Differences in Complete 2 Compete Participant Characteristics: What Can They Tell Us?

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DIFFERENCES IN COMPLETE 2 COMPETE PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS: WHAT CAN THEY TELL US?

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Higher Education in the Department of Higher Education The University of Mississippi

by

AUDRA J TRNOVEC

May 2019
ABSTRACT

In 2017, the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) and the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) adopted a program developed in 2010 by the National Governors Association titled Complete 2 Compete (C2C). The C2C program was created to combat the disparities in educational attainment and to meet the demand for a more educated workforce. In addition to fulfilling these social and economic needs, the engagement of C2C students also address the problem of declining numbers in traditional students.

The majority of C2C students participating at the University of Mississippi (UM) are adult students who face different barriers in their return to higher education than traditional students. These barriers necessitate the review of and changes in student services. To better understand this population, an analysis was conducted of 582 C2C participants who had already acquired some college credit at UM. The purpose of this study is to develop a sustainable program that assists more students to successfully return and complete a degree. The study looked at students’ ages, overall earned credits, gender, overall grade point average, ethnicity, number of credits to completion, and existence of a bursar bill prior to enrollment and compared the characteristics of C2C participants who had engaged in the process of completing their degree as compared to those who did not.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the family I was born into who taught me the value of education and hard work and to the family I was gifted to discover who taught me about strength, courage, and the power of kindness.

I would also like to thank my beloved husband. Without your love, support, and infinite patience, my aspiration of completing my doctorate could never have happened.
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To the entire faculty in the Department of Higher Education, who shared your knowledge and passion with me and taught me a great deal about higher education and the kind of professional I want to be, thank you for your time and commitment.

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I am truly blessed to work with an amazing and compassionate team in the Office of General Studies. The Complete 2 Compete program could not have succeeded without your hard work, willingness to take on more, and genuine passion for helping others. I particularly want to thank my supervisor, Terry Blackmarr, for her words of encouragement and understanding.
To the staff in the Office of the Registrar, Admissions, the Provost’s Office, Financial Aid, Office of the Bursar, and each academic college and school staff who help serve the Complete 2 Compete students every day, you may not get to see their proud faces or hear the excitement in their voice, but you have made a huge difference in each of their lives.
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MANUSCRIPT ONE:

DEGREE COMPLETION AND ADULT LEARNERS
IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

It is clear that our nation needs a workforce with higher levels of education to fill existing and future positions if the country expects to continue the positive economic trends and stay globally competitive (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2010). Projections show that current education models will not meet the anticipated demands of the workforce, global competition, or economic gains for the individual (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Sources agree that continuing to focus on more traditional student populations cannot fill this employment gap (Blumenstyk, 2018; Copper, 2008; Delioe Manufacturing Institute; 2016, Ryan & Bauman, 2016). As acknowledged by Lane through the Adult College Completion Network, “one thing is clear: the “traditional” education pipeline that flows from high school directly to postsecondary education cannot, by itself, meet these ambitious objectives” (2012, p. 1). The solution for many organizations has been hiring a global workforce through the H-1B visa program, but the policies of the new presidential administration could potentially limit companies from hiring talent they cannot find in the US through restrictions on H-1B visas. In a January 30th, 2017 article published on USA Today’s website, authors state “H-1B visa are used by tech companies, by hospitals looking to hire doctors, especially in medically underserved areas, and by school districts looking to hire language teachers when U.S. teachers are not available” (Cava, Weise & Swartz, 2017, n.p.).

One efficient solution to meet the current and future needs of the United States workforce is to focus on enrolling adults in degree programs; particularly adults with partial credits towards a degree. Kohl (2010) identifies a number of factors encouraging adults to return and complete.
Among these are the need for advanced skills in an education built economy, shifts in retirement age, the hiring of international talent, the increase in online and flexible degree programs, and greater access to education and information. Unlike their inexperienced counterparts, adult student learners have already demonstrated they can succeed at college-level coursework and may be able to complete degrees and certificates in a shorter period of time than those entering from high school with little or no college experience or credits (Lane, 2012).

In 2010, the National Governors Association developed the Complete to Compete (C2C) initiative to “increase the number of highly-quality college graduates within the available funding to meet workforce needs and compete globally” (Reyna, 2010, p. 7). In 2017, the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) and the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) adopted this initiative. The Mississippi Complete 2 Compete program will focus on:

- Identifying students who may be eligible to return, addressing barriers that might prevent individuals from returning and completing, identifying incentives that community colleges and universities offer to assist adult learners, and creating a website to help match adult students with the appropriate community college or university that can assist them on the path to college completion. (Mississippi Public Universities [MPU], 2016a, p. 1)

Examining students who already have some credits towards a degree with the life experience necessary for successful completion of their degrees, compared to their past enrollment, could have positive impacts on graduation rates and education rates. The Mississippi Complete 2 Compete program was designed with this purpose in mind. An IHL press release from November of 2016 identified that there are over 10,000 Mississippians who could earn a bachelor’s degree with no additional work and over 20,000 that only need some additional
coursework (Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, 2016). It is difficult to pinpoint percentages of completion or those who have gone on to secure a high value training certificate or licensure because little data is maintained on students who do not complete a college degree (Lane, 2012). What is clear is the need for high rates of completion for postsecondary degrees. An article published in November of 2015 in the NACE Journal stating that “the demand for college graduates is not up” (Cappelli, 2015, n.p.) was accurate but did not display the whole picture. The Cappelli article compared employment demand for two specific groups: high school degree or less and bachelor’s degrees. When the picture is expanded however, the anticipated changes in the workforce from 2012-2022 indicates that over 64% of job growth will require workers with an associate’s degree or higher (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). In the manufacturing industry alone, a 2015 report from the Deloitte Manufacturing Institute states that “nearly three and a half million manufacturing jobs [will] likely need to be filled and the skills gap is expected to result in 2 million of those jobs going unfilled” (Deloitte Manufacturing Institute, 2015, p. 2) over the next decade. In 2015, the United States tied with Korea at fourth with 45% of all 25-64 year-olds with some higher education attainment behind Canada, Israel, and Japan but ranks much lower at 10th when younger adults ages 25-34 are considered (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016). The increasing demand for higher education is clear and tapping an existing resource such as adult learners with completed college credits will be necessary to compete globally and flourish economically.

The population of non-traditional, adult students enrolled in degree-granting institutions of higher education is once again growing and can no longer be ignored (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). With enrollment of traditional students in decline at the
University of Mississippi (UM), it makes sense to take a closer look at what other opportunities exist to enroll more students (Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning [IREP], 2018).

In 2015, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) requested information on students who had not completed a degree from all 2-year and 4-year public institutions in the State of Mississippi. This information was refined through the help of a marketing company and eligible students were contacted in August of 2017 to participate in the Complete 2 Compete program. Students are directed to a website where, if interested, they can complete an online participation form and select an institution at which to complete their degree from a recommended list. The student’s information is then sent to the institution where a C2C coach downloads it and contacts the student to develop a completion plan. If the student chooses to return and complete their degree, the coach will also help them apply and enroll in the institution.

From August of 2017 to November of 2018, over 1300 students chose to participate in the statewide Mississippi Complete 2 Compete (C2C) program through the University of Mississippi. However, not all students who joined the State of Mississippi Complete 2 Compete program through the University of Mississippi chose to engage in the process of readmission, enrollment, and completion of their degree. The purpose of this dissertation in practice is to identify possible differences between University of Mississippi Complete 2 Compete participants who have chosen to engage in the process of completing their degree by re-applying to the University of Mississippi and those who have chosen not to engage by re-applying to the university.

Analyzing the data for Complete 2 Compete students who are interested in returning to the University of Mississippi to complete their degree and making comparisons between those who chose to engage in the re-enrollment process and the non-engagers could shed light on
characteristics that may influence student actions and inform university policy and practice. Understanding these demographics can help us, as an institution and as part of a statewide program, to focus our efforts, fine-tune our procedures, provide information, and more effectively serve students in Mississippi who want to complete their bachelor’s degree through the Complete 2 Compete program. For graduation rates to improve, adult learners need to be served in ways that many of the traditional undergraduates are not. This in turn would increase degree completion and help alleviate the education and skilled labor concerns of the state and nation.

After exploring the possible biases that exist in the researcher’s experience, this chapter will review the connections existing in the problem of practice to ensure it aligns with the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (C.P.E.D.) principles. Next is the review of literature followed by a summary of the conceptual framework including Council on Adult and Experiential Learning’s 10 Principles for Serving Adult Learners, Schlossberg’s Transition Model, and social rational choice theory will be used to inform the study (CAEL, 2019; Knowles, 1990; Schlossberg, 1984; Goldthorpe, 1998). The research questions and methodology will round out this chapter.

POSITIONALITY AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

I discovered the power of education early in my life. Both of my parents attended college but neither finished. My dad joined the military and eventually became a commercial pilot. My mom, an immigrant from Germany, left college to marry my father and returned to school to complete her education after my sisters and I were in high school. My parents sent me to a
private, Catholic, college-prep school with the expectation that I would get a degree in higher education.

Although I was raised in a conservative Catholic household, my views were influenced by the experiences of my paternal grandparents during the depression and those of maternal grandparents during WWII with their postwar flight from Germany. I visited my German family and became familiar with the education system by attending school with my cousins. Theirs was a very strict education system where an individual’s career was guided by early aptitudes and efforts.

As mentioned, both of my parents attended college. My father never finished and joined the Air Force. My mother attended college while I went to school and completed her bachelor’s degree the same year I completed my Master’s degree. My father was a successful pilot for a major commercial airline where education was not key in his success. However, I grew up with the expectation that I would attend college following secondary education at a college preparatory high school and knew that I did not have to consider the cost of tuition primarily when selecting a school and degree program. Neither of my parents’ experience in college was very helpful as both of their experiences were very different. I had a vague idea of what level of work and commitment to expect from the hours my mother devoted to her studies.

My mother finishing her education has likely influenced my passion for the Complete 2 Compete program. Prior to that, she was a homemaker and mother. It was not until she started back to complete her degree that I heard her talk about working outside the home and the possibilities her degree would provide. Under the influence of my mother, my sisters and I were not encouraged to follow traditional female roles. This experience led me to believe that
education is the great equalizer, that not all people have equal access to education, and that the greatest barriers are not just financial but influenced by expectations.

I attended a mid-western, mid-sized, public, land-grant institution and learned early on that working in student services was a real and respectable career. I was nurtured during my master’s program through a graduate assistantship in Recreation Services, professional organizations in both recreation and student affairs fields, and esteemed faculty such as John Schuh and Elizabeth Whitt and their colleagues, Earnest Pascarella, Patrick Terenzini, and George Kuh. My higher education master’s program focused on student development theory, the positive influences of non-academic extracurricular activities on retention and performance, and student services.

As a woman working in the field of outdoor recreation in the late 1980s through the early 2000s, I perceived what it meant to be a minority in the field and adapted numerous strategies to navigate the predominantly patriarchal world in which I functioned. I moved into fields more dominated by women including career counseling and academic counseling. Both careers involved the interpretation of personality, skills and interests and their impact on career goals. Because of these shifts in my career, I understand first-hand that life experience and education together influence the career opportunities each person has and that a career is not necessarily a linear element in one’s life.

Assumptions

C2C provides opportunities for a variety of studies, but what I am interested in starting with and using as my problem of practice for my dissertation in practice is an examination of the barriers that prevent students who have enrolled in the program to reenter an institution and
complete their degree. There are several assumptions I know I hold with regard to the C2C program. First, with regard to the C2C participants, I tend to assume that students left school because they had to and not because they chose to. I also assume that they chose to participate in C2C because they want to complete their degree and are invested and self-motivated. I also know that a defining factor of an adult student is not a school-focused life, but that student is one of many roles an adult student plays. My approach therefore is not the same one I use with traditional undergrads.

My approach toward my problem of practice leans more towards positivism than interpretivism or critical theory. I believe that each person’s viewpoint is unique; it is for this reason that interpretivism is slightly flawed. It is impossible to understand how our experiences and interactions will influence our interpretation. For many of the same reasons, I both accept and reject critical theory as my dominant philosophy. The distortion of standpoint can only be seen through one viewpoint and cannot be fully interpreted by another. I know that this initial study of the C2C population may very well reveal opportunities to utilize other approaches to examine more detailed interconnection.

To enhance my credibility in this study, I plan to complete an extensive examination of previous research findings on adult learners, invite peer scrutiny through my dissertation committee, and continue to reflect on my own assumptions and how they influence the interpretation of data.

To enhance transferability, I will strive for a significant sample size who share similar characteristics. The characteristics will be objectively defined as the number of earned credits, age, gender, grade point average, race, credits to completion, and the presence of a pre-enrollment bursar bill.
To enhance dependability and confirmability, I will carefully document my research design and implementation so that other public colleges or universities in the C2C program could utilize it with their groups of C2C participants. I also understand the importance of documenting how the data is analyzed and reanalyzed to make sure that the results are consistent and repeatable. I believe that the careful reflection on this project through every step, justifying and explaining in detail to my committee, and contemplating feedback will provide a great opportunity to establish purposeful and reflective research techniques for future research.

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Defining Adult Learners

It is first important to understand what adult learner, non-traditional student, or independent student mean. Concise definitions are difficult to articulate for this population, but listing characteristics can be endless and obscure.

Independent college students, once considered “nontraditional,” now constitute the majority of students in the United States. As of 2012, just over half of all U.S. college students were independent (51 percent)—meaning they had at least one defining characteristic outlined in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), including being at least 24 years old; married; a graduate or professional student; a veteran; an orphan, in foster care, or ward of the court; a member of the armed forces; an emancipated minor; someone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; or having legal dependents other than a spouse. (Cruse, Eckerson, & Gault, 2018)
Compared with traditional dependent students, these independent or adult students are more likely to be a woman, a person of color, parents, low-income, and employed. They are more than twice as likely to have high financial aid needs and are less likely to graduate in a six-year period (Cruse et al., 2018). Adult students differ from their traditional counterparts because of the role education plays in their life. For traditional students, their primary role is as a student. For adult learners, they serve in many roles such as parent, caretaker, worker, and citizen along with that of a student (Super, 1957; Tinto, 1993). Adult students also have learning styles that differ from their traditional classmates. Malcolm Knowles’ (1990) concept of andragogy outlined a set of assumptions about adult learners including self-direction, drawing on experience, readiness to learn, problem-centered, and internal motivation.

