services. If enrollment funding is based on student FTEs or student credit hours, it would be better to provide student services funding on a headcount basis to provide support for institutions with large numbers of part-time students.

In recent years, many states have moved from enrollment-based funding models to performance-based funding. There is scant evidence that performance-based funding of higher

educational institutions improves 4-year graduation rates and as indicated by students in my study, these types of policies may further stigmatize part-time enrollment. A specific metric that should be reconsidered would be the 4- or 6-year graduation rate. Instead, it would be better to reward increases in the numbers of students who hit certain “milestone measures” or “momentum points” that would increase the likelihood of degree completion, rather than rewarding only increases in 4-year graduation rates. For example, some states now incentivize campuses for increases in the students who complete 60 credit hours (Dougherty et al., 2016).

Funding models should also appropriately resource summer term courses, or even incentivize year-round enrollment, especially for part-time students. There was evidence in my study that part-time undergraduate students took or desired to take courses in the summer that would keep them on track for their graduation plans. Some (e.g. school system employees) indicated the summer was a better time for them to engage in coursework. Several students chose to be part-time the entire year (including summer) rather than taking courses full-time during just fall and spring terms.

Recommendation 4.2 - Tuition and fee policies are another area that should be evaluated for their impact on part-time undergraduate students and others who may not fit the “traditional” student profile. The part-time student participants in my study included individuals who were in online and on-campus degree programs. At Duncan University, based on policy of the university system board, online students are charged only the Educational and Technology Fee, whereas on-campus students are charged all fees (Authorization of Tuition and Fees, 2019). Likely due to this policy, on-campus students in my study were more likely than online students to express concern or a lack of value in some of the things they were paying for in fees.

These policies may be handled at the state, university system, or campus levels, and all would have a role in evaluating their impact to varying types of students, but especially part-time undergraduates. If part-time students do not benefit from all fees, then it may be better to not charge them, or that may signal an area that university services should be enhanced. There is a connection here as well to financial aid eligibility maximums, since fees paid would add costs and potentially push a student toward the maximums more quickly. For some students, if they could avoid paying fees for services that they did not use, they may have been able to avoid hitting their aid maximums. Conversely, some part-time students may want to “opt-in” to some fees to access the services. Some student participants, for example, indicated they opted into a fee that allowed them to access the university’s recreation center and a fee that gave them access to counseling services.

Action Area 5: Reconsider academic policies, programs, and practices to better serve part-time students (seven recommendations).

Recommendation 5.1 - Transfer-in policies and articulation agreements need routine examination for impact to part-time students. While some students experienced a seamless transfer of their coursework from previous 4-year institutions or community colleges, there were also instances where students lost the opportunity to transfer courses. Importantly, that impacted students in their time to degree but in many cases the “secondary” loss of sufficient financial aid availability made their continued enrollment tenuous. Students who used financial aid in their initial 4-year degree or community college programs then transferred to Duncan University but in that process may not be able to transfer all previous course credits. That meant that the remaining number of credits might exceed their amount of remaining financial aid

eligibility. Students in those situations were in quite dire circumstances in terms of their ability to continue.

Related to both flexibility and transfer-in policies, the Senior Academic Administrator indicated course articulation was fairly straightforward with community college coursework and the articulation agreement, but the type of institution that a student is transferring from affects the process for credit acceptance at Duncan University.

Community college transferring is pretty transparent [with the] articulation there.

But transferring from a private institution or some other school they have been to, we have matching through CIP codes but ultimately a department representative – it must be the faculty. The departments have to agree to a transfer.

These types of situations may be positive in allowing some flexibility for course acceptance at the departmental level, yet there should be some review to determine that part-time students are not penalized in course transfer decisions. In addition, changes to an institution's general education program need to be considered with a nod to potential impacts to part-time students, particularly those who transfer-in to the institution, often with some significant time since their prior enrollment. Articulation agreements and transfer-in policies should be reconsidered often and not be static documents. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that due to their particular circumstances, many transfer students (like participants in this study) are not covered by states' articulation agreements.

Recommendation 5.2 - Faculty, department heads, and campus leadership should examine the programs where part-time students may want to enroll and programs that have high numbers of part-time students transfer or drop out. In discussions with part-time students, there were clearly programs that they felt were not able to be done on a part-time basis

(e.g., teaching and nursing in particular) and those that they felt were well-designed for part-timers such as the BLS program and most Business programs. Several of the student participants had begun in other majors but changed their major due to needing something that worked better for their part-time enrollment. Similarly, some students chose particular majors (especially BLS) because they “worked well” for part-time enrollment.

If a campus wants to focus on part-time students and grow numbers of part-time enrollees as well as retain and graduate more part-time students, it is important to examine the differences that might exist between programs. At Duncan University, most student participants had very strong opinions about the programs that were and were not conducive to part-time enrollment. An example of a barrier for many part-time students was a requirement to complete an internship or practicum at a place other than their place of employment. Some student participants changed programs that did not require a practicum, while others went to great lengths, including loss of income and use of all their available sick leave in order to meet internship requirements.

Recommendation 5.3 - Specific attention should be given to majors that are “high need” for the state or region but are not conducive to part-time enrollment. At Duncan University, students considered both the teacher education and nursing programs to be difficult or impossible to complete part-time. Those are considered “high need” for the state and may be areas where individuals already working (e.g., teaching assistants or certified nursing assistants) or desire to complete a baccalaureate degree while remaining employed. This is an area for further analysis and research within each campus and potentially within each state and system. Proposals for new degree programs, particularly those that are in high demand for a state or region, should include an evaluation of how the degree could be completed by a part-time student or what barriers might exist based on the design of the program.

