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THE UNMET NEEDS OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS AT  
HOLMES COMMUNITY COLLEGE ON THE GOODMAN CAMPUS

A Dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Education

in the Department of Higher Education

The University of Mississippi

by

KAREN RAY

December 2021

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a three-manuscript dissertation exploring the unmet needs for academic support of TRIO-eligible college students on the Goodman Campus of Holmes Community College (HCC) in Mississippi. The quantitative study uses descriptive and comparative statistic techniques to analyze two data sets, including the academic success of students who are qualified, applied for, and were selected for HCC TRIO SSS in 2017-18 and the success of students who are qualified, applied for, but were not selected for 2017-18 federal program. The aggregate academic successes, as measured by grade-point average (GPA), was the first comparison of the two groups. This study also compared the two groups' academic success by gender, which was the subsequent comparison.

This research study found that the GPAs of the students who are qualified, applied for, and were selected for the program were significantly higher than the students who are qualified, applied for, but were not selected for 2017-2018 HCC TRIO program. This manuscript focused on the attainments of students who participate in student support service programs, which including tutoring, financial literacy, mentoring, and other pre- and post-college services. They have higher GPAs and are more successful completing post-secondary education. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher provides several recommendations for practitioners to use.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Elijah and Jonah, my sons, for their sacrifice and understanding. This four-year process took quality time away from both of you, but you continued to be my biggest cheerleaders. I pray my journey shows you that you can accomplish anything with determination and dedication. To Chris, my husband. thank you for your unwavering encouragement and support throughout this process. I love you all, and I know the four of us can accomplish anything together.

## **Definitions of Terms and Concepts**

These terms are referenced throughout the research and define within the context of this paper.

**Attrition Rate** – The calculated rate of turnover of a large among a collected group of students. (Stein, 2018).

**College Navigator** – Provides college students with student service resources to help improve GPAs, retention and graduation rates (2021).

**College Retention** – The number of students who complete their degree at the institution where they began their college education (Spear, 2019).

**College Prep Curriculum** – Entry-level, college-credit courses leading to a certificate or degree without the need for college remedial or developmental courses (What is a College Preparatory Program?, 2019).

**Cultural Capital** – A person’s social material asset, such as knowledge, skills, or education (Sauntson, 2020).

**First-Generation (or First-Gen) College Student** – A student who the first of their family to attend or graduate a college (Are you a first-generation student?, n.d.).

**Financial Literacy** – Educational seminar that teaches financial management and related responsibilities. A financial literacy curriculum that consist of budgeting, investing, college grants and loan skills (What is Financial Literacy?, n.d.).

**Good Academic Standings** – A student’s grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or more on a 4.0 grading scale (Undergraduate Advising, 2019).

**Holistically** – The analysis of a person that consists of one’s social, mental, and physical characteristics (Loveless, 2021).

**Low-Income College Student** – Students whose family’s income is 20% of or lower than the national average income (Fain, 2019).

**Remedial Courses** – Courses that assist non-entry level college-ready students by offering skills that close fundamental gaps and does not count toward student graduation required course load (Jimenez, 2016).

**STEM** –The acronym for Science Technology, Engineering and Math field of study or programs (Defining Stem, n.d.).

**Student Support Service Programs** – Resources that assist college students, often meeting their academic, social, emotional, and financial needs (California Teachers Association, n.d.).

**Student-Centered** – Refers to people who engage students in varies activities and educational programs to support learning needs, aspirations, interests, or various backgrounds of individual students and/or groups of students (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

**Underrepresented Student** – Students who have a small fraction of representation on college campuses of the total college population (Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, n.d.).

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to my family, friends, and colleagues who continue to encourage me to continue and complete this educational journey. The countless phone calls, text messages, and emails helped me to move forward.

Thank you to all underserved students who strive to complete their education and become leaders of tomorrow. Also, deserving of thanks are all TRIO professionals and student support services specialists, who mentor and promote change, not just for TRIO students but for all students.

To students with learning disabilities – even though higher education can be challenging, never let the college environment interfere with your ability to succeed. As a student with a learning disability, I understand your struggles, and I hope to encourage you to strive forward constantly. There are always solutions to your obstacles.

To cohort III, you have played a key role in my educational experience at the University of Mississippi. I look forward to seeing the positive changes you will make in each of your higher education environments.

Finally, I want to thank the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Phillis George, Dr. Susan McClelland, and Dr. Patrick Perry. I want to especially show my gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. George McClellan, for never giving up on me. Dr. M.'s guidance and dedication to this process were unwavering. Thank you, committee, for all your encouragement and support that will never be forgotten.