Barriers

There are varieties of reasons that many of these students do not return to complete a college degree, the most obvious of which are time and financial resources, but there are a great many more perceived and actual barriers that have been identified (Lane, Michelau, & Palmer, 2012). State programs like Complete 2 Compete (Mississippi), You Can! Come Back! (Indiana), and Tennessee Reconnect (Tennessee) were initiated to combat three major hurdles.

First, students may not have considered returning or lack knowledge of how close they may be to completing a degree program. Because the focus is on completion and graduation rates to determine an institution’s success, universities have not been encouraged to track students who depart. Tracking departing students would also require devoting precious and limited resources to discover what path students take after they leave. Some may continue in a consecutive semester at another university or college while others may stop-out until they are
ready to return, determine what path they want their education and career to take, or more fully understand the benefits of a degree (Tinto, 2012). Records would need to be maintained at a state and federal level that track all enrollments, transfers, and completions. Because accurate and accessible records on these students do not exist, it is difficult for institutions to develop marketing campaigns to reach out and encourage students to return. This is where state programs have been more successful. Creating a central hub for data collection, distilment, and outreach supported by state funding, can alleviate come of the burden on institutions constantly required to do more with less.

Second, students who do consider returning are often met by systems that are designed for more traditional students and do not know what questions to ask and what resources are available to them. If a student chooses to return on their own, they are often returning to institutions that are drastically different from when they left or starting at institutions they have not yet attended. Systems designed for first-time, traditional students continuing from high school may be unfamiliar and difficult to navigate. Digital application systems, residency documents, past debts, transfer transcripts, immunization records, placement tests, and entrance exams can each present new challenges. Many institutions devote and provide substantial resources to enrolling and retaining traditional freshman students than to transfer students of any age (Blumenstyk, 2018).

Third, universities often lack the resources to support the unique needs of restarting adult students with finances and scholarships. Financial aid is often restricted to students entering college for the first time and continuing to completion. Many scholarships and grants are merit-based and provide no opportunity for students who left under academic suspension or dismissal. Some institutions do not provide tuition payment plans for working adults to pay on a monthly or
bi-monthly basis and many students already carry the burden of financial holds that prevent them from reenrolling or obtaining transcripts (Pingel & Holly, 2017).

Fourth, adult students are often attending part-time while working full-time jobs and cannot attend classes offered during the traditional school day. Although many institutions are working to develop online programs, students may not be able to afford the computers and broadband services needed for web-based courses. In some rural areas, broadband services are not even available. While they may have the hardware and Wi-Fi available, many adult students do not have the opportunity to develop the necessary technical skills needed to navigate online delivery software and modes of communication (National Adult Learner Coalition, 2017). Until traditional universities are willing to address these barriers, students seeking to complete degrees may once again become an attrition statistic.

Some institutions have developed to provide services for this unique and underserved population. Completion colleges originated in the early 1970s as a response to the rapid expansion of universities in the wake of the GI Bill; their sustained success is due to their acceptance of prior learning and transfer credits, a nontraditional student focused environment, and emphasis on online courses (Johnson & Bell, 2014). These colleges, including institutions like Excelsior College, Governors State University, University of Phoenix, and Colorado State University have capitalized on serving adults who want to complete their degrees. Over time, through experimentation with delivery methods, these colleges developed “a number of specialized core capabilities and competencies that create competitive advantages and offer real value for students” (Johnson & Bell, 2014, p. 2). What has made these colleges successful and unique is their ability to integrate prior learning, focus on nontraditional students, a willingness
to accept credits earned at other institutions, services that are statewide and offered interstate, and an emphasis on online courses.

Even though students over the age of 25 make up the largest percentage of students enrolled part-time and full-time in higher education (Kena, et al., 2016), until more institutions of higher learning are willing to make adult education a priority, adult students will remain on the fringes of a college’s or university’s mission. Institutions identify many obstacles to initiating programs for ready adults or near completers. Nationally collected and reposted statistics do not account for transfer students and adults returning to higher education (Lane, 2012). Accountability metrics that measure the completion rates of institutions for the purposes of funding, institutional evaluation, and prestige also do not count students who transfer to an institution and complete a degree or those students who stop-out and complete a degree upon their return. Without a clear advantage to the university, it is difficult to justify the necessary funding for assessment, staffing, quality control, and acceptance of large amounts of transfer credits.

Student Perspective

In a survey conducted by the Kresge Foundation, Sillman and Schleifer (2018) identified the top worries for prospective adult students considering getting a degree. The top six included: taking on debt; balancing work and family; affording textbooks and supplies; understanding financial aid; being academically ready; and graduating on time. Additionally, the survey found that “most adult prospective students plan to attend college in ways that can make completion more difficult including transferring between institutions and going to school part-time” (Silliman & Schleifer, 2018, p. 9). A third do not know what they want to study.
The Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) provides a variety of resources to help define trends in adult learning and provide campuses with tools necessary to serve this population (Council on Adult and Experiential Education, 2017). Recently, CAEL conducted a survey to determine which institutions in the State of Mississippi are Adult Learning Focused Institutions (ALFI). To do this, CAEL surveyed adult students and asked them to rate the importance of a range of adult student services on the importance of each and their satisfaction with the services provided. The results were reported to each institution with national comparison data in a statewide summary in July of 2017. The University of Mississippi results showed that the largest differences between importance and satisfaction among currently enrolled adult learners are the availability of course offerings, institutional communication regarding missed requirements, and assistance with developing strategies to manage academic and personal responsibilities (CAEL, 2017).

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and Competency-Based Exams (CBE)

There is a significant time investment for faculty members and money for specialized contractors to evaluate academic or training programs especially when offered on a small scale (Johnson & Bell, 2014). In addition to traditional transfer credits from 4-year and 2-year institutions, credits can also be earned in the form of certifications, continuing education programs, military training, academic testing such as College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests, and prior learning assessment (PLA). CLEP test scores are already well established on university and college campuses with databases developed to ease the burden of transferring credits. The American Council on Education (ACE) has developed a Military Guide to formalize and recommend credits for college courses and in 1974, the Council for Adult and
Experiential Learning (CAEL) began assisting colleges and universities with the development and expansion of PLA (American Council on Education [ACE], 2019).

Prior learning assessment is the process of evaluating a student’s learning for the purpose of providing academic credit. The learning may occur through employment, certifications, military training, self-guided study, or even life experiences (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). To CAEL, “what matters most is what someone has learned, not how or where they learned it” (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013, p. 2). To be evaluated for PLA credits, students must submit substantial portfolios that can be hundreds of pages long documenting their learning and demonstrating their knowledge. These are then carefully evaluated by faculty teaching in a specific discipline that evaluate the quantity and quality of the knowledge base and decide whether it aligns with course offerings or if general credits can be awarded. “While championing the growth of the adult education movement, program advocates simultaneously express concern about achieving and maintaining a high level of quality in these programs” (Taylor, 2000, p. 1). It is often difficult for faculty to justify awarding credit to learning that takes place without academic supervision and outside of their supervision in a traditional classroom.

Critics of this process are often focusing on two key points. First, credit should not be awarded by those who are not responsible for the learning and, second, that the interplay between professors and students in an academic setting cannot be replaced (Wilson, 1990). Evaluating portfolios can be time consuming and difficult. Many universities are reluctant to grant credit for the skills that traditionally employed or military personnel have acquired through their experiences even though studies demonstrate that there is a correlation between credits for prior learning and successful degree completion (Lane, 2012). Students who earn credit through
PLA are two-and-a half times more likely to complete a degree than their counterparts who do not earn PLA credits (Klein-Collins, 2010).

Services

Accepting a wide range and number of credits is not the only thing necessary for the success of adult college completion programs. Adult student support services must be provided to assist returning students successfully navigate a completion program. Recruitment, admissions, enrollment, financial aid, career planning, campus connection, academic and computer skills, education methods and transfer credits are all of critical importance to returning nontraditional students (Taylor, 2000). “In many states, institutions have implemented a single point of contact for adults to help guide them through the application and readmission project” (Lane, Michelau, & Palmer, 2012, p. 44). It is critical that these admissions coaches have been trained to interact with adult learners in a way that their life experience and unique situation merits, understand university services from the perspective of a nontraditional student, and have a network of resources to ease the transition for these students. Through their connection and interactions with returning students, these individuals can also further advise administration on policies and procedures, student orientation, and recruitment methods.

Helping a student to connect with the campus and other students is also important, and although adult students are less likely to participate in traditional collegiate extracurricular activities, studies show that they are more likely to participate in student organizations and peer groups dedicated to adult students (Wyatt, 2011). Additionally, because adult students do not value extracurricular engagement in the way that traditional students do, a connection to an
institution, which is critical to the students’ success, may only be developed through the relationships and interactions they have with the staff and faculty (Tinto, 1993).

Quality advising is likewise critical to the success of any college student, but particularly to returning students. Advisors must develop a regular advising schedule with returning students and be prepared to develop individual learning plans that incorporate the student’s unique skills and needs, prior leaning, and unique personal commitments outside of the institution (Ebersole, 2010). Time must be allowed in appointments to debrief life events, provide support and referrals for additional services, and build a strong and trusted relationship.

Faculty must similarly be committed to nontraditional learners. Academic programs that provide education methods with online or hybrid class models, night and weekend courses, practical application options for course assignments and projects, an understanding of adult learning theories, and enrollment flexibility are more likely to see returning students persist until completion (Copper, 2008). They must allow time to cultivate a connection because faculty have the greatest number of contact hours with students. For classes that meet in the classroom, the best and sometimes only opportunity to connect with students outside of class time is immediately before and after classes as faculty office hours are often insufficient for students with substantial commitments outside of their education. Faculty also need to understand the unique methods by which adult students assimilate information. Malcolm Knowles’ (1990) widely-used andragogic theory of adult learning focuses on “the need and capacity [of adult students] to be self-directing, to utilize his experience in learning, to identify his own readiness to learn, and to organize his learning around life problems” (p. 43). For faculty to effectively engage adult students in learning, they need to understand that traditional pedagogy will not be as effective as andragogy.
Returning students are also more likely to need refresher courses on math and writing skills and will likely need assistance and or tutoring on academic technology (Ebersole, 2010). Tutoring programs or online tutorials that students can utilize at any time are particularly beneficial along with learning centers that have night and weekend hours.

In addition to children, aging parents, full-time employment, financial obligations, and other commitments can be a prohibiting factor for C2C students wishing to return. Prior to enrollment, their admissions counselor should brief students on tuition and fee assessments, billing cycles, and payment options (Gast, 2013).

Economics and Society

As the proportion of traditional aged college students declines, traditional four-year institutions will be particularly pressed to make necessary adjustments to existing services or run the risk of these students completing their education elsewhere. In a 2012 Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) report, Lane explains that “institutions of higher education, state agencies, and education-focused nonprofit organizations can become key partners with the private sector” (Lane, Michelau, & Palmer, 2012, p. 3). Kentucky, Georgia, Iowa, and Indiana schools have been developing critical partnerships to assist non-completion students with obtaining a degree.

In Louisville, KY, Greater Louisville, Inc. has collaborated with the chamber of commerce through a Lumina-funded project to identify employees with college credit and provide avenues for them to complete credentials. In Georgia, the state higher education system hired a consulting firm to reach out to 171 former students to research perceptions that it would later use in a statewide marketing campaign (Lane, 2012). The Manufacturing Institute
developed a Skills Certification System that utilizes strong partnerships between employers and higher education to allow students to earn stackable credentials endorsed by the industry (Lane, 2012). In Iowa, the Iowa Admissions Partnership Program allows students attending a community college to receive specialized services by Iowa State University “including transfer advising, on-campus housing, and guaranteed admission” (Gast, 2013, p. 21). Indiana developed an online, competency-based university through collaboration with Western Governor’s University and funding from the Lumina Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Lily Foundation (Kohl, 2010).

For many of these states, it is not just about helping students to reach their dream of completing a degree. Increasingly, states need an educated workforce to entice industries to establish business interests and localities. The economic stakes are high. “Now more than ever, attaining a life of self-fulfillment, civic engagement, and economic productivity requires a college education” (Wegner, 2008, p. 2). Increasing degree completion would have significant impacts on democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility (Labaree, 1997).

In 2010, the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce published a report that outlined the education challenges the country faces in the future. “The shortfall—which amounts to a deficit of 300,000 college graduates every year between 2008 and 2018—results from burgeoning demand by employers for workers with high levels of education and training” (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Using the social efficiency framework to examine the influences of improved career preparation, we can find substantial and far-reaching impacts. These impacts should be broken down into family, community, state, national, and international influences. At the home level, students accessing and succeeding in higher education increase incomes to support families, have better health and health insurance benefits, and better finances
in their retirement. Improved income, health and retirement would reduce the dependency and need for many thin-stretched state and federal social assistance programs.

The impetus behind the degree completion movement is that “a more highly educated society will lead to greater economic impacts for both the individual and society” (Gast, 2013, p. 17). Assisting students with their return to college and degree completion would produce additional qualified candidates for an increasing number of high demand jobs at the local, state and national level that require post-secondary education. More candidates trained for positions requiring a degree would reduce the unemployment rate and improve the national and state economies by attracting business to locations where qualified pools of candidates do not exist or where jobs have been outsourced to other countries with more substantial human resources to fill those positions. Communities could also be impacted if graduates provided a better selection of candidates for needed positions in education, to open businesses that provide healthcare to underserved areas, and to open profit or non-profit businesses that can benefit the communities.