Recommendation 5.4 - Academic program designs should be considered for their effects on part-time students. Academic program design can positively or negatively affect degree attainment for part-time students. There are many academic program design-related questions to consider:

- Is the application process straightforward and accessible to part-time students?
- Is the program designed in a way that it can be completed part-time?
- Can students reasonably enter on a part-time basis and complete on a part-time basis? Does the program require anything that would be in conflict with reasons they might be part-time, such as full-time employment and having a family or caregiver role?
- What are the impacts of changes to a campus general education program on part-time students or others who transfer-in?
- Can required internship and practicums be done in a way that students who work can reasonably complete them, or are there alternatives available for fulfilling those requirements?
- Are advising services accessible and responsive to part-time students?
- Are courses available in the mode and timeframe needed by students?
- Are course offerings publicized well in advance of the semester?

Recommendation 5.5 - Course scheduling and flexibility (or lack thereof) can provide key supports or establish difficult barriers for part-time students to navigate.

Given the complexity of roles that they are managing and scheduling, the need for flexibility was a common theme of discussion with students. These discussions had several practical points, the

first being that students needed course availability in times that they could attend. For those who worked full-time, that typically meant they needed courses outside the traditional 9-5 workday. Some employed students were able to adjust their work schedules slightly in order to attend courses, but they did indicate that it was often difficult to get the courses they needed at the times that they could attend. In their study of nontraditional students, Remenick and Bergman (2020) listed the implementation of “more flexibility in courses – such as online, evening, or weekend courses, or courses offered at the location of employment...” (p. 6) as a way for institutions to offer greater access to working students. Goncalves and Trunk (2014) also found that students wanted more flexibility with classes and more online classes.

Recommendation 5.6 - Flexibility with regard to mode of delivery is also important to part-time students. While some students specifically chose online coursework, many students indicated they did not like the Duncan University’s policy of limiting students to either on-campus or online coursework. Instead, they wanted to have the option to choose the course that they needed in the mode of delivery that made the most sense for them at the time. Many who lived locally indicated given this option, they would have chosen courses less based on mode of delivery and more based on completing needed coursework on a schedule that fit around their other obligations such as work and family.

Recommendation 5.7 - Campuses should make longer-term course schedules and graduation pathways available to students. Students indicated it would be very helpful to have course schedules and degree progression or graduation plans that helped them plan out their coursework as a long-term pathway to graduation. To accomplish this herself, one student went through old course catalogs and noted whether a course was typically offered in the fall or spring and then designed her own plan to degree. Administrative units (i.e. Registrar’s Office) should

partner with academic departments to make a clearer schedule of courses available so that students could plan ahead in this way. For part-time students, course planning and sequencing are extraordinarily important to maintain their pathways to graduation. If a student is able to take only two courses per semester, there is a much greater chance to miss a step on the stair step planning to graduation. It becomes even more critical to have those two courses in the right order and know when all the necessary coursework will be offered to build the right stepping stones in the correct sequencing.

Action Area 6: Encourage and train faculty in best practices to influence persistence and completion of part-time undergraduates. Faculty and classroom interactions are central to the experiences of part-time undergraduate students. Connections with and positive feedback from faculty can make the difference in retention for part-time students. Student participants described their interactions with faculty at Duncan University in extremely positive ways. It is important to consider that the classroom is the main source of interaction for these students who are typically living off campus and often only interact with the campus for their coursework. However, faculty may not know students are attending part-time or have information about students' other life obligations. While this may not be necessary information to teaching in the classroom, students did express that faculty who knew this about them and acknowledged their other life roles provided them additional encouragement and even confidence in classroom interactions. Personalized encouragement and feedback from faculty was crucial to many students' experiences. This is another way that part-time students feel "seen." Elaine mentioned how important an email from a faculty member was to her persistence:

The instructors, they really seem to be concerned about you. They really want you to succeed. One of my instructors this semester, she sent me an email. It just

really pulled me over to wanting to come back next semester. I was thinking of just taking a break next semester, but I said, ‘No, I better stay in here. I better just keep trucking.’ Her words were just so encouraging that she was paying attention to me as an individual.

Jennifer, when asked about a “great experience” immediately went to classroom interactions:

Probably getting positive feedback on projects that I’ve completed in the classroom? The interaction from the professors made me feel like okay I can do this, and I can do well at it, and I can continue on the studies. I felt supported by the faculty.

It is also important for faculty to be aware of difficulties that part-time students may face in group work assignments. Group work that can be done during class time may be less difficult than group work that has to take place outside of class. If much of their time is devoted to a full-time job and/or family, part-time students may struggle to identify times that they can meet with other group members outside of class. It is also helpful for faculty to be aware that part-time students may feel slighted if other group members do not carry their share of the work.

If faculty can provide part-time students with opportunities to integrate other parts of their lives (i.e., employment, families, children) into their classroom assignments they may be more engaged. Remenick & Bergman (2020) noted institutions could show more acceptance of working students by developing “policies that pair students’ work experience with their educations.” Patrice, who studied in the online Peace and Conflict Studies program, noted she and her classmates often integrated family experiences into their class discussions. Several students in the Early Childhood program were employed in childcare positions and discussed merging what they learned with their daily work.

These types of strategies that can enhance retention of part-time undergraduate students may be different than strategies for traditional students. As such, campus Teaching and Learning or Faculty Development offices should be specifically trained in ways to help faculty use specific tactics to encourage part-time undergraduate students to persist and ultimately graduate. Then these central points of faculty development could include the outcomes in the information that is received as a follow up.

Action Area 7: Train advisors about the differences in the university experience for part-time undergraduates and remove presumptions of full-time enrollment from any advising tools.

Campuses should ensure advisors know if their advisees are enrolled part-time or full-time, or have a mixed enrollment strategy. Advisors should work with students in the enrollment strategy that the student chooses, and not push part-time students to enroll full-time. At Duncan University, part-time students responded negatively to advisors' assumptions that they were full-time. Similarly, the presumption of full-time enrollment within a portal for planning courses and tracking graduation requirements was a drawback for part-time students. Online course and graduation planning tools should be customizable to the student's enrollment strategy (i.e., full-time, part-time or mixed enrollment). Course planning and design of a pathway to graduation should not presume that all students are enrolled full-time.