Students who are first generation, minority, or from a lower socioeconomic status are not retained by colleges for degree completion at the same rate as other students (Morgan, 2005; Ryan & Bauman, 2016; Tinto, 1993). Similarly, because there is a significant lack of data on demographics for adult students who have completed some college credit, it is difficult to pinpoint the characteristics of this diverse and complex population (Steele & Erisman, 2016). In the critical framework of higher education values that focuses on democratic equality, improving enrollment and graduation rates for nontraditional, returning students would increase the diversity and participation of underrepresented groups. Retaining diversity in the cohort improves learning and critical thinking skills by creating disequilibrium and greater intercultural sensitivity (Vavrus, 2015). In a diverse environment, students learn to better understand and
appreciate differences. A significant impact would therefore be on the learning environment. Into adulthood, these individuals will be able to better collaborate with a diverse population of people. It is also reasonable to assume that these same students may better understand the needs and inequities of minority and/or low socioeconomic communities and would be in a better position to run for a public office with a college degree. A more engaged constituency means more collaborative solutions and better utilization of existing government resources. Horace Mann (1848) observed that “however elevated the moral character of a constituency may be; however well informed in matters of general science or history, yet they must, if citizens of a Republic, understand something of the true nature and functions of the government under which they live” (n.p.). If they do not run for a public office, they may choose instead to volunteer time in their communities or increase social activism. Higher education also better prepares students to understand a variety of perspectives and be better prepared to participate in national and international events and issues. Again, Horace Mann had a vision that is consistent with the premise of democratic equality and is often quoted as saying, “it may be an easy thing to make a Republic; but it is a very laborious thing to make Republicans” (1848, n.p.).

With increased diversity in the classrooms, society might see unique and varied approaches to research or research in areas never considered before. It would create a larger diverse candidate pool for colleges and universities, which would in turn improve the support through mentorship of students from a diverse background to improve their success and once again have an impact on the democratic equity approach to higher education. Finally, increasing the number of people in the country with higher education degrees would increase the global competitiveness of the United States allowing for better product development, higher quality
products, and human resources that are highly recruited and sought after for their ideas and abilities.

“The tendency is to conceive of higher education as simply an engine of economic development in itself, rather than as an instrument for increasing economic and social wellbeing through the educational results it produces” (Wegner 2008, p. 5). In addition to creating better citizens and improving the economy, providing opportunities for students to enter and complete college would affect social mobility. Because our society does not provide equal opportunity and access for all, the value of a post-secondary education is indispensable to the amendment of privilege. “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men – the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (Mann, 1848, n.p.). Students with a degree earn significantly more during their lifetime than that their peers who have only a high school education. In addition to earnings, these students would have greater means to obtain greater social capital.

To meet the future needs and to sustain their economic advantage, universities will need to seriously consider the ways they are willing to accommodate this critical mass of potential graduates. Efforts that only partially meet the needs of nontraditional learners will result in failure. “Optimized learning requires that institutions proceed beyond widely accepted proxies for educational excellence—which focus heavily on selectivity and resources—and set standards that assess how well institutions meet the needs of communities and the people who live in them” (Wegner, 2008, p. 3-4).
Best Practices

The University of Memphis made three attempts starting in 2011 to recruit students with some credit to return and complete their degree. Each time they learned and incorporated new incentives and practices until finally, in 2014, Finish Line was successful. It incorporated four critical changes: financial aid for adults, dedicated advisors, academic fresh start, and low-cost options for earning credits (Blumenstyk, 2018). These are part of the success formula, but do not cover all of the best practices at adult-focused institutions.

Shasta College’s ACE program, originally Associate Completion in the Evenings and now Accelerated College Education, offers 8-week evening courses that accommodate the schedules of working adults and provide a regular sense of accomplishment that encourages continuation. The program is also set for a structured schedule and limited course options that simplify enrollment and allow students to anticipate future commitments. Finally, built in coaching encourages students and gives them a single point to find answers and get guidance (Blumenstyk, 2018).

Financial aid continues to be the greatest barrier to enrollment of adult learners (Walizer, 2018). Many have to choose between hours at work and time to do required coursework. Time spent in class also requires childcare for many adult students that can be a further drain on financial resources. Both the Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success and the Education Commission of the States published reports in 2016 that expressed the clear need for changes in the state and federal financial aid to provide adult students with equal access to educational funding (Pingel, 2016; Pingel & Holly, 2017). Many financial aid programs limit the number of years after completing high school that students are eligible for aid, have inflexible deadlines for applications and disbursement of funds, require students to attend full-time, have strict merit-
based restrictions, and provide inequitable funding depending on the type of institution a student attends (Taliaferro & Duke-Benfield, 2016). The Education Commission of the States reviewed policies for the two largest financial aid programs in each state and found that of the 100 programs 48 are merit-based, 26 link eligibility to high school graduation date, 30 required full-time enrollment, and 19 exclude two-year institutions (Pingel & Holly, 2017). “Across these four dimensions of state aid policy, significant overlap exists” (p. 4). These overlaps make it nearly impossible for adult students to compete for financial aid funding. The report found that only one state addressed all of the barriers: Minnesota’s Postsecondary Child Care Grant Program. Four additional states (Arizona, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington) mentioned by the report as having financial aid programs that come closer to providing policies inclusive of adult students. Considering “more than half of the states have goals to increase college degree attainment within the next decade…” (Pingel & Holly, 2017, p. 1), states will need to make policy reforms if their goals are to be attained.

CARNEGIE PROJECT ON THE EDUCATION DOCTORATE (C.P.E.D.) PRINCIPLES

Although the Complete 2 Compete program has, at its foundation, the economic development and success of the State of Mississippi, it is also closely linked to the C.P.E.D. principles of equity, ethics, and social justice that are an integral part of the University of Mississippi Doctorate of Education.

National data and research show that attrition rates are higher among students of color, first-generation, low-income, and adult students (Radford, Berner, Wheeless, & Shepard, 2010; Ryan & Bauman, 2016; Tinto, 2012). Many of the students who are participating in the C2C program are part of these marginalized populations. Increasing the completion rates for students
who have stopped-out decreases past disparities in educational opportunity. It is the ethical obligation of every education institution to provide for the “fair and proper administration of higher education systems, processes, and policies that recognize and value all persons as equals” (George, 2017, p. 43). Addressing past inequities does not improve a broken system; it only provides a window that allows us to inspect policies, procedures, attitudes and neglect that have permitted such injustices to occur. As leaders and administrators in the field of higher education it is our obligation to fully understand the systems within which we function and the students who we serve. Not utilizing the opportunity for inquiry into past and current failures is to not fulfil our ethical responsibility as stewards of public resources. This program provides a unique chance to look at a spectrum of people who share a common goal: education; and identify the places in which we have failed them as a system and a community in both the past and the present. The C2C program has also provided government support, institutional motivation, and limited resources to more carefully understand the problems in the vacuum of our institutional practices and in a positive context of current successes. The program provides an opening to establish new partnerships, examine existing policies, and improve existing services that will have lasting impacts. By finding ways to graduate our past students, we can look at what we need to do to help our future students succeed and better provide for the equitable distribution of privilege, opportunity, and wealth.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual frameworks for adult learners will utilize four forms: best practices, transition theory, rational choice theory, and career theory. Each is carefully integrated and
dependent on multiple factors. These will be helpful in a multi-dimensional analysis of the C2C participant data.

Best practices for adult education are abundant. In 2018, the Chronicle of Higher Education published a guide recognizing the importance for institutions to consider adult learners. A compilation of information on who the adult learner is, strategies for serving the adult population, and resources for networking, the guide makes significant case for institutions to shift their focus from traditional learners to serving the millions of potential adult learners (Blumenstyk, 2018). The Ten Principles for Effectively Serving Adult Learners developed by the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL, 2019) include outreach, life and career planning, financing, assessment of learning outcomes, teaching-learning process, student support systems, technology, transitions, strategic partners, and adaptivity. They each have clear examples regarding institutional preparation and performance and serve students well once they make the decision to return. As thorough as they are, they cannot completely inform an analysis of potential returning students, although they do help outline priorities for adult learners.

Nancy Schlossberg (1984) over the period of 35 years developed and redeveloped the Transition Model. This model includes two components that will provide a conceptual framework for the data analysis on the C2C UM participants. First, it identifies three types of transitions (anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent) that can be applied to the reasons students may choose to return and complete their degrees by choice, change in life circumstance, or in their choice not to return. The remainder of the theory deals with the use of an individual’s use of situation, self, support and strategies to successfully transition. These will be beneficial in evaluating best practices for the C2C students at UM.
In 2017, Irvins, Copenhaver, and Koclanes integrated Schlossberg’s transitional theory and transfer shock to identify key factors of adult transfer success and failure. These include gender, race, time of transfer, GPA, and prior academic success. There are additional factors included that affect the students transition after they enroll including involvement, faculty, and degree program. Their research can be complimented with emerging theories on rational choice theory (SRC) that integrate social and economic theory that examine how choices are made through assumptions of forward-thinking rationality, expected utility, and social and economic returns (Gambetta 1987; Goldthorpe, 1998; Breen & Goldthorpe 1997; Morgan, 2005).

Educational rational choice weighs the benefits and risks of obtaining higher education credentials. Since career is a large part of the benefits of obtaining a degree, it must be considered in the theoretical framework. In 1957, Super developed a life-span approach to career development. This approach examined nine roles people occupy during five different life stages and the impact those roles have on career development. As age is one of the data points, career theory is significant in this analysis.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Research Questions

R1. What are the characteristics of C2C students who choose to engage in the process of completing their degree by reapplying to the University of Mississippi?

R2. What are the characteristics of C2C students who choose to not engage in the process of completing their degree by reapplying to the University of Mississippi?

R3. What are the differences between engagers and non-engagers?
Hypotheses

H1. There is a significant difference in ethnicity between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not.

H2. There is a significant difference in gender between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not.

H3. There is a significant difference in age between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not.

H4. There is a significant difference in pre-enrollment bursar bill between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not.

H5. There is a significant difference in overall grade point average between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not.

H6. There is a significant difference in overall earned credits between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not.

H7. There is a significant difference in the last date of enrollment between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not.

H8. There is a significant difference in the number of credits to completion between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not.

Variables

The dependent variable is level of engagement in the process of reenrollment for returning C2C students. “Engaged” students are the students who have applied to the Complete to Compete program, designated the University of Mississippi as the institution they want to complete through, already completed some coursework at UM, and reapplied to the University.
“Non-engagers” are those students in the sample population who have applied to the C2C program, designated the University of Mississippi as the institution they want to complete through, and have already completed some coursework at UM, but have chosen not to move forward and re-apply to the University. The independent variables are ethnicity, gender, age, pre-enrollment bursar bill, overall grade point average, overall earned credits, last date of enrollment, and number of credits to completion. It is expected that there are differences in the independent variables for engaging students and those who are “non-engagers”.

Methodology

To participate in the C2C program, a person must apply to Complete 2 Compete through the IHL website at www.msc2c.org and select the institution where they want to complete their associate’s or bachelor’s degree. IHL then posts participant contact information onto the C2C dashboard of the college or university of the participant’s choice. Daily, the C2C coach at that institution, who is responsible for initiating contact with C2C participants in their charge, downloads the information. The C2C coach collects and reviews the transcripts, determines the number of degree applicable credits, and evaluates the credits remaining for a degree of the participant’s choice and their shortest path to completion at that institution. The C2C participant is then sent a summary of the credits and courses that are remaining toward a degree or degrees and asked to take the next step: to apply/reapply to the University of Mississippi.

Of the almost 12,000 Complete 2 Compete participants throughout the state, over 1,300 have chosen to complete their degree at the University of Mississippi since the program began in August of 2017 (LK Marketing, 2018). Although future studies of the state-wide Complete 2 Compete program could include a larger number of participants from all of the participating IHL
institutions, utilizing a smaller number from only the University of Mississippi will allow for
more consistent data definitions and more manageable numbers to perfect the analysis.

Of the 1300 C2C participants at UM, approximately 54% are students who have already
accumulated some credits from the University of Mississippi and are considered “returning”
students. There students are labeled as C2C-R in the student records system SAP. Students who
have not attended the University of Mississippi in the past are considered “transfer” students.
These students are labeled as C2C-T in the student records system SAP. Because transfer
student data is not available until students complete their application for admission to the
University of Mississippi, the data for this group of students is skewed. For this reason, transfer
students were removed from the scope of this analysis and only returning students will be
analyzed.

Of the returning UM C2C students, approximately 10% have not met the program criteria
and are ineligible. Most of those students did not meet the requirement of having “been out of
college at least 24 consecutive months” (Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning [IHL],
2016) prior to enrolling. Because they are not eligible to participate at this time, they were
removed from the data pool.

In the late 1990s, the current electronic student records system was put into place. Some
C2C participants who chose to return to UM are not in the University’s electronic student
records database because they attended UM prior to the late 1990s and have not reapplied to the
University for readmission. The elimination of these students does pose a potential limitation to
this study. Many of these students were born prior to 1980 and will influence the outcomes of
data analysis on age. Of these students, approximately 13% did engage in the process and apply
to UM and their records were added to SAP after they completed their application to UM. When
requesting data from Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning (IREP) for this study, these students were not included in the sample.

The remaining C2C students who are returning to the University of Mississippi have been given a C2C-R status in the digital record system. Of the students who have a C2C-R status, all are sent a welcome email outlining the steps to take to engage in the re-enrollment process. Some of the students have engaged in the process, but many have not. A comparison between these two groups to discern any differences in specific characteristics including ethnicity, gender, age, pre-enrollment bursar bill, overall grade point average (GPA), overall earned credits, last date of enrollment, and number of credits to completion will help to determine which participants are most likely to engage and which ones are not.