In that same vein, advisors need additional training to understand the complex lives of part-time students, the ways that they might be different than full-time students, and to understand the ways the university plans to serve part-time undergraduates and the degree pathways those students need. All of these would help part-time students to feel more "seen" by their advisors and perhaps establish more trust with the guidance they provide. Overall, an emphasis on good ratios of students to advisors, creating personalized relationships, and

establishing a single point of contact with advisors would be beneficial to supporting part-time students' degree pursuits. Students who participated in the study by Goncalves and Trunk (2014) "thought it would be beneficial to have an advisor who only dealt with nontraditional students" (p. 167).

Many student participants called their advisor's names when I asked who had supported them in their degree pursuits at Duncan University. It was clear that for some of the programs (e.g., BLS and Early Childhood Education), that there was a key person who advised the students but also served as their overall "go to person." This is in line with and would further extend a suggestion by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) that each new student should be assigned a single individual to work with them from before they were officially admitted through their first semester. At Duncan, University, advisors often made themselves available to students outside of regular business hours and talked with students about the other demands on their time, such as jobs and family life. Students who described strong relationships with advisors were more apt to express confidence in their ability to complete their degrees.

Advisors could also assist with the previously recommended plan of coursework alongside financial aid eligibility. A "graduation plan" populated with the courses students needed to take each semester that also matched up with the expected aid eligibility would help students feel more confident in their ability to complete. It would reduce the possibility that students matriculate within just a few courses of graduation but are unable to complete due to a lack of remaining financial aid eligibility.

Action Area 8: Design new models of engagement and invite part-time undergraduate students to take part in campus life in new and different ways (two recommendations).

Recommendation 8.1 - Part-time students might be more engaged with campuses if institutions offered other ways for them to participate. Institutions may take the viewpoint that part-time students are less apt to be engaged in institutional programming or less interested in participating. However, it may be that part-time students do not engage with campus activities due to the types of activities that are offered. Quaye and Harper (2015) noted institutions should be careful to not put the entire responsibility for engagement on students but instead consider the institutional conditions and actions as well. Student participants in my study indicated they were not very involved in campus activities. Many of the part-time students did not feel like they would “fit in” with the individuals attending campus activities or did not have much time to participate. However, most part-time student participants indicated a desire to be more involved. When I asked students more about what types of activities or connections they would find helpful, students most commonly expressed that what they really wanted was for the university to help connect them with other part-time students because their experiences often felt isolating or lonely. This indicates the need for institutional staff to consider ways that they could facilitate connections amongst part-time students, who may then be able to engage with and support one another. This mirrors the concept expressed within “support” by Tinto (2012) to create “a safe haven for groups of students who might otherwise find themselves out of place in a setting where they are a distinct minority” (p. 29). To address this need, one recommendation is the development of social media tools, such as Facebook and Instagram or an app where students could opt-in to an online group of other part-time students, moderated by a one or more university or program staff that would provide connections, guidance and support.

Recommendation 8.2 - Campuses should expand service delivery to include individuals who support part-time students and play a crucial role in supporting

their degree attainment. Most student participants indicated a spouse, parent, sibling or their teen/young adult children provided them with needed support and encouragement. As stated by Bergman et al. (2014), “[t]his points to the importance of institutions reaching out to families and making all members of adult students’ families feel invested in the institution and the process” (p. 99). Campuses could offer orientation programs to family members that would include the types of challenges and opportunities the family may face while the student is pursuing higher education (e.g., childcare and household responsibilities, expectations for time with children, financial stressors; Jacoby, 2015). Online or campus-based workshops for partners and other family members would help show them what their students were doing and help them understand how to offer support (Jacoby, 2015). Another way to enhance inclusion of students’ family supports would be to allow family and friends to attend campus events with the students. For example, a mom with teenage children might attend a campus sporting event if she could bring her teenagers for free or for a small fee.

Action Area 9: Reinforce the positive impact that all faculty and staff can have on the experiences of part-time students through campus training and communications (three recommendations). Part-time students are typically not acknowledged by campuses (Bombardieri, 2017). Student participants indicated being recognized as an individual and having interactions where faculty or staff empathized or accepted their multiple roles helped them feel included and encouraged them to continue in their studies. This finding echoes that of Bergman et al. (2014) who found:

campus environment variables played a significant role in student outcomes and attenuated the effects of educational goals as well as external environmental variables...

As a student felt more strongly that the institution was responsive to his or her needs, the odds of persisting increased by about 63%...campus environment accounted for more of the variation in adult student persistence than student entry characteristics or external factors. (pp. 97-98).

Similarly, Bowen et al. (2009) indicated “embedding an emphasis on retention in the fabric of the institution is essential” (p. 222).

Notably, Duncan University’s overall focus on diversity and inclusion did resonate with part-time students. Participants often indicated a reason that they chose Duncan University and/or had a positive experience there was due to the institution’s overall focus on diversity. This was a key strength that Duncan University had in working with its part-time student population. Institutions who already have a strong emphasis on, and more importantly, reputation for diversity and inclusion may have more success in growing part-time student enrollments and assisting them towards their degree completion.

Recommendation 9.1 - Campus leadership should encourage, recognize, resource, and give “kudos” or “shout outs” to programs, departments, or faculty who focus on and are successful in enrolling, retaining, and graduating part-time students. Recognizing and even supporting the enrollment of part-time students through policies and practices requires not just allowing these students access to the institution (which was the most commonly cited “support” by student participants), but also serving them well. Campus leaders could emphasize the importance of serving part-time students by creating public recognition for units and individuals on campus who retain and graduate part-time students. Where on campus are part-time students receiving not just access, but where are they also being served well? Those areas should be noticed and recognized.

Offices, units, and departments that demonstrate how they make a difference for part-time undergraduate students should receive recognition, and if possible, additional resources. Duncan University students noted positives from interactions with the library, their academic advisors, the Cashier's Office, the Financial Aid Office, Students First, the Career Center, and Writing Center. One administrator noted the Duncan University library considers "equity of services" in how it delivers services. Institutional support areas could use this perspective to think creatively about how to provide access stellar service to students of all types. An interview with Duncan University library staff to describe and highlight their "equity of services" model could be helpful to other campus units as well as the library staff. One of the most meaningful descriptions from a student was about how individuals working in the Cashier's Office always gave her as much information as they could and encouraged her to keep pursuing her degree. In fact, it was with the Cashier's Office staff that she expressed feeling "seen" and recognized as an individual who was working hard to succeed.

At Duncan University this might be some recognition for the degree programs such as the Early Childhood programs, BLS program, and the Business program that clearly are designed for part-time students and do graduate part-time students. More impactful than providing recognition to these programs would be providing them with resources to grow and enhance their programs. In addition, impact would be increased by providing these programs, departments, and faculty with "seats at the table" or echo their perspectives to help shape institutional policies and practices for students. Finally, campus leaders play an important role in encouraging campus units. Campus leaders could use technology through videos or email to remind faculty and staff that their interactions with students are the key to institutional and student success. Providing vignettes about how faculty impacted a part-time student's progress to degree or how a staff

member encouraged a student to stay enrolled and keep working would be powerful ways to adjust campus culture. In my work at Duncan University for example, there were students who indicated they would have stopped out if it were not for the encouraging email or call with their faculty member or staff contact. I can imagine a campus news article to profile the Duncan University Cashier's Office and how staff there encourage and support part-time students.

Recommendation 9.2 - Due to their limited time on campus, each individual interaction that part-time students have with the institution may be more “high value.”

Students often brought up academic or institutional support service area experiences. Each individual interaction for part-time students may matter more than it would to a “traditional” student. Even for services that students may not encounter initially, it is important to train staff with the concept that their interactions may have higher value or higher impact than they realize and can make the difference for students' continued enrollment or ultimate graduation. This importance of each interaction should be included in training for faculty and staff in regard to their work with all students but especially emphasized as important with part-time undergraduates.

Many participants noted at other institutions even at the entry or “front door” aspects of campus interaction, they encountered a lack of responsiveness or negative attitude toward “nontraditional” students. This led to their pursuit of a degree from Duncan University instead, where they had much more positive interactions. This demonstrates that institutions should provide additional training for their various “front door” offices such as Admissions, Financial Aid, Registrar, Cashier's Office, or others that students might contact on their path to enrollment. Those “front door” staff offices should be given an opportunity to understand the changing

demographics of students, the importance of their interactions with students, and the institution's commitment to all types of students, including part-timers.

Recommendation 9.3 - Institutions should consider logistical issues that part-time students face in the process of accessing campus services. Students in the study routinely mentioned difficulties with accessing services, many of the difficulties related to hours of operation and parking challenges. Jacoby (2015) indicated:

[t]he manner in...which services are delivered can create either a welcoming or chilling climate for commuter and part-time students....If services are not open when commuter and part-time students need them, such as early mornings and evenings, students may feel frustrated and disenfranchised (pp. 299-300).

As with many college campuses, parking on Duncan University's campus can be difficult, particularly during the main hours that campus offices are open. Students also expressed difficulty with access to some campus services due to limited office hours. Participants described logistical challenges of getting to campus during the student's normal working hours, then being faced with a hurdle of locating appropriate parking and getting to a meeting or support office by an appointment time or before the office closed. Shonda talked about this challenge:

I went over to campus at 10:30 this past Friday morning. I left work to go over there. Then just driving around, and around, and around to find a parking spot. It was just crazy. As far as the foot traffic it wasn't bad, but just finding a place to park, when everybody's already in class, that's hard. And it makes it extra hard because here I am missing work to get this done. Same thing when I went to go to the Writing Center, which overall was a really good experience, but here I was getting off work at 5:30 and trying to get over there. I went two weeks in a row.

The very first week I went, I managed to snag a parking spot and get there on time. My group was waiting for one of the other young ladies, and they were pretty lenient. Then the following week, I am coming from a full day at work. I'm trying so hard to find a parking spot, and getting there I was a little late and it was like [the person working in the Writing Center said], "Well, we're gonna let you do it this time, but you arrived five minutes late. Normally if you're after your time, then we don't allow you to proceed." I was like, 'Wow.' I know that they have policies in place for a reason but sometimes it would be nice to have a little bit of leeway.

Students indicated a way to access parking quickly near campus service offices or the availability of a reduced-rate commuter parking pass would be welcomed options. In addition, they utilized later office hours when available and accessed services through email, online chats, or other virtual options. It is recommended that campus units extend service hours past 5:00 p.m., add weekend service hours (even occasionally), or offer services via online platforms (Remenick & Bergman, 2020).

Conclusion

Despite the fact that large numbers of students enroll on a part-time basis, there has been very limited research done about their experiences (Bombardieri, 2017), and even less on students who enroll in public 4-year universities on a part-time basis. Both the public and policymakers tend to generalize "college students" as typical 18-year olds who attend college on a full-time basis (Falk & Blaylock, 2010). Current systems, data, policies and programs are still relatively "traditional" and truth be told, simplistic. Policymakers at the campus, state, system, and federal levels need a better understanding

of the types of students that will need to be educated in order to meet college completion goals. Part-time students are a group that can help the United States to increase overall college completion. They have complex lives, and are typically marginalized. For the United States to have more individuals with college degrees, this is a group that needs to be addressed in data, policy, programs and practices. This study is intended to fill the literature gap by providing insight into part-time students' experiences and what institutional practices and policies support or impede their success.