This information could inform decisions regarding marketing, admissions, communications, services, and coaching techniques used to assist the students with successful completion of their degrees. For example, the C2C program was designed to influence the educated workforce in the State of Mississippi. If it is found that the greatest number of participants engaging in the process of completing their degrees are near retirement age, changes may need to be made in the C2C program to more effectively attain the objectives. If it is found that people who have more overall earned credits or a higher overall GPA are more likely to engage in degree completion, marketing may be developed to better target this population. Knowing if the large number of people returning to complete their degrees are women, for example, would help a coach to know what resources should be highlighted for returning students such as daycare. If it is found that the presence of a bursar bill prior to enrollment influences a student’s decision to return, funding options or structured payment plans may need to be considered.
The aggregate data obtained through the IREP does not need to include any identifiable information for any of the participants. The data for the total population, engagers and non-engagers will be analyzed for frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, and measures of variation to provide an overview of the data and to identify outliers and gaps in the data. Simple t-tests will be used to analyze numerical data and Chi-square tests will be used on the categorical data to determine if there is a significant relationship between each characteristic category for the “engagers” and the “non-engagers”. Numerical data included age, the amount owed on a pre-enrollment bursar bill, overall GPA, overall accumulated earned credits, and number of months since the last time enrolled. Categorical data included gender and ethnicity.
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MANUSCRIPT TWO:

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGAGERS AND NON-ENGAGERS AMONG RETURNING COMPLETE 2 COMPETE PARTICIPANTS
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Our nation needs a labor force with higher levels of education to fill existing and future positions if the country expects to continue the positive economic trends and stay globally competitive (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2010). “The number of good jobs for workers with a BA or higher in skilled-services industries more than doubled between 1991 and 2016, from 17.2 million to 34.9 million” (Carnevale, Strohl, Ridley, & Gulish, 2018, p. 15). Globalization, automation, upskilling, and decreasing numbers of manufacturing jobs, led to a shift in the American economy around 1980 from that of manufacturing to skilled-services jobs including healthcare, finance, information technology, and education. In 2015, 56% of all jobs earning middle-class income salaries required a bachelor’s degree (Carnevale et al., 2018). Encouraging students who already have some college credit to return and complete their degree could have positively impact on graduation rates and the economy of the nation as a whole.

In 2010, the National Governors Association developed the Complete to Compete (C2C) initiative to “increase the number of highly-qualified college graduates within the available funding to meet workforce needs and compete globally” (Reyna, 2010, p. 7). After over a year of preparation, the Mississippi initiative launched in August of 2017 coordinated through the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) with the participation of the 2 and 4-year public institutions.

One year later, the program has successfully connected with over 1300 participants at the University of Mississippi alone. However, not all of the 1300 students chose to engage in the process of enrolling to complete their degree. Analyzing characteristics of a smaller portion of
these participants could better inform administrators for the purpose of sustaining this program and assisting more students to successfully return and complete a degree. As a C2C coach working directly with this program and coordinating its administration, I have an interest in the program’s success and in the success of the participants entrusted to my care. Knowing more about this population will strengthen my approaches as a practitioner and will provide key information to strengthen the foundation of the C2C program at the University of Mississippi.

In addition, as a student in a Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED) influenced EdD program, I have committed myself to the principles of equity, ethics, and social justice. A degree in higher education works toward giving everyone what she or he needs to be successful. “Workers with at least a bachelor’s degree earned more than the $907 median weekly earnings for all workers” (Torpey, 2018, p.1). It also reflects an ethical choice to be a good steward of the resources entrusted to the University and to serve students in the best possible way. Finally, the social implications of higher education with relation to networks, opportunity, and distribution of wealth cannot be overlooked.

C2C Participants

Over 1300 C2C participants have chosen the University of Mississippi to complete their degree. Among those participants are both transferring and returning students. Returning students account for approximately 54% of all C2C students participating at UM while transfer students make up the remaining 46%.

Because it is important to understand the differences between the characteristics of C2C students who choose to engage in the process of completing their degree and those who choose to not engage in the process, a small population of students who had already attended the
University of Mississippi was examined. Of the initial 1300 C2C participants, 582 participants who were returning to UM were identified and separated into two categories. The first category was the “engaged” students. Minimally, these C2C students have re-applied to the University of Mississippi. Students who did not meet this definition of engagement where put in an alternate category of “non-engagers”. Age, gender, ethnicity, money owed, grade point average, earned credit hours, the amount of time since the last enrollment in higher education, and credits remaining to completion were all relevant to the existing literature (Ebersole, 2010; Gast, 2013; Lane, Michelau, & Palmer, 2012; Taylor, 2000) and selected for investigation in this study.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is engagement. All students who apply to the Complete to Compete (C2C) program at the University of Mississippi receive a letter outlining what their next steps are to engage in the C2C program. The welcome letter asks that they do three things: complete a brief online survey, send official transcripts from all other institutions where they completed collegiate coursework, and apply/reapply to the University of Mississippi. Since it is required that students be admitted prior to enrolling in classes, students who applied to the University were labeled “engagers” while those who did not were labeled “non-engagers”. The total population used in the study consisted of 582 C2C participants with 316 in the set of “engagers” and 266 in the set of “non-engagers”.

Independent Variables

Independent variables include ethnicity, gender, age, pre-enrollment bursar bill, overall grade point average, overall earned credits, last date of enrollment, and number of credits to
completion. Gender and ethnicity were analyzed using cross tabulation as is appropriate for categorical data and all other independent variables were analyzed using independent-samples t-tests.

DATA OVERVIEW

Data Collection

Data collection began with seeking approval from the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB). After completing the application and receiving approval, a request was submitted to the Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning (IREP) to obtain the birthdates, gender, ethnicity, balance owed, overall grade point average (OGPA), overall earned credit hours, number of credits to degree completion, and last date of enrollment prior to the Complete 2 Compete (C2C) program. Additional approval from the Registrar was necessary to gain access to the grade point averages for this population. IRB granted permission and meetings commenced with IREP to outline the data required for the study. These conversations with the IREP staff revealed that most of the data necessary for this study could not be provided by IREP and collection by other means would be needed. Access was available to the information through the electronic student records center and the custodians of the Complete 2 Compete program at the University of Mississippi. To assure ethical practices, the retrieved data was inside of the scope of that for which approval was given through the IRB and through IREP.
Data Problems and Limitations

Some limitations to retrieving the data by this means existed. Data points that were unable to be downloaded through the student records system included the existing balances owed by some of the students in the sample population, the number of credits remaining toward degree completion, and the date each student was last enrolled prior to their participation in the Complete 2 Compete program. The UM Bursar was contacted to obtain information on students with existing balances and the office graciously agreed to supply the necessary information utilizing a list of student ID numbers. Because IREP utilizes historical data, they were only able to supply the last enrolled semester and year for the sample population. The number of credits to completion had been calculated as each student’s records were evaluated and was available through the Office of General Studies.

The initial population of C2C students returning to the University of Mississippi was 589. This sample population included all C2C participants categorized as returning to the University of Mississippi to complete their degree as opposed to C2C participants who were transferring into the University of Mississippi with credits only from other institutions. Students who did not have a current 9-digit student ID number were not included in this sample as their data was incomplete because of missing transfer transcripts, information on ethnicity and gender, and lack of financial data on student accounts. Of the initial 589 students, an additional seven students had to be eliminated because information on the overall GPA was incomplete. This left a sample population total of 582 participants.

The information on existing balances provided by the Bursar’s office required some additional preparation. Holds on student accounts that can prevent students from registering for classes or obtaining their transcripts fall into multiple categories. The two holds directly related
to a cash value are a Bursar Hold and a Loan Hold. Both of these amounts were provided by the Bursar’s office for each student in the sample who had a balance or credit on their account. The bursar bill amounts and loan amounts were combined to make the total existing balance for the purpose of this study. The balances for enrolled students were provided and included recent enrollment charges. Each enrolled student’s bursar bill was therefore adjusted to only reflect any balance that may have existed prior to his or her most recent enrollment period.

The Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning supplied the last enrollment semester for each of the students in the study group. This information was not complete and required some treatment. For the 70 students who are currently enrolled, the last enrollment date listed was current and the last date of enrollment prior to their recent enrollment needed to be corrected. Because the end dates for each semester are not available for all of the semesters and change each academic year, three dates were utilized for the last date of enrollment for each semester. If the last semester was fall, the date used was December 31. For spring, May 15 was used and for summer, July 31 was used. These dates, subtracted from the date the data was downloaded, provided the number of months that had passed since the student was last enrolled. For the purpose of data calculations, the number of months are used, but the numbers are also presented in years.

One data set from the original list was not included in this study. The number of credits remaining to complete a degree program was not available for all of the participants. Students’ records were only evaluated if the records appeared complete in the records system. For the group of students who did not engage, many did not have complete records. Engaged students were more likely to send missing transcripts and were therefore more likely to be evaluated.
Even among those who were evaluated, not all wanted to be evaluated for the shortest path and instead chose a specific degree program which influenced the number of credits remaining.

Data Coding

Some data cleaning, adjusting, and coding was necessary to be able to analyze the data efficiently and effectively. Gender was by far the simplest. Genders were coded for the sake of analysis as one (1) for male and two (2) for female. Age was calculated using the birthdates provided and adjusted for the number of years old on the date the data was run, which was November 4, 2018. Ethnicity was coded according to the categories assigned by the university with one change; the “two or more races” category was combined with the “multi-racial” category and assigned the title “multi-racial” (5). Each category was assigned a single digit code for analysis. Other categories included American Indian or Alaska Native (1), Asian (2), African American (3), Hispanic or Latino (4), White (6), and Unknown (7). Grade point average and number of earned credits did not require any adjustment, but it is relevant to mention that, in a few cases, the number of total earned credits hours could not be determined because of missing transfer transcripts. Although records existed for these students, it is unclear how the absence of transfer transcripts affected their overall GPA and earned credit hours so they were not included in the sample population.

Initial Analysis

The total population, engagers, and non-engagers comprised three data sets that were analyzed for descriptive statistics including range, minimum, maximum, mean, mode, standard deviation, variance, and frequency. This analysis was conducted multiple times in order to
identify general issues with the data and correct them (see tables 1-3). The next step was to run t-tests on the numerical data from each group (total sample, engagers and non-engagers) and Chi-square tests on the categorical data to determine the significance of difference between sets of data. Numerical data included age, pre-enrollment bursar bill, overall grade point average, overall earned credits, last date of enrollment, and number of credits to completion. Categorical data included ethnicity and gender. All tests utilized a 95% confidence interval.

Table 1. Total population descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total Owed in Dollars</th>
<th>Overall GPA</th>
<th>Overall Earned Hours</th>
<th>Past Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>37.73</td>
<td>31.13</td>
<td>2.2424</td>
<td>114.58</td>
<td>178.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>35.95</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>2.2200</td>
<td>119.00</td>
<td>137.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>6414</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>6414</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>557</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Engaged descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total Owed in Dollars</th>
<th>Overall GPA</th>
<th>Overall Earned Hours</th>
<th>Past Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td>57.33</td>
<td>2.2887</td>
<td>124.70</td>
<td>188.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>36.37</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>2.2650</td>
<td>129.00</td>
<td>153.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>6414</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>6414</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>557</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Non-engaged descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total Owed in Dollars</th>
<th>Overall GPA</th>
<th>Overall Earned Hours</th>
<th>Past Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>36.87</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>2.1873</td>
<td>102.56</td>
<td>165.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>35.40</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>2.1450</td>
<td>103.00</td>
<td>108.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Ethnicity

Of the total population, participants were broken into seven categories for ethnicity (1=American Indian/Alaskan Native, 2=Asian, 3=Black or African American, 4=Hispanic or Latino, 5=Multi-Racial, 6=White, 7=Unknown). The breakdown for the total participants on the study is as follows: 5 American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.9%), 5 Asian (0.9%), 214 Black or African American (36.8%), 8 Hispanic or Latino (1.4%), 14 Multi-Racial (2.4%), 324 White (55.7%), 12 Unknown (2.1%). The significance value of 0.145 is less than the alpha value of 0.05 so it can be assumed that there is no relationship between engagement and race as seen in table 4 & 5. Standardized residuals for all categories, when comparing the population breakdown for ethnicity between engagers and non-engagers, were neither larger than 2.0 or smaller than -2.0. However, the count for American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic or
Latino, Multi-Racial, and Unknown categories were too small to extrapolate this conclusion to a larger population.

Table 4. Ethnicity cross-tabulation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>American Indian or Alaska Native</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black or African American</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>116.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>175.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>316.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Status</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Ethnicity</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Residual</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Engaged</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>148.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>266.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Status</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Ethnicity</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Residual</td>
<td>-.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>-1.4</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>214.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>324.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>582.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Status</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Ethnicity</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Ethnicity chi-square test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>9.540</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>10.446</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>582</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 6 cells (42.9%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.29.

American Indian/Native Alaskan and Asian participant populations were each smaller than five within the engagement groups but equaled five for each within their ethnicity group for the total population. Because N=5 is preferred for tables larger than 2x2, results for these two ethnicities are unreliable with a population of this size.
It is necessary to note that this population is not reflective of the overall UM student population. It includes a large percentage of minority students. In the fall of 2018, approximately 24% of the undergraduate student population on the Oxford and regional campuses identified as non-white (Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning [IREP], 2018). In the total population of the returning C2C students examined, over 44% identified as non-white. It stands to reason then that enrollment of this population makes the University more racially diverse.

Table 6. Ethnicity comparison of engagers and non-engagers.

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

Gender

Gender was assigned in two categories (1=male, 2=female). Of the 582 participants, 48.8% are male and 51.2% are female. For both engagers and non-engagers, there was little variation in these percentages as demonstrated in table 7. For engagers, male and female percentages were 48.7% and 51.3% respectively and for non-engagers they were 48.9% and 51.1% respectively. The significance value of 0.974 is greater than the alpha value of 0.05 so
there is no significant relationship between gender and engagement (see tables 8 & 9).
Additionally, no standardized residual values were greater than 2.0 or less than 2.0. However, during the 2017-2018 academic year, males made up approximately 37% and females approximately 63% of the total undergraduate student population at the University of Mississippi Oxford and regional campuses combined. Although there is not a significant difference in the gender distribution between engagers and non-engers in the study, the total population of the returning students appears to be substantially different from that of the current undergraduate population with far more males in the C2C population.

Table 7. Gender comparison of engagers and non-engers.
Table 8. Gender cross-tabulation results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>316</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>154.2</td>
<td>161.8</td>
<td>316.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Status</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardized Residual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Engaged</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>266</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>129.8</td>
<td>136.2</td>
<td>266.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Status</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardized Residual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>298</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>284.0</td>
<td>298.0</td>
<td>582.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Status</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Gender chi-square test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>.001a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>582</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 129.80.