The students who generously shared their stories and perspectives with me were smart, extraordinarily motivated, and hard-working. Duncan University administrators, faculty, and staff are beginning to understand and address their needs. The institution is likely on the leading edge of public doctoral level universities working with this group of students. There were many policy and practice supports that students described in their experiences; however, barriers continue in policy and practice that the federal government, state government, university system, and institution can address.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Student Participant Recruitment Solicitation

This is a statement that was provided to potential gatekeepers to assist in recruiting participants and directing them to the site for the introductory questionnaire.

Hi! I recently learned about a research study that you might be interested in since you are or were a part-time student. The researcher wants to hear the stories of students like you so that we can understand what policymakers can do to help you and students like you to complete degrees. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in public 4-year universities. Furthermore, the researcher is interested in how policies and institutional structures impact those experiences.

- If you have been an undergraduate student and taken fewer than 12 hours in any “nonsummer” semester, you may be eligible for the study.
- Any information you provide will be kept confidential.
- Nothing you share will be identifiable to you personally, and nothing will be communicated with the university in a way that you could be identified.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please complete the brief questionnaire at [site] by [date]. This study is being conducted by Ginger Burks Draughon, a part-time doctoral student in the Higher Education program at NC State. If you have any questions at all about the study, you may contact Ginger at parttimestudents2018@gmail.com.

After Ginger receives a completed questionnaire from you, she will contact you to let you know if you have been selected for the study and schedule a time for your interview. The interview is expected to take an hour to two hours to complete.

Everyone who completes an interview will receive a small gift card as compensation for your time. More importantly, your story is vital for us to hear, and I hope that you will consider sharing your insights. Please reach out to Ginger and/or complete the questionnaire so that your perspective can be included.

You can access the questionnaire at [site].

Appendix B – Introductory Questionnaire for Students

This is an introductory questionnaire that was made available to participants via web link

(Qualtrics form) or if needed, via a hard copy prior to the interview.

Hi and thank you for visiting this site! My name is Ginger Burks Draughon and I am requesting your participation in my dissertation research study. I am currently a part-time doctoral student, working to complete my degree in Higher Education. I am very interested in your experience as a part-time undergraduate student. I want to hear stories of part-time students like you so that policymakers and campuses can understand how best to support you.

I would like to learn more about how you see your experience, and particularly your experience related to the university that you attend or previously attended on a part-time basis. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in public 4-year universities, as well as how policies and institutional structures impacted those experiences. For this study, I need participants who were or are enrolled in fewer than 12 credit hours during any “nonsummer” semester as an undergraduate student. I am currently interviewing students who attended one of two public universities [list] in [state] since Fall 2003.

Note: If you sometimes enrolled on a part-time basis and sometimes on a full-time basis, you are still eligible for the research study.

This introductory questionnaire should take you fewer than 10 minutes to complete. I would also like to follow up to do an in-person interview with some study participants.

Information that I gather and summarize will be available to you if requested via email to parttimestudents2018@gmail.com. Information that you provide will be summarized in my research and will not be personally identifiable to you or any other student. Any information you provide will be kept confidential. I may publish, present, or share the results; but your name or information that might identify you individually will not be used. If you have any questions about the study, you can contact me at parttimestudents2018@gmail.com

If you have attended more than one university as a part-time student, please complete this questionnaire based on the most recent school that you attended.

Please select one of the following:

-I consent to voluntarily participate in this research study.

-I do not consent to participate in this research study.

Thank you for your willingness to complete this questionnaire!

1. Name:
2. Email:
3. Phone Number:
4. Which of the following institutions did you attend or are you attending now as a part-time student?
 - a. [University A]
 - b. [Duncan University]
 - c. Another Institution
5. What is the most recent semester and year in which you were enrolled at that institution? [Example: Fall 2016] [participant can type in a short response]
6. How many courses were you enrolled in during that semester? Was that typical of the number of credit hours you enrolled in during a semester? [participant can type in a short response]
7. What was your age during the most recent semester that you were enrolled part-time? [participant can type in age]
8. What degree or certificate (examples: Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts) and in what discipline (examples: education, business, medicine, history, English, science) were you or are you pursuing? [participant can type short responses]
9. Do you identify as:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
 - d. Prefer not to answer
10. What is your racial or ethnic identification?
 - a. Alaska Native
 - b. American Indian
 - c. Asian
 - d. Black/African American
 - e. Hispanic or Latino
 - f. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - g. White
 - h. Two or more races
 - i. Other
 - j. Prefer not to identify
11. Please provide an estimate of your household income when you took your most recent course as a part-time student:
 - a. \$0-20,000
 - b. \$20,001-30,000
 - c. \$30,001-50,000
 - d. \$50,001-\$70,000
 - e. \$70,001-\$90,000
 - f. More than \$90,000

- g. Other/Prefer not to answer
12. Which of the following is the best describes you and your situation regarding the degree you were working on as a part-time student?
- I did not complete the degree and do not plan to return to complete it.
 - I did not complete the degree, but I'm planning to go back to complete it.
 - I am currently enrolled and planning to complete the degree.
 - I am currently enrolled but have serious doubts about whether I will be able to complete the degree.
 - I completed the degree requirements and graduated.
 - Other (please describe)

Thank you so very much for completing this questionnaire. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in public 4-year universities, as well as how policies and institutional structures impact those experiences. Ideally, the results of the study will provide some information about what institutions can do to help part-time students succeed.

I myself am a part-time doctoral student in the Higher Education program at NC State. If you would be willing, I may want to talk with you directly to learn about your experience. Please note that the university will never be able to identify you or your responses.