Age

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare age of engagers and non-engagers. For the total population, the ages ranged from 22 to 75 (54 years) with a mean of 37.73 years old. The range was the same for engagers as the total population, but the mean was slightly higher than the total population at 38.46 years old. For non-engagers, the range was slightly narrower, from 24 to 67 (43 years) with a mean age of 36.87. Because the significance value of .046 is less than alpha, we can assume that the 1.587 difference in the mean age of engagers and non-engagers demonstrates a significant difference between age and engagement with engagers being significantly older.
Table 10. Age independent samples test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>5.855</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>1.996</td>
<td>579.465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are also more outliers in the range of engagers and a slightly different distribution in ages between the two populations as seen in tables 11 & 12. According to Donald Super, the mean of the total population places the majority of participants in the “establishment” phase of their careers when skill building and stabilization is the priority (1980). We also see many students in the next phase of career development, “maintenance”, when defining behavior includes adjustments made to improve position (Super, 1980). This is consistent with the studies that found the majority of adult students return for the purpose of improving job prospects (Silliman & Schleifer, 2018).
Table 11. Age comparison of engagers and non-engagers.

![Age by Status](image)

Horizontal lines represent means

Table 12. Age in years of total population.

![Age in Years of Total Population](image)

Mean = 37.73
SD = 8.68
N = 582
Pre-Enrollment Balance

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare existing pre-enrollment balances on bursar bills between engagers and non-engagers. For the total population, pre-enrollment bursar bill balances ranged from $0.00 to $6,414.00 with a mean of $31.13 owed. For engagers, the range was the same with a mean of $57.33 owed. However, only thirteen participants accounted for the total amount owed with an average pre-enrollment bursar bill of $493.38 each. Of the 13 participants, four owed less than $100.00, four owed less than $1000.00, and the remaining five owed greater than $1000.00. Table 13 shows the specific balances owed by each of the thirteen. All thirteen of these participants fell into the sub-population of engagers making the mean balance for non-engagers $0.00. The Levene’s test had a significance of 0.000 so we will assume that variances are not equal and use the appropriate t-test significance of .037 which is less than the alpha value and demonstrates that there is a significant difference in amount owed between engagers and non-engagers (see table 14).

Table 13. Amounts owed by engagers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Amount Owed by Each</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$22.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$80.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$97.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$97.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$169.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>$430.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>$433.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>$679.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>$1105.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>$1300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>$2233.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>$5052.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>$6414.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14. Total amount owed independent samples test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>14.404</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>2.097</td>
<td>315.000</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the difference is skewed in a direction that is unexpected and unsupported by the literature. It may be that students who owe a substantial amount may see it as an insurmountable barrier and not even examine the possibility or returning to complete a degree. It is also necessary to consider that students may owe a balance at another institution. It would be difficult to determine this data and, although it may not prevent a student from applying to UM, it could prevent a student from obtaining an official transcript from another institution that would verify additional earned credit hours toward a degree at UM.

Overall Grade Point Average

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare overall Grade Point Average (OGPA) in engagers and non-engagers. The range for the total population is .23 to 4.0 (3.77 grade points) with a mean of 2.24 (see table 15). The range for engaged students was .23 to 3.83 (3.60 grade points) with a mean of 2.287 and the range for non-engaged students was .32 to 4.0 (3.68 grade points) with a mean of 2.1873. The mean difference is 0.1014. The Levene’s test reveals that equal variances can be assumed so the significance value of 0.024 is used. Because the significance value is less than 0.05, we can assume that 0.101 is a significant difference in OGPA between engagers and non-engagers as shown in table 16. Since past success is one
factor in predicting student persistence toward completing a degree, the significantly higher GPA’s of engaged students could be linked to overall engagement rates of C2C participants. (Piland, 1995).

Table 15. Overall GPA of total population.

Table 16. Overall Grade Point Average Independent Samples Test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.829</td>
<td>.363</td>
<td>2.265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>2.254</td>
<td>551.611</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Low GPA was anticipated to be a barrier to completion so the Bachelor of University Studies degree that was developed for C2C students included amnesty for all earned grades of “F” when the final calculations are made on GPA for the purpose of graduation. The required
overall and resident GPA required to graduate is 2.0 for most programs with other more specific requirements related to specific degree programs. With a mean of 2.24 overall GPA, that component of the degree program may not have been the necessity it was anticipated to be. It may also be that the overall GPA does not take into account differences in residential and transfer GPAs. To graduate, a student must have both a residential and overall GPA above a 2.0. If a student had transfer work with a high GPA and did not do well in the courses taken at UM, it could be that they meet the required overall GPA once residential and transfer GPAs are averaged, but they may not meet the 2.0 requirement for the residential GPA. It is also significant to note that the mode for the total population and engagers was 2.04. For these groups, this would put almost half of the sample population below 2.0. For non-engers, this puts over half of the sample sub-population below a 2.0 (see table 17). Because GPA for the purposes of state and federal financial aid are calculated on an average of all attempted credit hours, even the policy of “F” amnesty associated with the Bachelor of University Studies degree cannot help students’ eligibility for financial aid that requires a 2.0 GPA.

Table 17. Overall grade point average modes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GPA Mode Statistics</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Non-Engaged</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall Earned Credits

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare overall earned credits for engagers and non-engagers. The range for the total population was 1 to 264 credits with a mean of 114.58 credits (see table 18).
Table 18. Overall earned hours of total population.

![Histogram of整体 earned hours of the total population](image)

Mean = 114.56  
Std Dev = 36.401  
N = 562

This range was the same for the engaged sub-group, but the mean was greater than that of the total population by 10.12 credits for an engaged mean of 124.70 earned credits. The range for non-engagers was 3 to 196 credits with a mean of 102.56 earned credits. Table 19 displays each group separately with lines to indicate the means for each sub-group. The output in table 20 shows a significance value of 0.000, which is lower than alpha, so 22.141 is a significant difference in the mean overall credits earned with engagers having a significantly greater mean than those of non-engagers.
Table 19. Overall earned hour comparison of engagers and non-engagers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Overall Earned Hours</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
<th>Non-Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Earned Hours by Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>62.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Engaged</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>62.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20. Overall earned credits independent samples test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>Mean Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>22.141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is relevant to mention that most degree programs at the University require 120-124 degree applicable credits and that the number of degree applicable credits can be significantly smaller than the earned number of credit hours because of course duplication and degree requirements. This research also looks at the overall number of credits earned and does not differentiate between transfer credits and residential credits. All degrees at the University of Mississippi require a minimum of 30 residential credits hours and that 15 of the final 20 credits
earned need to be from UM. When and where students earned credits can have an impact on the number of credits remaining to complete a degree.

Months Since Last Enrolled

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the number of months since students were last enrolled in higher education for both engagers and non-engagers. To be eligible for the C2C program students cannot have been enrolled in an institution of higher education for at least 24 consecutive months. For the total population, the range was 29 to 557 months since the student last earned credits at an institution of higher education. This translates into 2.4 to 46.4 years with a total range of 44 years and a mean of 178.21 months or 14.9 years. The range for engaged students was the same as the total population with a mean for the engaged students of 188.93 months or 15.7 years. For the non-engaged population, the range was 34 to 514 months or 2.8 to 42.8 years with a range of 40 years. The mean number of months for non-engagers to have been out of higher education was 165.47 months or 13.8 years. The analysis in table 21 shows a significance value of 0.038 so we can assume that there is a significant difference in the amount of time a student had been out of school with engaged students having been out of school 23.5 months more than non-engagers; almost 2 years more.

Table 21. Months since last enrolled independent samples test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>4.796</td>
<td>.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>2.083</td>
<td>577.471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is interesting to note that spikes exist in the numbers of years that students have been out of school. These spikes are shown in tables 22 and 23. The years of enrollment for the three spikes include 1975, 2000, and 2010. A further examination of the economy, educational policy, or changes at UM may reveal why students from those particular years stopped-out from their college education.

Table 22. Months since last enrolled comparison of engagers and non-engagers.
Table 23. Months since last enrolled of total population.

![Histogram of Months Since Last Enrolled of Total Population]

**DISCUSSION**

**Research Question 1**

What are the characteristics of C2C students who choose to engage in the process of completing their degree by reapplying to the University of Mississippi? In summary, engaged participants are more likely to reflect the characteristics of the total population studied and are more likely to have outlying data points. They are generally older than non-engagers and have earned more credits. Engagers are more likely than non-engaged to have an existing balance on their bursar account when they return and have been out of school longer.
Research Question 2

What are the characteristics of C2C students who choose not to engage in the process of completing their degree by reapplying to the University of Mississippi? Non-engaged participants are slightly younger on the average and have less earned credit hours than engagers have. They have a lower overall grade point average and are less likely to have an existing bursar balance. They are also more likely to have been out of school longer than engagers are.

Research Question 3

What are the differences between engagers and non-engagers? Of the total population studies, 54% engaged in the process of returning to complete their degree by reapplying to the University while 46 % did not reapply. Engagers are an average of 1.6 years older than non-engagers are and have earned an average of 22 more credits. Engagers also have an average grade point average of 0.10 higher than non-engagers have and are more likely to have left school owing money to the University. Engagers are more likely to have been out of school longer with an average difference of 23.5 months longer than non-engagers are. Both engagers and non-engagers showed no significant difference in gender and ethnicity. They did however demonstrate a difference in both gender and ethnicity from the current undergraduate population at the University of Mississippi. Finally, the sample included more engagers than non-engagers.

Implications

To frame these findings, four conceptual contexts will be considered: best practices for serving adult learners, transition theory, choice theory, and career theory. Implementation and practical applications are included in manuscript three along with a careful examination utilizing
each of the Ten Principles for Effectively Serving Adult Learners developed by the Council on Adult and Experiential Education (CAEL). For the remainder of manuscript two, transition theory and choice theory will be joined by career theory to contextualize the data analysis results.

Transition can be defined as “a period in-between moments of stability, initiated by the move between two socio-cultural systems, and in which a person is aware of changes in their environment that cause internal re-adjustment” (Ivins et al., 2017). It is clear that, no matter what the reason, C2C students are entering or already in a period of transition. Difficulties for students in transition can be heightened by both social and academic factors. Social factors include age, finances, employment, number of years out of school, and marital status. Academic factors include GPA and transferable academic credits (Piland, 1995; Rhine et al., 2000).

Some social factors need to be taken into consideration by coaches during initial interviews with students considering reentering the academic setting including marital status, family responsibilities, and employment. Rational action theory takes into account three factors when making choices about advanced education. The first factor is about the cost of school, the second is the likelihood of success, and the third is the value or utility that education provides (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Because engagers carried the whole of existing bursar bills prior to enrollment, it is more likely that they will have to consider financial concerns earlier than non-engagers do. Even if financial aid is available to assist with education expenses, finding the means to pay off existing balances prior to enrollment can be an additional financial strain that must be factored into the choice to return. Although the findings in the C2C study revealed that having an existing bursar prior to enrollment balance is not a deterrent, it should be considered in recruiting methods. Including information on resources available to address financial concerns
may help to ease transfer anxiety and encourage more students to apply to the C2C program and engage in the enrollment process.

The catalyst for most adult learners is to improve career prospects or advancement (Silliman & Schleifer, 2018). “Forty-four percent of adult prospective students are planning to pursue a degree or certificate in order to get a different kind of job or career altogether, and 27% are looking to get ahead in their current job or career” (Silliman & Schleifer, 2018, p. 4). Donald Super (1980) developed five stages of life and career development that included generalized age categories for each phase of development. Of the research population, 93% are between the ages of 25 and 55 placing them in the “establishment” and “maintenance” stages of their careers (Super, 1957, p. 292). The mean age of 37.73 years for the research population is also significant. Individuals this age are in the middle of the “establishment” stage of their careers, which spans approximately 20 years from the age of 25 to 44. In this stage, an individual is focused on finding an appropriate field and making a permanent place in it through success and advancement (Super, 1957). It makes sense then that the C2C participants may be returning to school because they have reached an impasse in salary, interest, or advancement in their current career and are returning to obtain skills and education that will help them establish the career they desire. If both career and transition theory are considered together, a clear understanding of career returns on the investment of time and money can help participants with choosing an appropriate degree program and assist with the choice to complete their degree. Clearly, career counseling should also be part of the services provided to these returning students.

“Student academic success as demonstrated by GPA and the completion of the maximum amount of transferable credit hours at a community college, predicts student persistence in completing a bachelor’s degree” (Rhine et al., 2000, p. 446). Although this conclusion focuses
on community college students, it can easily be extrapolated to describe adult student populations as they share so many characteristics and often are the same. That engaged students in the C2C study had significantly higher numbers of earned credits hours and higher overall GPAs is consistent with research findings, may explain the higher numbers of engaged students, and may be predictive of ultimate student success in completing their degree (Piland, 1995; Rhine et al., 2000). Additionally, those who chose to engage may have been emboldened by academic factors including higher GPAs and numbers of earned credits that may account for the higher numbers of engagers over non-engagers in the research population.

It is also likely that the C2C student population may have more overall success with the transition back to school. Piland (1995) found that successful transfer graduates “included a higher portion of females, part-times, minority students, and students who transferred a higher number of units”. Although there was little difference in gender and ethnicity within the research population, the high number of minority participants in the total population as compared to that of the traditional student population indicates that these students will have greater success in their return to school.

SUMMARY

To date, the focus of the C2C program has been on serving the students who choose to participate in the program. This provides for development of day-to-day procedures to more effectively and efficiently process students and get them enrolled. To better provide for their participation and success in obtaining their degree(s), a deeper understanding of this population is necessary. To initiate this process, a basic analysis of data on existing students at the University of Mississippi was conducted to provide a cursory profile of the students and to
determine if there are any significant differences in the characteristics between students who chose to participate in C2C but did not engage in the process of enrollment and those who did. Significant differences between engagers and non-engagers were found, but more importantly, it provoked additional questions and need for further research. A step-by-step analysis of best practices needs to be conducted to see if the data justifies changes in policy and procedures both at the departmental and institutional levels. Where it does not, questions should be considered for future research that can better inform practice.
REFERENCES


Taylor, J. (2000). *Adult degree completion programs: A report to the board of trustees from the task force on adult degree completion programs and the award of credit for prior learning at the baccalaureate level*. North American Association of Colleges and Schools, Chicago, IL. Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.


MANUSCRIPT THREE:

PREPARING THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI FOR THE STUDENT POPULATION OF TOMORROW
SUMMARY OF PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

“Millions of Americans have attended college, accruing significant amounts of college credit, without ever receiving a college credential that appropriately recognizes their learning and effort” (Wheatle, Taylor, Bragg, & Ajinkya, 2017, p. 3). More than 35 million Americans over the age of 25 had some credit, but no degree in 2015 (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). In 2017, the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) and the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) adopted a 2010 program developed by the National Governors Association titled Complete 2 Compete (C2C). The C2C program was created to combat the disparities between educational attainment and the demand for a more educated workforce that is projected to require a college education for 65% of the workforce by 2020 (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2013).

Fifteen months after the launch of the Mississippi C2C program, over 1300 students have expressed an interest in completing their degree through the University of Mississippi (UM). To better understand and serve this population, an analysis was conducted of 582 C2C participants who had acquired some college credit at UM. The focus was on answering three questions:

1. What are the characteristics of C2C students who choose to engage in the process of completing their degree by reapplying to the University of Mississippi?
2. What are the characteristics of C2C students who choose to not engage in the process of completing their degree by reapplying to the University of Mississippi?
3. What are the differences between engagers and non-engagers?
Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The majority of C2C students participating at UM are adult students defined not only by their age but also by the simple fact that their life situation places the role of student secondary to other roles. Unlike their traditional student counterparts, adult students are also parents, caretakers, spouses, workers, and citizens. Although “only 16 percent of higher education enrollments represent the “traditional” 18-22 year-old, full-time undergraduate students residing on campus” (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning [CAEL], 2019a, n.p.), most institutions are still driven in their structure and policies to serve traditional students entering colleges and universities immediately after high school graduation. To better serve adult students and provide for the success of the Complete 2 Compete program, practitioners need to understand how this population differs from traditional students.

Adult students face different barriers than traditional students in their return to higher education and these barriers necessitate different services. Balancing an academic schedule with other responsibilities and taking on additional expenses are the primary concerns of adult students according to a 2018 research study by Silliman and Schleifer. The study also showed that relatively few returning students worry about dropping out, but those who do, express concerns about academic preparedness and possessing the necessary technological skills to succeed. To assist these students, institutions should consider how credits are transferred and what is accepted, what financial assistance is available and how payment plans can be utilized, where and when daycare might be provided, who can help students navigate institutional systems and advise students academically, and when courses are being offered and how they are being taught (Blumenstyk, 2018).
To put these findings into context, the data will be examined through the lenses of Schlossberg’s (1994) transition theory, Super’s career theory (1957), and Hills’s (1965) transfer shock along with rational choice theory (Goldthorpe, 1998; Jaeger, 2007). This examination alone would be incomplete; therefore, the Ten Principles for Effectively Serving Adult Learners developed by the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL, 2019b) will be used to identify and understand the problems of practice and barriers of adult learners in order to develop education plans and leadership strategies that enhance equity, ethics and social justice.

Data and Collection

Subjects for the research project were selected from a database maintained by the Office of General Studies and the University of Mississippi Complete 2 Compete coach. Because the data on each student was most complete, the population consisted of students who had already completed coursework at the University of Mississippi. The student information on ethnicity/race, gender, age, amount owed to UM, grade point average (GPA), overall earned credits, and months since last enrolled were obtained through the electronic student records system with the assistance of the Bursar’s office and Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning. Originally, the data on academic credits remaining to completion was to be included, but the information available was both incomplete and inconsistent. The population was then divided into two sub-groups: engaged students and non-engaged students. C2C students who had actively begun their return to school by re-applying to the university were labeled as “engaged” while those who had not done anything to initiate re-admission were labeled as “non-engaged”. Gender and ethnicity were analyzed using cross tabulation and all other independent variable were analyzed using independent-samples t-tests.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of C2C students who choose to engage in the process of completing their degree by reapplying to the University of Mississippi?

2. What are the characteristics of C2C students who choose to not engage in the process of completing their degree by reapplying to the University of Mississippi?

3. What are the differences between engagers and non-engagers?

C2C engagers are older by an average of 1.6 years, have an average of 22 credits more earned hours, have an overall grade point average by an average of 0.10 points, are more likely to have an existing bursar bill prior to enrollment, and have been out of school an average of 23.5 years longer than non-engagers. Engagers were also more likely to have statistics closer to the total sample population ranges, averages, and modes. There was not a significant difference in age and ethnicity between engagers and non-engagers.

Hypotheses Analysis

There was no significant difference in ethnicity of the population of engagers and that of non-engagers. The breakdown for the total participants on the study is as follows: 5 American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.9%), 5 Asian (0.9%), 214 Black or African American (36.8%), 8 Hispanic or Latino (1.4%), 14 Multi-Racial (2.4%), 324 White (55.7%), 12 Unknown (2.1%). There did appear to be a notable difference between the students returning through C2C and the current UM undergraduate population with 20% more students in the C2C research population identifying as races other than white (IREP, 2018). This is most likely because attrition rates for
marginalized populations are notably higher (Tinto, 1993). Considering rational choice theory (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Jaeger, 2007), it makes sense that marginalized populations have more to gain by increasing their level of education when both economic and social returns are considered (Morgan, 2005). Economic benefits can be enhanced by providing career counseling to maximize the effects of obtaining a degree, exploring financing options to help potential students weigh returns, creating an inclusive campus culture, and providing students with childcare options and assuring that other support services are available at beneficial times. Clearly, the addition of Complete 2 Compete students to the existing UM student population would not only bring some relief to the disparity in initial persistence, but would also bring greater diversity to the university as a whole.

There was also no significant difference between gender in the total research population as well as in the engaged and non-engaged populations with approximately 49% male and 51% female. In the current UM undergraduate population, the gender breakdown is 37% male and 63% female. More males returning to complete their degree may be due to a variety of reasons related to rational choice theory. Men make up a larger percentage of workers in the US workforce so may have more to gain in job advancement by completing a degree than women. Even if both men and women in a household are working, current inequities in wage and salary make it more economically advantageous for a man to advance his career than a woman. Additionally, it is still more likely for a woman to be the primary caregiver to dependent children making it more difficult for a woman to return to school (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Recruitment strategies targeted at women may increase participation in the program but childcare and flexible course options would be imperative to support female learners.
The difference in age between non-engagers and engagers was significantly different with the non-engagers being approximately 1.6 years younger than the engagers. Age data is not available for the current population of UM undergraduates, but it is safe to assume that the C2C total population mean of almost 38 years old is greater than the mean age of all current UM undergraduates. With an average age of 37.73 for the C2C engaged and non-engaged students, it is clear that these students require careful consideration as adult students. Super’s life span model demonstrates that majority of these students will meet at least two of the characteristics of adult student and many will be engaged in some or all of the eight roles he identified: parent, homemaker, spouse, worker, citizen, leisurite, student, and child (Super, 1957). Establishing an institutional culture where these students can not only succeed but also thrive will require a careful analysis of CAEL’s 10 principles and adjustments to the current environment (CAEL, 2019b).

Perhaps the most surprising data came from the analysis of existing C2C student debt to the University. There was a significant difference in pre-enrollment bursar bill between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not. It was expected that students who owed money would be less likely to engage in the process of readmission; the actuality was that non-engagers had no outstanding pre-enrollment bursar bills. Thirteen engagers owed a total of $18,116 with non-engagers owing nothing. The average amount owed among the engagers is $493.38 each with four owing less than $100.00, four owing less than $1000.00, and the remaining 5 owing from $1105.17 to $6414.13. Seven of the 13 students had existing debts that could be paid off utilizing the $500.00 C2C grant provided by the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning through monies donated by the Kellogg Corporation. It may be that students with existing debt are more likely to participate in the C2C program, however, it is also likely
that students with existing debt may not even consider returning to complete their degree and choose to not participate in the C2C program at all. It is also possible that students who chose not to engage have existing balances at other institutions that would prevent them from obtaining transcripts necessary to complete their application to UM. Before decisions are made using this data, further research should be conducted that includes a wider scope of individuals both within the C2C programs, but also from the population of people who were contacted by C2C but did not choose to participate in the C2C program. This research would be best accomplished by IHL and the marketing firm hired to help administer the C2C program.

A significant difference was found in overall grade point averages (OGPA) of engagers and non-engagers with non-engagers having an OGPA 0.1014 lower than engaged students. Townsend, McNerny, and Arnold (1993) found that student’s with previous academic success are more likely to succeed. Although a difference in GPA of 0.10 points is minor, it may dictate two possible courses of action. First, if resources are limited, it may be more prudent to recruit students with higher GPA’s because they may be more likely to complete their degree. If resources are not a concern, it is likely that students with lower GPA’s may experience a higher level of transfer shock (Ivins et al, 2017) and may require a higher level of support to succeed. In both groups, the mean OGPA was above the 2.0 required for most degree programs at the University of Mississippi. However, to calculate the overall GPA at UM transfer GPA (TGPA) and residential GPA (RGPA) are averaged so the overall GPA does not take into account deficiencies that may exist in either TGPAs or RGPAs for engaging and non-engaging C2C participants with transfer credits. A more careful analysis of GPA that breaks out transfer, residential, and overall GPA may reveal more detail about this characteristic. Additionally, although the mean GPAs for the total population, engagers and non-engagers were all above 2.0,
the modes were much closer to 2.0 with the mode for the total population and engagers at 2.04 and the mode for non-engagers at 1.82. Student with a GPA of less than 2.0 are not considered in good academic standing and are not eligible for most financial aid. As non-traditional students already experience significant barriers with access to financial aid, this further compounds this problem. For C2C students to succeed, UM needs to consider how financial aid can be made available to these students.

A significant difference did exist in the number of overall credits earned between engagers and non-engagers. Engagers averaged over 22 credits more credits earned than non-engagers and had an average earned credit amount of 124.7 earned credits which is above the 120 earned credits required for most degree programs at UM. The range for the total population was one credit to 264 credits with a mean of 114.58 credits. It is clear from the results that students with more than the 120-124 credits need to graduate are significantly more likely to engage in the process. Rational choice theory may influence this outcome. Student weighing the decision to return will examine their education choice in terms of social returns and economic returns (Jaeger, 2007). Returning to school may provide more social connections and mobility, but may have significant impacts on family and relationships. Likewise, completing a degree may offer more positive economic opportunities in the long-term but may require significant financial sacrifices in the short term. Students who have a shorter path to completing their degree will likely suffer less negative economic and social impacts than those who need to complete significantly more credits. The 22 credits average difference between engagers and non-engagers equates to seven or eight 3-credit courses and tuition, at UM, of approximately $8,000 not including fees. With limited financial aid opportunities available to non-traditional students, this can impose a serious burden on a family’s finances. As with ethnicity, choices to
reenter higher education need to be supported with career counseling, financial options, and support services.

The analysis showed that there was a significant difference in the amount of time a student had been out of school. Engaged students had been out of school 23.5 months more than non-engagers, almost two years more. Although the data represents a significant difference, two years seem less supported by actual theory or practice than the students’ age after being out of school for an average of almost 15 years for the total population. In 15 years, policies and procedures along with campus culture and structure can change significantly making transition more difficult for those out for longer periods of time. Schlossberg (2011) provided a framework of 4 Ss to consider when working with students in transition. Coaches and advisors should be familiar with the implications of a student’s situation, self-image, and support network to help them develop strategies for making the transition back into academics and college life and to connect them with appropriate campus resources. It was interesting to note that large numbers of students stopped-out during the years of 1975, 2000, and 2010. Although that is not the purpose of this study, an analysis of economics, employment trends, financial aid and tuition costs, and changes in policy may provide additional insight to the reasons for large numbers of student to stop out during these years.

The final hypothesis intended to examine difference in the number of credits to completion between those who engaged in the re-enrollment process and those who have not, was not included in this study. That is not to say that it is not important data, but that the means by which to analyze the data did not exist. Before research can be done on this particular characteristic, a standardized method for identifying degree applicable credits versus earned credits needs to be established. Degree applicable credits take into account repeated courses,
transfer credits accepted by the institution, and degree program. Shortest path to completing a
degree may be a consistent way to calculate these numbers but reconstructing this data for
students already evaluated will be time consuming. It would be good however to find a way to
maintain this data moving forward.

IMPROVING PRACTICE TO ENHANCE EQUITY, ETHICS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Policy and Practice Changes

The engagement of C2C students is of critical importance given the need for an educated
workforce, declining numbers in traditional students, the diversity this population contributes to
the educational environment, and the opportunity to better equalize completion numbers amongst
marginalized student populations. Although understanding the results of the research in terms of
theory is important, it would not be as effective if an analysis of application was not conducted.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has developed Ten Principles
for Effectively Serving Adult Learners (CAEL, 2019b) that provides an outline for the analysis
of policy and practice. These principles include adaptivity, strategic partners, assessment of
learning outcomes, teaching-learning process, financing, student support systems, life and career
planning, technology, transitions, and outreach.

Adaptivity hinges on the ability to adjust to shifting market forces and stakeholder
expectations. In the case of Complete 2 Compete, the stakeholders vary widely and include C2C
participants, higher education institutions and governing boards, state and federal government,
current employers and potential employers, and all Mississippi residents with a desire to obtain
postsecondary credentials. Communication, collaboration, and partnerships among these
stakeholders are necessary for the advancement of social justice, the development of ethical practices that equitably distribute resources and provide for equal opportunity, and the ability to adapt to a changing environment.

Strategic partnerships with employers that provide work release time, structured certificate programs that are linked with progress toward degree curriculums, and support from the organization or institution for professional development linked to advancement opportunities, provide a pathway for students to return to school. For example, the University of Mississippi provides tuition assistance for all employees. Helping all UM employees understand what these benefits are, outlining opportunities for advancement through educational accomplishments, and supporting an institutional culture that values each employee’s development can encourage academic achievement.