If you would be willing to further discuss your experiences, please indicate below. Any follow up discussions we might have will be completely confidential and scheduled at a time and location to be as convenient for you as possible. Your contact information will not be shared or used other than for the researcher to follow up with you.

All who agree to and complete follow up discussions will be provided a \$20 gift card to compensate you for your time.

(Check box) Yes, I would be willing to discuss my experiences as a part-time student.

(Check box) No, I would not be willing to further discuss my experiences as a part-time student.

If you have a preferred method of contact other than the email and phone numbers listed previously, please indicate below:

Whether you are willing to be interviewed about your experiences or not, if you have friends or associates who also were part-time students, I would be truly appreciative if you would share the questionnaire link with them [LINK]. Posting this link on your social media is also a big help.

Thank you again!

If you would like to receive additional follow up or have any questions about this study, please contact me at parttimestudents2018@gmail.com

Appendix C – Student Consent Form

Policy Barriers & Supports for Part-Time Students in Public Universities: A Case Study

Ginger Burks Draughon parttimestudents2018@gmail.com

Informed Consent

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in public 4-year universities, as well as how policies and institutional structures impact those experiences. The study is designed to understand the experiences of part-time undergraduate students and what institutional structures or policies are helpful (supportive) or detrimental (barriers) to their degree pursuits. Further, the study will include a literature review that will provide for some analysis of the participants' experiences as compared to the literature.

Benefits

The anticipated benefits of the research are to better understand the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in public universities. Furthermore, the researcher anticipates gathering information about what policies and institutional structures are helpful or detrimental to those students' degree pursuits.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

This is an opportunity to provide your own thoughts and responses during an interview that will be approximately one to one to two hours in duration. You will be asked a series of questions about experiences during your enrollment as a part-time student. The interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and location for you and the researcher. I will take notes and if you agree, our discussion will also be recorded by me to help capture your insights accurately and in your own words. If you are uncomfortable with a recording, you may let me know and I will turn off the recording and rely solely on my notes. I ask to record so that I can be sure to get exactly what you say.

Risks

The study poses minimal risks to the participants. You have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provide will

be destroyed and omitted from the final paper. Insights provided by you will be used in writing a dissertation and the associated presentation as well as any publication of the research.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in the locked home of the researcher. I will not cite your actual name within the final documents. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will be kept confidential.

Compensation

For those who agree to and complete an interview, a \$25 gift card will be provided. Depending upon the time of the interview, a meal, snack, or coffee may be provided to the participant during the interview session.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Ginger Burks Draughon at {phone number} or parttimestudents2018@gmail.com.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact NC State IRB Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1.919.515.4514. You can also find out more information about research, why you would or would not want to be in research, questions to ask as a research participant, and more information about your rights by going to this website: <http://go.ncsu.edu/research-participant>

Consent to Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____
Researcher's signature _____ **Date** _____

Appendix D – Student Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Time:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Thank you for your willingness to be an interview participant for this study. As you may recall, I am currently a part-time doctoral student, working to complete my dissertation research in Higher Education. My research interest has emerged from my own experiences, and I am very interested in your experience as a part-time student. I would like to learn more about how you see your experience and particularly your experience at the institution that you attend(ed) on a part-time basis. For this study, undergraduate students' part-time enrollment is defined as being enrolled in fewer than 12 credit hours in any "nonsummer" semester.

Information that I gather and summarize will be available to you by request if you email parttimestudents2018@gmail.com. Information you provide will be made available to the universities only on a summarized basis and never where it could be identified to you personally.

If you would be willing for me to do so, I would like to record our conversation only for the purpose of being sure that I can be true to your words and statements in my documentation. The recordings will not be made available to anyone other than myself and perhaps a transcriber or other individual to check my documentation. No one besides me will be able to connect it to your name, email, or phone number. Would it be okay with you for me to record?

1. For the record, did you consent to be a participant in this research study and for me to record our conversation for the purposes of study documentation?
2. Great, thank you! I'll tell you a little bit about me so that we can get to know each other a little bit. I grew up in [state] and got my undergraduate degree at [institution], left and went to [state] for a few years and came back to work in [city] and then in [city] now back to [city]. Along the way I worked for state budget offices, for the [system], and now on a campus. I am married and we have a son who is [age], and I was working full-time and in this degree program part-time when he came along. It was my professional and my personal experience that really got me interested in talking to students who are enrolled part-time. Is there anything else you would like to know about me?
3. Okay, please tell me a little about yourself and your journey in higher education.
4. Why did you choose to go to school on a part-time basis rather than full-time?

Follow ups as needed to understand the participants' reasonings

5. Why did you choose {institution}? What did you choose as your major and why?
6. How far into your program of study are you or did you get? (Follow up as needed for info such as completed degree or not?)

NOTE: If student did not complete the degree, ask more about that here if appropriate or later in the interview if does not seem comfortable here.

7. Could you think a little about your experience at {campus}, particularly as it relates to the fact that you are or were in school part-time. Would you say it was overall a positive or negative experience? Why would you say that?

Follow ups if needed--- can you think particularly about (institution) and what were positives or and negatives about being a part-time student here?

Was there ever a program, service, or other resource that you were looking for that did not seem to be available to you?

8. What were the best one or two things that [university name] did for you as a part-time student?

Follow up if needed:

Could you tell me about a great experience that you had as a part-time student at [university name]?

Is there anything that the university or anyone in it has done that has been very helpful to you because you attended part-time?

9. What were the worst one or two things about being a part-time student at [university name]?

Follow up if needed:

Could you think of a challenge that was presented about being a part-time student at [university name] and tell me about that experience?

Is there anything that the university or anyone in it has done that has really annoyed you because you attended part-time?

10. Have you ever been enrolled as a full-time or part-time student at another university? If so, please tell me a little about that and how it compared to this experience.
(Follow up as needed to understand.)

11. What did you think that [institution name] really understood about your life as a part-time student?

- a. Why do you think that is the case?