Part of the ability to adapt comes in the form of learning outcomes assessment and academic programs contributing to them. Developing opportunities for students to receive credit for training and experiences, consistent with learning outcomes, which happen outside of the institutions, is not easy but ethical and necessary for student success. Developing programs to assess prior learning via the submission of certificates for standardized training and portfolios to document skills and knowledge obtained through life and work experience is already benefiting students across the country at many institutions. The Council on Adult and Experiential Education provides a transferable template for the advancement of such programs. The research supports that higher numbers of accumulated credits are more likely to engage in the readmission process (Piland, 1995). If opportunities existed to earn additional credits utilizing life experiences, it is likely more students will engage.
In addition, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning is best equipped to provide resources to faculty on pedagogy specific to adult learners, andragogy (Knowles, 1990), and for instructors who regularly teach adult students. Strategies for incorporating Knowles’s theory with traditional pedagogy will better equip faculty to accommodate a variety of learning styles for both their traditional learners and adult learners.

Although the research outlined in this dissertation did not demonstrate that owing an institutional debt prevents engagement, it did demonstrate a need to provide financial services to those who do engage. Having financial aid counselors who are familiar with the unique situations and needs of returning adult students is critical to their success. These counselors must be readily available on all campuses and provide appointments outside of traditional office hours for working students. These can be on an appointment-by-appointment basis and do not require extending office hours as much as allowing counselors to have flexible schedules. It is also critical that payment plans, without penalties such as accrued interest, be available for payment of tuition and existing debts. Finally, establishing funds to assist students with the payment of balances on an as-needed basis can be a great philanthropic opportunity for alumni and benefactors.

Other student support services should be examined to see if they are equally meeting the needs of adult students. For example, orientation programs that are scheduled from noon on day one to noon on day two are difficult, if not impossible, for students who work and or have families they care for. Although it is possible for students to not attend an orientation session, those who do miss critical information, connections, and resources. If they are able to attend, they find themselves in programs about Greek organizations and dining halls where they share more in common with the parents of students than those with whom they are being oriented. The
EDHE 305-Transfer Student Experience has many curricular components that would benefit both returning and transfer adult learners, but sessions are only offered in the classroom and only after 5:00pm on some regional campuses. All student services and academic departments should consider how they can serve students outside of the hours of 8:00 am-5:00 pm Monday through Friday when students may be at work.

As the majority of students returning to complete a degree are doing so for the purpose of employment and career advancement, attention must be given to help them succeed in their endeavor (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Silliman & Schleifer, 2018; Super, 1957). Up-front career counseling to ensure students are on the academic path consistent with their career goals should be available. At the University of Mississippi, a C2C coach trained in career development is provided. This can be enhanced with pre-appointment surveys designed to help students articulate career goals along with additional services being provided through the Career Center. As with financial counseling services, career services accessible at a distance and outside of traditional work hours is a necessity.

Returning students also express a concern about their ability to navigate new technology required for academic participation. Where traditional students may be more fearless than their adult classmates when using new software, adult students need resources that assist with the mastery of online programs used to teach and facilitate courses. At UM this technology includes the myOleMiss student portal, Blackboard, email, and applications for the University and programs within, such as iStudy. Blackboard provides tutorials after students have located it and log in, but internally created programs like the myOleMiss portal have no such tutorial options.

Complete 2 Compete participants have been out of school from 2.4 to 24.4 years with an average of almost 15 years. The knowledge and expectations of these students with regards to
the university system wildly vary and it is difficult to predict what students may or may not know about the existing policies and procedures. With adult students always in a state of transition (Ivins, Copenhaver, & Koclanes, 2017), careful consideration should be given to methods that can be used to eliminate barriers and ease anxieties for returning adults. Partnerships between 2-year and 4-year institutions can help lubricate the transition back to school or between institutions, particularly where academic records are concerned. Individual institutions do not retain high school records, transfer transcripts, inoculation records, and ACT/SAT scores if students are no longer attending or never enrolled. These are difficult and expensive to reproduce or become inaccessible as time passes. Consolidating databases that are accessible to institutions with student’s permission would make the exchange and sharing of information more efficient and cost effective. Finally, one adult and transfer learner resource office, that can help students troubleshoot issues and connect them with resources, would benefit all students. Although the Registrar and Admissions have initial contact with most students, front-line staff are not often able to assist students with barriers to enrollment in a comprehensive manner.

Once these nine principles have been addressed, the final principle should be considered. Outreach to adult students without the establishment of a system to support and include them, is a poor ethical choice and can waste time and resources. For although it may bring some adult students back, it does not provide for their continued success and completion of a degree. If the school is prepared to serve and value adult learners, administration of the institution will need to develop an enrollment strategy incorporating a universal message both within the institution and externally.
Intervention or Preliminary Action

With these principles in mind, five initial actions need to be taken. First, a case needs to be made to the UM administration on the importance and benefits of attracting adult students, particularly those with some college credit, to enhance immediate enrollment numbers. Second, an institutional definition of adult learners needs to be established so that these students can be identified and traced. Third, adjustments need to be made in services to better include this population in the mission of the institution. Fourth, an adult student advocate and resource center needs to be established, and fifth, the new CAEL Adult Learner 360 assessment needs to be administered incorporating perspectives of both institutional administrators and faculty in addition to students. This data can then be used to help guide the University of Mississippi’s decisions about where to focus improvement methods.

In 2016, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning conducted an Adult Learner Inventory (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning-CAEL, 2017). This tool pre-dated the current Adult Learner 360 (AL360) now offered by CAEL and was not aligned with all Ten Principles for Effectively Serving Adult Learners. The survey included 575 students with the purpose of identifying performance gaps between the importance students assigned to certain items and their satisfaction with the services provided by the University of Mississippi. Of the 575 students surveyed, 91 (15%) identified as being married, 135 (23%) had dependents, and 172 (30%) were employed 20 or more hours per week. Four hundred and eighteen of the 575 students were studying on the Oxford campus. Although the CAEL-Adult Learner Inventory (CAEL-ALI) is usually focused on students 25 years or older, this survey was administered to students 21 years and older at the request of the University of Mississippi administration.
Therefore, 382 (66%) students were 24 years old or younger. If the Adult Learner 360 was to be administered, it would be prudent to focus this adult learner survey on students 25 or older.

On the ALI, forty-seven statements regarding programs and services are included for students to rate on importance and satisfaction. These 47 items are divided among eight composite scales including outreach, life and career planning, financing, assessment of learning outcomes, teaching-learning process, student support systems, technology, and transitions. Table 23 shows that the University of Mississippi scored significantly below the national average on all eight scales (CAEL, 2017). Of the eight scales of the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI), the University of Mississippi had the greatest performance gap in student perception in the area of life and career planning. This scale “assesses how the institution addresses learners’ life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals” (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2015, p. 2).

Table 24. CAEL Adult Learner Inventory scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>University of Mississippi - ALI</th>
<th>National Four-Year Adult Learners</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale #1: Outreach</td>
<td>Importance: 6.16</td>
<td>Satisfaction: 5.24/1.29</td>
<td>Performance-Gap: 0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale #2: Life and Career Planning</td>
<td>Importance: 6.12</td>
<td>Satisfaction: 4.84/1.49</td>
<td>Performance-Gap: 1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale #3: Financing</td>
<td>Importance: 6.08</td>
<td>Satisfaction: 5.08/1.53</td>
<td>Performance-Gap: 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale #5: Teaching - Learning Process</td>
<td>Importance: 6.06</td>
<td>Satisfaction: 5.35/1.32</td>
<td>Performance-Gap: 0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale #7: Technology</td>
<td>Importance: 6.01</td>
<td>Satisfaction: 5.49/1.21</td>
<td>Performance-Gap: 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale #6: Student Support Systems</td>
<td>Importance: 6.00</td>
<td>Satisfaction: 5.13/1.38</td>
<td>Performance-Gap: 0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale #8: Transitions</td>
<td>Importance: 5.96</td>
<td>Satisfaction: 5.00/1.44</td>
<td>Performance-Gap: 0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale #4: Assessment of Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>Importance: 5.92</td>
<td>Satisfaction: 5.08/1.39</td>
<td>Performance-Gap: 0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Difference statistically significant at the .001 level

The survey data established three groups: all respondents, regional campus respondents, and Oxford campus respondents and provided performance gaps for each. The largest discrepancies between importance and satisfaction were with the following statements:
- Advisors are knowledgeable about requirements for courses and programs of interest to me.
- I receive the help I need to stay on track with my program of study.
- Sufficient course offerings within my program of study are available each term.
- This institution provides students with the help they need to develop an education plan.
- I am able to choose course delivery that fits my life circumstances.
- This institution assists students who need help with the financial aid process.

This feedback would indicate that improvements be made in the areas of advisor training and caseloads, course delivery schedules and modalities, and financial aid advising.

Advisors or, more preferably, coaches of adult students need more time for service delivery to each student than with more traditional student advising. Standards established by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education should be adhered to when training and case loading advisors. “[Academic Advising Programs] must provide adequate resources to ensure that academic advising caseloads are consistent with the institutional mission and stated goals” (Miller et al., 2014, p. 7). Advising loads should be strictly limited in size so that coaches can answer the many questions adult students have, ask the appropriate questions to comprehensively understand the life situation of each student, and carefully develop a long-range academic program with variations if necessary to help each student understand what will be expected of them each semester. Academic advisors or coaches, who work with adult students, need to be trained in a more comprehensive set of skills and knowledge than those who work with traditional students for a specific academic degree program or school. Coaches need to have a more wide-spread knowledge of admissions operations, academic credit transfer, career theory and development, financial aid options for adults, payment options for bursar bills, and
veteran and military services in addition to an ample knowledge of all academic majors, minors, and program requirements.

In the original ALI survey conducted in 2016, twenty-eight student comments were specifically about the lack of quality advising at the University of Mississippi. This constituted the largest number of negative comments on any particular subject. Although no advisor is perfect, adequate training programs need to be established at UM and required for anyone who serves as an academic advisor and caseload numbers need to be limited depending on each advisor’s student population and role.

In addition to having an adult student advising office with space for adult students to study, store meals needing refrigeration, access computers, and lounge, an adult specific contact email and phone line need to be established so adults know where they can go to for answers to complex questions and receive coaching. Appointments with coaches throughout the day and after hours should be available as well so busy and inflexible work and family schedules can be predictably accommodated.

To help with the transition, an orientation designed to help adult students navigate the university and academic environment needs to be developed. If offered in person, it should be short and concise and offered on a weekend with time before and after to travel and daycare options for students with young dependent children. Online options should also be available in the form of an orientation video along with tutorial libraries of technology necessary for registration and course completion.

The second largest complaint from students in the ALI survey was regarding course offerings. Student concerns ranged from limited night offerings, last minute cancellations of courses, the need for online offerings, and scheduling priorities. To accommodate adult learner
schedules, registration priority should be granted to students with multiple life commitments and limited access to academic offerings.

Course offerings should also consider the complexities of adult student schedules. Sections labeled as “web” should be offered in a format where students can complete the course exclusively online. Currently, many “web” sections require students to be on campus for exams multiple times per semester. To avoid confusion, classes that require students to be physically present for exams should be labeled as a “hybrid” course. Preferably, many of the courses that are currently labeled as “web” and that offer all components of a class online, should be offered in a semester or flex iStudy option. The current iStudy options allow students to choose a semester format or a flex format that allows them up to a year to finish, but that can also be finished in as little as two months in some cases. The flex format courses can be started at any time which allows for adult students to get started immediately when they are ready and to take careful advantage of those windows when their other life commitments will allow. Instructors who teach “web” courses are already trained in skills necessary to teach online courses with particular attention to technology. For instructors who are also teaching iStudy flex courses, an additional module or modules on adult learning andragogy should be included.

Financial aid concerns, particularly from adult learners, were expressed in the ALI survey as well. Although the University may not be able to directly influence the availability of financial aid for adult students who have often exhausted awards, lost aid because of breaks in attendance, or penalized for early mistakes that led to a low GPA, options do exist. Financial aid advisors on the regional campuses are more familiar with financial aid options for adult learners. Having specialists on all campuses or making regional campus financial aid advisors available to Oxford campus students would provide more fair and equitable access to financial aid funds.
The lack of financial aid for adult students also provides a great opportunity for alumni or benefactors to support the mission of the university. Creating an endowment that would provide matching funds, which could be used to help pay existing balances for returning students, would be a great philanthropic and social justice endeavor.

An exploration committee needs to be established to examine the possibility of offering prior learning assessment (PLA) to UM students who have substantial life experiences and quantifiable professional skills. The committee would need to include representatives from the Provost’s office and the Registrar’s office who were present at the initial PLA training offered by CAEL prior to the launch of C2C along with faculty representatives. The options for providing PLA vary in breadth and can be piloted on a limited basis to establish their substance. CAEL already provides a template for such programs that could easily be adapted for use at UM.

Finally, when the need was recognized for better services for transfer students, a substantial transfer student task force was created in June of 2015. The taskforce was substantial and had representation from administration, student affairs, academics, Institutional Research, Outreach, students and student groups (Lowe & Knight, 2015). A similar task force should be convened to address the needs of adult student learners with representatives from the Bursar’s, Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid, Institutional Research, and Provost’s offices along with representation from faculty and academic schools. These students share many qualities with transfer students and could be the impetus for renewed efforts of completing the recommendations put forth by the transfer taskforce. It could also help to clarify the differences between adult students and transfer students and initiate new considerations for this population.
Dissemination of Findings

The benefits of this research are not so much in the findings of this particular study, but in the questions it evoked. Distribution of this information will be done on a limited basis and will mostly be utilized internally by the direct proprietors of the C2C program at the University of Mississippi. It will also be utilized to demonstrate the need for the allocation of resources and for future data collection and research that can have a more substantial impact on this and other degree completion programs. Finally, portions of it may be employed to educate administrators on the needs of adult students, their importance to the diversity of the institution, and solutions to provide better services for them.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional analysis of the population included in this study should be conducted. GPAs and earned credits need to be broken down into transfer, residential and overall numbers for each student to identify trends within those categories. Additionally, some data should be further analyzed for variances within groups and characteristics such as age within gender or age and last enrollment. Also, covariate analysis of the independent variables could be conducted to identify relationships between the variables.