- b. What did they really not understand?

Why do you think that is?

12. Imagine that you are talking to the Chancellor, or a magic genie, and he or she asked you one thing that could be changed at [university name] that would help part-time students to complete their degrees there, what would it be?
13. If you had a good friend who wanted to go to school part-time, would you recommend [university name]? Why or why not?
14. Were there any particular services, offices, or people on campus that made your experience especially positive? Any that were especially negative ones?
15. Were there any particular services, activities, or campus amenities that you used a lot or not at all? Are there things that you wondered about their value to you?

Please tell me a little more about that.

16. In general, when you think about your experiences, did you feel like you “belonged” in the program/on the campus or did you feel more like an outsider? If you would, share a little about that feeling with me, tell me why you felt that way.
 - a. Follow up as needed – did you feel as though you fit in or belonged in the classroom? What about outside of the classroom setting (on campus, at athletic events, etc.)?
17. Did you ever feel pressured to change from being a part-time student to being a full-time student?

If so, please describe that for me. (Follow up as needed: How, when, by who?)
18. Thinking about when you were a part-time student, can you tell me what a “typical” day would look like for you?

Follow up as needed – please take me through a description of your day.

19. In your experience as a part-time student, have you encountered or did you encounter some sort of policy that made it easier to pursue your degree? That could be something on campus, from the state, from the system, or from the federal government. If so, please describe that for me. If not, is there a policy that could have helped you?
20. In your experience as a part-time student, have you encountered or did you encounter some sort of policy that made it more difficult to pursue your degree? That could be something on campus, from the state, from the system, or from the federal government. If so, please describe that for me.
21. I know that it can sometimes be very difficult to be a part-time student. When your days were difficult, who provided you encouragement? Who do you/did you wish was more supportive?

22. Do you know any other part-time undergraduate students at [campus] that you think would be willing to do an interview with me? If so, could you ask him or her to complete the preliminary questionnaire? I can give you this handout with the link or email the link to you.
23. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experiences as a part-time student at [Institution name]?

Thank you so very much for your time. The intent of this study is to help universities and policymakers understand part-time students better and consider the policies that are barriers or supports for part-time students. Please note that the institution will not be able to identify you or your responses.

As promised – here is your gift card. I truly appreciate your willingness to share your experiences. If needed, I hope it will be okay for me to follow up with you to be sure that I understood exactly what you told me. If you ever want to contact me further about this, you can reach me at partimestudents2018@gmail.com.

Appendix E – Administrator Recruitment

Hello [insert name and title],

I hope that this email finds you well. I am currently a doctoral student in the higher education program at NC State. I have also been employed as a campus administrator and system office administrator for more than 15 years. I recently completed interviews with [number] students at [campus]. I interviewed part-time students about their experiences, particularly as it related to policy and institutional structures. I would like to expand my study by including interviews from several administrators at [campus] as well. In the process, I would like to also share with you some of what I learned about your students' experiences. I would truly appreciate it if you would be willing to have an hour to hour and a half interview with me about this.

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in public 4-year universities. Furthermore, I am interested in how policies and institutional structures impact those experiences. Any information you provide will be kept anonymous. Nothing you share will be identifiable to you personally, and nothing will be communicated with the university in a way that you could be identified.

If you are willing to do so, please respond to this email and let me know whether I should work with you directly or with someone else to schedule a time for a discussion with you.

Thank you so very much,

Ginger Burks Draughon

Appendix F– Administrator Consent Form

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study/Repository: Policy Barriers & Supports for Part-Time Students in a Public University: A Case Study eIRB# 14058

Principal Investigator: Ginger Burks Draughon, parttimestudents2018@gmail.com, 919-491-6706

Faculty Point of Contact: Dr. Audrey Jaeger, ajjaeger@ncsu.edu, 919-515-6240

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of part-time students in a public 4-year doctoral level university, as well as how policies and institutional structures impact those experiences. The study is designed to understand the experiences of part-time undergraduate students and what institutional structures or policies are helpful (supportive) or detrimental (barriers) to their degree pursuits. Further, the study will include a literature review that will provide for some analysis of the participants' experiences as compared to the literature. We will do this through one semi-structured interview that should last approximately 30 minutes to 1 1/2 hours.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because the goal of the research is to help policymakers understand the barriers and supports that can help or hinder the degree pursuits of part-time undergraduate students. In addition, during our interview, I will be able to share with you some summary level information about what I learned from part-time students at your institution. You may not want to participate in this research because it will require some of your time and involve asking you about your experiences at your university.

In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office (contact information is noted below).

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of part-time undergraduate students in a public doctoral level 4-year university, as well as how policies and institutional structures impact those experiences. The study is designed to understand the experiences of part-time undergraduate students and what institutional structures or policies are helpful (supportive) or detrimental (barriers) to their degree pursuits. Further, the study will include a literature review that will provide for some analysis of the participants' experiences as compared to the literature.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?

There will be approximately 20-25 student participants and 5-10 administrator participants in this study.

In order to be a participant in this study you must be currently or previously employed as an administrator at the institution where part-time students have also been interviewed.

You cannot participate in this study if you are not currently or were not previously working at the institution.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all of the following: complete one semi-structured interview with the researcher, and if you approve it, allow the interview to be recorded. You would be asked a series of questions about your institution and part-time undergraduate students. The interview would be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and location for you and the researcher. I will take notes and if you agree, our discussion will also be recorded by me to help accurately capture your insights in your own words. The interview recording would only be available to a transcriber and possibly someone else to check my documentation, but they would not be able to connect the data to you individually. If you are uncomfortable with a recording, you may let me know, and I will rely solely on my notes. I ask to record so that I can be sure to get exactly what you say.

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is 30 minutes to an hour and a half.

Photos and video

If you want to participate in this research, I would like to ask for your consent to audio record our discussion.

____ I consent to be audio recorded

____ I do not consent to be audio recorded

Risks and benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. An indirect benefit is an opportunity to contribute to the research available about part-time undergraduate students and the policies that create supports or barriers for their degree pursuits. In addition, I will be able to share with you some summary level feedback from part-time undergraduate students at your institution.

Right to withdraw your participation

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please tell me that you would like to stop. If you choose to withdraw your consent and stop participating you can expect that we will stop our discussion and I will not include any information from you in my research, my dissertation, and any further publications that may come from this research.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Files will be kept by the researcher behind locked doors and related data kept in a computer that is password protected. Electronic data files will be stored as encrypted files or folders to maintain security. Data may be reported in aggregate, with

individual responses, or by using direct quotes but will only be done in ways that do not identify the University or the individual participants' identities. Identities will be masked by use of pseudonyms and by not using the institution's name. Unless you give explicit permission to the contrary, no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Individual data with identifiable details removed may be made available to the public as required by a professional association, journal, publication requirements, or funding agency.

Compensation

Depending upon the time and location of the interview, a meal, snack, or coffee may be provided to the participant during the interview session. Otherwise, there is no compensation for participation in this study.

What if you are a University employee?

Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at the University, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Ginger Burks Draughon at: partimestudents2018@gmail.com or 919-491-6706.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (institutional Review Board) Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1.919.515.8754. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities.

You can also find out more information about research, why you would or would not want to be a research participant, questions to ask as a research participant, and more information about your rights by going to this website: <http://go.ncsu.edu/research-participant>

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Participant's printed name _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Investigator's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix G – Administrator Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Time:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed for this study. As you may recall, I am currently a part-time doctoral student, working to complete my dissertation research in Higher Education. My research interest has emerged from my own experiences, and I am very interested in your campus experiences. I have also been employed as an administrator in the university system for more than fifteen years.

During our discussion, I may share with you some summary-level information that has been relayed to me by part-time students at your institution. Please know that those students' identities will be kept confidential, but I will share summary level information for the purpose of our conversation and to get your thoughts about what they shared with me. For this study, students who are enrolled in fewer than 12 credit hours in any "nonsummer" semester are considered part-time undergraduate students.

Information that I gather and summarize will be available to you by request. Information you provide will be made available to others only on a summarized basis and never where it could be identified to a specific interviewee.

If you are willing, I would like to record our conversation only for the purpose of being sure that I can be true to your words and statements in my documentation. The recordings will not be made available to anyone other than myself and perhaps a transcriber or other individual to check my documentation. No one besides me will be able to connect it to your name, email, or phone number

Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed for this study.

1. For the record, did you consent to be a participant in this research study and for me to record our conversation for the purposes of study documentation?
2. Do you have a pseudonym that you would prefer for me to use for you in the research report? If you have no preference, I will assign one to you.
3. Please tell me a little about yourself and your role here at [institution].
 - a. (If needed) in what ways do you interact with part-time undergraduate students?
4. Thinking very big picture about [institution], its mission statement and strategic plan, do you feel like the part-time undergraduate students are reflected there? And how or how are they not?
5. Could you identify a recent example of a policy or institutional structure that was created, implemented or revised?
 - a. Please describe what it was and how it came to be created, implemented, or revised.
 - b. How did your institution approach the implementation of the policy or structure?
 - c. What did you consider important about the impact to students?
6. Could you describe for me the “average” undergraduate student at your institution, or the type of student that you think about when you think of your undergraduate population?
7. If I asked you the same question about part-time undergraduates at your institution, what type of student comes to mind?
8. Would you say that your institution reaches out to and/or is welcoming to students who want to pursue an undergraduate degree on a part-time basis? In what ways is the institution welcoming or not to that type of student?
9. Do you know how many or what proportion of your undergraduate students are currently enrolled part-time or who attend part-time for at least one semester during their coursework?
10. What are the things about your institution – policies, institutional structures, etc. that you think are positive for part-time undergraduate students? What are the negatives?
11. When your campus is doing enrollment planning and making admissions decisions, do you track or discuss part-time undergraduate students?
12. What about when a new policy or draft policy comes about at your institution, from the state, or from the system? Is the impact on part-time undergraduates a part of your analysis?
13. Is there financial aid available on your campus for part-time undergraduates?

If so, please describe that for me. For example, what is the source of funds?
(Follow up as needed- federal, state, campus-based, donors?)
14. Are there policies from the system office, the state, or the federal government that you think are particularly helpful or detrimental to part-time undergraduate students?
15. Are there any particular services, offices, or people on campus that you believe help part-time undergraduate students? Ones that are known for not being helpful to these students?
16. I prepared this as my preliminary information and things that might be interesting for us to talk about [Shared summary level, preliminary data discussion...]

[Discuss the data as analyzed from students who attend or attended this institution on a part-time basis.] I interviewed [number] students who had previously studied or are currently enrolled at your institution on a part-time basis. Some of the things that they have said helped them are [.....] Some of the things that they said were detrimental were [.....]

- a. Will you tell me what you think about those assessments?
 - b. Are these things that you were already aware of or does this bring up new items consider?
 - c. Could you tell me a little more about the origin of the policy or policies (those the students discussed)? Were they campus-based or implemented by the university system, the state, or the federal government?
17. Are you aware of any materials recruitment strategies that your campus has that are geared to students who enroll part-time? If so, could you share a copy of any materials with me or tell me how you go about that recruitment process?
 18. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me related to this topic?
 19. Are there other of your colleagues on campus who would be good for me to interview?
 20. If you are willing for me to attend and observe any meetings of your staff, campus enrollment planning process, or other relevant discussions I would be appreciative.

Thank you so very much for your time. The intent of this study is to provide more information about part-time students for universities and policymakers. Please note that your individual responses will not be associated with you personally in the way the data will be reported.