The C2C program graduates should also be surveyed to gain a better understanding of where C2C program improvements should be made, how the University policies helped or hindered their matriculation, and what the students are doing with their newly obtained degrees. A survey will be developed and administered on an annual basis to all C2C graduates for the purpose of collecting information necessary for the advancement of the program and revising practices that can ease the process of completion for adult students.
Although a better understanding of this population was gained through this research, there is clearly the need for additional information on the C2C population. A current adult student population needs to be defined and identified so all adult students at the University can be better understood and thus served through a proportionate distribution of resources. It is assumed that adult students reside at and are best served on UM’s regional campuses. Although this may be true, two contradictions exist. First, the majority of students attending regional campuses are not adult learners and not all adult learners are able to attend a regional campus. Additionally, full-time faculty and staff working at the Oxford campus with access to the tuition assistance benefit and interested in completing an undergraduate degree are best served on the main campus even if they live closer to one of the regional campuses. A more thorough understanding of the population and their specific needs must be obtained to efficiently and effectively use resources to the benefit of adult learners.

Now that many C2C students who have enrolled in courses have completed at least one semester, careful data should be kept including numbers of credits to completion, average course loads, tuition paid, GPA trends after re-enrollment, amount of time to completion, and post-graduate use of their degree with regards to career. Qualitative research should also be conducted with regards to the admissions and enrollment process, services offered, perceived barriers, instructional satisfaction, and value of the C2C program. Adult transfer students who have not previously attended UM need to be identified so their experiences can be compared to returning students.
Changes in Personal or Professional Identity

In the past year and a half, I have gained an immense amount of erudition through the execution of my responsibilities as the UM C2C coach and my research for this DiP. Much of the anecdotal knowledge I have accumulated has been put into clear relief by applying the principles and theory collected during my literature review and data analysis. I have also discovered that serving C2C students has revived a passion within myself for serving students and increasing my awareness of the myriad of issues and concerns that surround us daily as practitioners. I once thought my toils on the chosen topic of my dissertation would extinguish any interest in continuing to expand my knowledge of adult students. It has instead steadied my resolve to affect changes on this campus that can broaden the diversity of our student population, influence the equitable distribution of our education resources in the state, and impact the self-esteem and accomplishment of its citizens. I never considered myself an activist, but I now find myself in the unique position of being an advocate; not just for an individual student, but also for those underserved and marginalized by the current system. I will move forward from here with a new understanding of the Complete 2 Compete program, adult learners, university policy and opportunities, and a clear image of what needs to be accomplished in the upcoming years.

SUMMARY

The Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) and the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) adopted a 2010 National Governors Association program to combat the disparities between educational attainment and the demand for a more educated workforce. This program, named Complete 2 Compete launched in the State of Mississippi in August of 2017 and has attracted over 1400 adult students.
To serve this population better, the University of Mississippi needs to consider how it can adapt student services designed for traditional students to serve returning adult students. Partnerships among stakeholders, adult career counseling, focus on learning outcomes, and faculty trained in andragogy can motivate, serve, and support adult learners. Additionally, programs designed to get returning students acclimated to the current learning environment that take place on weekends, on weekdays after 5:30, or online can ease transition anxiety. Finally, providing a coach or adult student services office that can connect students to services will foster a sense of belonging and remove barriers.

Recruiting adult students who have completed some college credit can help compensate for declining enrollment, deliver an educated workforce in a shorter period of time than possible with traditional students, improve the social and economic growth of the individual and State, and provide opportunities to rectify the inequity in college completion among marginalized populations.
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- Develop state-wide Complete 2 Compete program at the University of Mississippi
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- Advise students on best options for completing a degree tailored to each student's unique life situation
- Counsel students on best degree options for career and life goals
- Serve as an advocate for adult students on the University of Mississippi Oxford and regional campuses
- Assess student records for quickest completion option(s) according to each student's accomplishment
- Analyze processes for the implementation of the C2C program and revise as necessary to ensure accuracy and efficiency
- Coordinate with Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid, and Deans offices to insure effective processing of each student's records and degree
- Coordinate referral of C2C participants to other institutions as necessary
- Train support staff to manage C2C participant data
- Contribute to State of Mississippi C2C Program knowledge base
- Conduct research on C2C student population and institutional services for adult learners
- Collaborate with other departments to improve policies and procedures for adult learners
- Increase adult student retention and completion rates
ACADEMIC ADVISOR (Aug 2015-March 2017)
University of Mississippi Center for Student Success, Oxford, MS
- Provide educational guidance and assistance for up to 530 undeclared freshman to senior students by planning schedules, recommending courses and determining appropriate education solutions
- Advise and provide resources to students who require assistance selecting a degree program from various majors and pre-professional programs or do not meet educational requirements
- Connect at-risk students with programs and services
- Instruct EDHE 105 Freshman Year Experience course and EDLD 201 Career Decision Making
- Assist with retention of Freshman students using intrusive methods of intervention
- Serve as RebelWell Champion and assist with student financial aid appeals.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (July 2012-Aug 2015)
Indiana State University Career Center, Terre Haute, IN
- Advise students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members on choosing degree, career and/or focused experiential education options
- Serve as a liaison to the College of Nursing, Health and Human Services, Athletics, Library, Distance Education, Residential Life, Honors Program, Veterans Services, Disabled Student Services and LGBT students
- Develop and administer innovative Career Center programs and services including constructing resumes and cover letters, practicing interviews, developing job search skills, selecting internships and experiential education, negotiating job offers, transitioning from student to professional, and appropriately utilizing social media to enhance personal brand
- Initiate, cultivate, and maintain positive relationships with employers, faculty, and staff
- Administer all aspects of First Destination graduate tracking survey including increasing response rate, tracking and manipulating data, and interpreting/reporting results
- Develop career center curriculum for 120 hour graduate practicum program and screen, approve, train and evaluate participants
- Supervise full-time coordinator, graduate assistants and part-time student staff

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CAMPUS RECREATION/SEAHAWK ADVENTURES
(June 2001-Feb 2012)
University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC
- Administer comprehensive outdoor recreation program and manage daily operations encompassing equipment rental, team building course, climbing wall, adventure trips, instructional workshops, student leadership development and special events
- Supervise annual budget of $85,000 (generated & student fee), submit hiring documents, make travel arrangements and handle reimbursements, reserve facilities and permits, approve and submit payroll, purchase equipment, bill clients and coordinate marketing
- Hire, train, schedule, evaluate and supervise full-time challenge course coordinator and 25 part-time student and professional staff to assure consistent high quality and safety of services
- Expand, instruct and coordinate Leadership Training Initiative to assure students possessed skills and confidence to maximize their potential as leaders
• Create, coordinate and market special events including annual climbing wall competition, bike race, orienteering challenge and accessible/adaptive recreation workshops
• Promote, facilitate and lead trips, workshops, high/low challenge course and teambuilding programs
• Supervised research, bid, design and construction of high and low challenge (ropes) course
• Develop and execute policies and procedures including consultation with University Legal Council and Environmental Health and Safety
• Serve on Chancellor’s, University and Student Affair committees
• Instruct CPR/AED/First Aid/Wilderness and Remote First Aid certification courses

COORDINATOR OF OUTDOOR RECREATION CENTER & PROGRAMS (July 1995-June 2001)
Iowa State University Recreation Services, Ames, IA

- Administer daily operations of Outdoor Recreation Center & Programs facility, $500,000 equipment inventory, Climbing Wall and $150,000 budget
- Develop and execute policies and procedures
- Hire, train, schedule, evaluate and supervise 25 part-time student employees
- Plan, coordinate and implement the ORC&P trip/workshop programs
- Develop, instruct and coordinate Leadership Training Initiative Program
- Lead trips and instruct workshops
- Supervised research, bid, design and construction of high and low challenge (ropes) course
- Work with on campus and off campus entities through meetings, academic presentations, and university committees

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

INSTRUCTOR FOR SCHOOL OF EDUCATION (Aug 2015-Present)
University of Mississippi, University, MS

- Taught 3-credit freshman seminar course (EDHE 105) with approximately 30 students each semester
- Educated first-year students to adjust to the university, develop a better understanding of the learning process, acquire essential survival skills, and begin the major/career exploration process

INSTRUCTOR FOR SCHOOL OF EDUCATION (Jan 2016-May 2017)
University of Mississippi, University, MS

- Taught 3-credit Career Decision Making course (EDLD 201) with approximately 30 students each semester
- Educated undeclared freshman and sophomores to develop self-awareness and career/life planning skills through exposure to theories of career development, self-assessment instruments, decision-making models, and occupational exploration

INSTRUCTOR FOR UNIVERSITY COLLEGE (Aug 2005-Nov 2011)
University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC

- Taught 2-credit Freshman Seminar course (UNI 101) with approximately 30 students each semester
- Educated incoming freshman during their first semester regarding University resources available to promote student retention and success
INSTRUCTOR FOR COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC
- Taught 3 credit undergraduate level course on Leadership and Management of Parks and Recreation Services (REC 375)
- Educated junior and senior level undergraduates on human resources, facilities, equipment, and event management and leadership styles

INSTRUCTOR FOR COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC
- Taught 3-4 credit undergraduate level field course on NC Coastal Issues (REC 362/EVS 485)
- Cross listed recreation and environmental studies class
- 12-day field course focused on environmental impacts, planning, and resource management of recreation

PROCTOR (Aug 1996-June 2001)
Iowa State University Testing Services, Ames, IA
- Proctored graduate level academic placement exams GRE, GMAT, LSTAT

MEMBERSHIPS:
- Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi
- Golden Key International Honour Society
- National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)
- National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD)
- Career Development Professionals of Indiana (CDPI)
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)
- American College Personnel Association (ACPA)
- Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE)
  President 2001-2002
  Secretary 2000-2001
  National Student Representative 1993-1994
- National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
- University of Mississippi Academic Advising Network 2015-Present
- NACADA Annual Conference 2017, 2018
- Leadeercast 2017
- Appreciative Advising Workshop 2017
- College Life Coaching Institute 2016
- Southern Association of Colleges and Employers Annual Conference 2012
- National Association of Colleges and Employers Career Coaching Intensive 2014
- Career Development Professionals of Indiana State Conference 2012, 2013, 2014
- Leadership ISU 2012-2013
- Human Resources FMLA/ADA Workers Compensation 2013
- BaFa - BaFa Cultural Training 2013
• Human Resources Supporting Change 2012
• Strengths Finder Leadership Report 2012
• Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) for Suicide Prevention Training 2011
• LGBTQIA Training 2011
• B-GLAD Training 2007
• Safe Zone Training 2002
• NIRSA School of Sport Management 2000
• Iowa State University 12+ Leadership Development Program 1997-1998

COMMITTEES:
• University of Mississippi EDHE 105/305 Faculty Development Task Force
• University of Mississippi Student Affairs Professional Development Committee
• University of Mississippi Undeclared Task Force
• University of Mississippi Assessment Committee
• Indiana State University Career Center Website Development Committee
• University Of North Carolina Wilmington Student Life Committee
• University Of North Carolina Wilmington Welcome Week Committee
• University Of North Carolina Wilmington Family And Alumni Weekend Committee
• University Of North Carolina Wilmington Student Affairs Social Committee
• University Of North Carolina Wilmington Student Affairs Awards And Recognition Committee
• University Of North Carolina Wilmington Parking And Transportation Committee
• University Of North Carolina Wilmington Residency Appeals Committee
• Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education National Board of Directors
• Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education Student Development Committee
• Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education 2002 ICORE Conference Host Committee

TRAINING/CERTIFICATIONS:
• NACE Career Coach
• NIRSA Certified Recreational Sports Specialist (CRSS)
• Basic Low and High Challenge Course Facilitation - Cornerstone Designs
• UNCW Multicultural Competency-Basic and Advanced
• Wilderness First Aid – WMA/SOLO
• Wilderness First Responder - SOLO
• CPR/First Aid/AED/Wilderness and Remote First Aid Instructor – Red Cross
• NAUI Openwater I SCUBA Diver
• Level II Reiki Practitioner

COMMUNITY SERVICE:
Habitat for Humanity 2011-Present
Rock Climbing Club Advisor 2007-2012
Accessible Recreation Day 2003-2012
UNCW Commencement 2001-2012
UNCW Move-In 2001-2012
Annual Adopt a Family 2005-2011
TECHNOLOGY:

- Web Design - Dreamweaver, Contribute
- Training/Academic - Blackboard, Sharepoint
- Finance/Business - FRS, Banner
- Social Media - Facebook, Skype, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pintrest
- Assessment - Qualtrics, Excel, Access
- Advising - CSO, MySam

SELECT PRESENTATIONS:

“Teambuilding for Changing Organizations”
  UNCW Student Organization Leadership Conference 2009
“New ACCT Standards Roundtable” and “Adventurous Women”
  AORE Conference 2009
“Teambuilding for Changing Organizations”
  UNCW Student Organization Leadership Conference Make-Up 2009
“Collaborating on Accessible/Adaptive Recreation Programs” and “Considerations for Adapting Activities for People with Disabilities”
  AORE Conference 2008
“Student Development Workshop”
  AORE Pre-Conference 2008
“Improving Organizational Dynamics: Rejecting Stereotyping Amongst Members”
  NIRSA National Conference 2008
“Group Dynamics”
  UNCW Student Organization Leadership Conference 2007
“Interviews: Asking the Right Questions”
  AORE National Conference 2007
  UNCW Recreation Majors Regional Conference 2007
“Seahawk Nation” (Diversity Presentation)
  UNCW Freshman Orientation 2006-2007
“Creative Teambuilding”
  UNCW Greek Summit 2006
“Build Your Team”
  UNCW Student Organization Leadership Conference 2006
“Peaceful Conflict Resolution”
  UNCW Student Leadership Conference 2005
“Taking the “Mandatory” Out of Training”
  NIRSA National Conference 2003
“Managing Generation X”
  International Conference on Recreation & Education 1998