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**MANUSCRIPT ONE**

## **Manuscript One**

There is a significant difference in graduation rates among all undergraduate students when compared to similar rates for first-generation, low-income, and disabled students. These latter groups of students are underrepresented in institutions of higher education across the United States. While graduation rates for all students increased from 56.7% to 62% in 2013, in this same year, the rate for underrepresented students increased from 43.8% to 50.1% (Camera, 2015). It should be noted that while the percentage has increased for underrepresented students, the gap is not decreasing as quickly as the rates for the overall majority.

Community colleges play an important role in serving historically underrepresented students because they offer lower tuition rates, more flexibility in admittance, and often do not require the rigorous test scores that many traditional colleges do. In fact, community colleges can provide American students with an education that leads to graduation and more importantly, an established career. However, students must work to create a viable pathway to achieve these goals. Unfortunately, some of the more immediate issues that make this a challenge are the low completion rates at community colleges. Studies have shown that less than 40% of students attending a community college ever complete a degree or certificate within the six-year enrollment period (Bailey et al., 2015), and approximately 54% of community college students do not graduate or transfer to a four-year institution of higher education within the same six-years (NCES, 2019). The literature on higher education offers several possible explanations for the disparity of graduation rates. Findings suggest that some students come from families who do not support their decision to attend college (Nickel, 2015); others may lack the socio-cultural

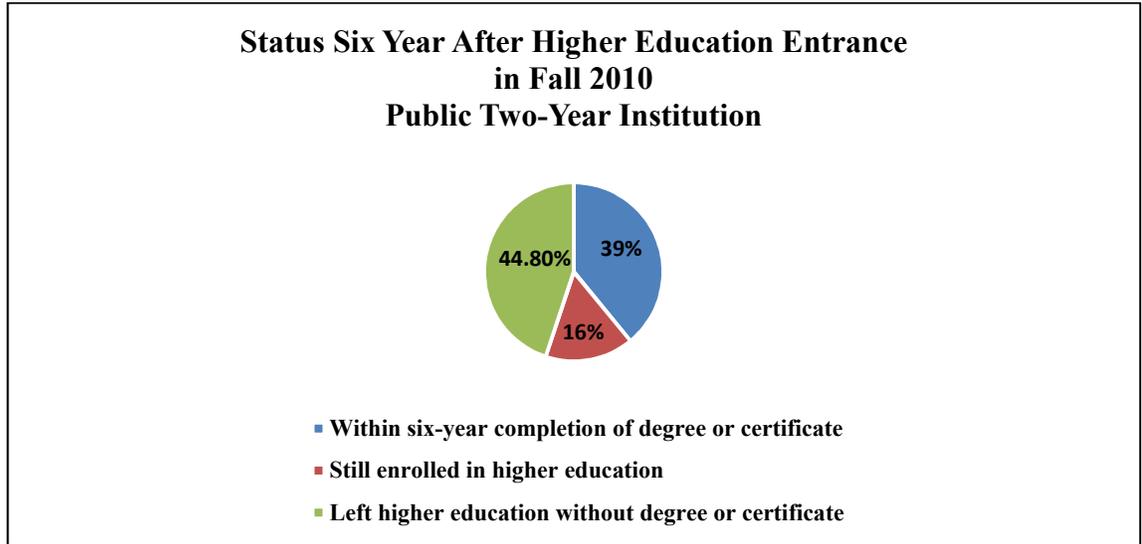
capital associated with higher education (Bourdieu, 2016); further, some students are unable to afford the final costs of a higher education, even at reduced rates (Nickel, 2015).

Community college students face significant barriers when they claim a lower socio-economic status and are first-generation college students. It has been noted that 81% of community college students do not enroll at two-year-institutions for occupational training (Dougherty et al., 2017). Rather, students often intend to transfer to a four-year, post-secondary institution. Recent studies show that a small fraction, 21.1% of students, successfully transfer which is often due to a lack of preparation at community college (Dougherty, Lahr, & Morest, 2017). This is often attributed to the students' lack of confidence and the ability to adapt to the pressures that a harder educational program offers at a four-year educational institution (Dougherty et al., 2017).

Community colleges play a different role than four-year institutions do in students' education. Community colleges have a relatively high number of non-traditional students, including those who are low-income or sometimes first-generation students, who are seeking an opportunity to improve their lives and their family's socio-economic conditions. Despite students' efforts, many community college students do not attain baccalaureate degrees at the same rates as do first-time students entering four-year institutions (Dougherty et al., 2017). There exists a gap of attainment between first-time students, who attend two-year institutions (Figure 1.1), and students who attend four-year institutions (Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.1**

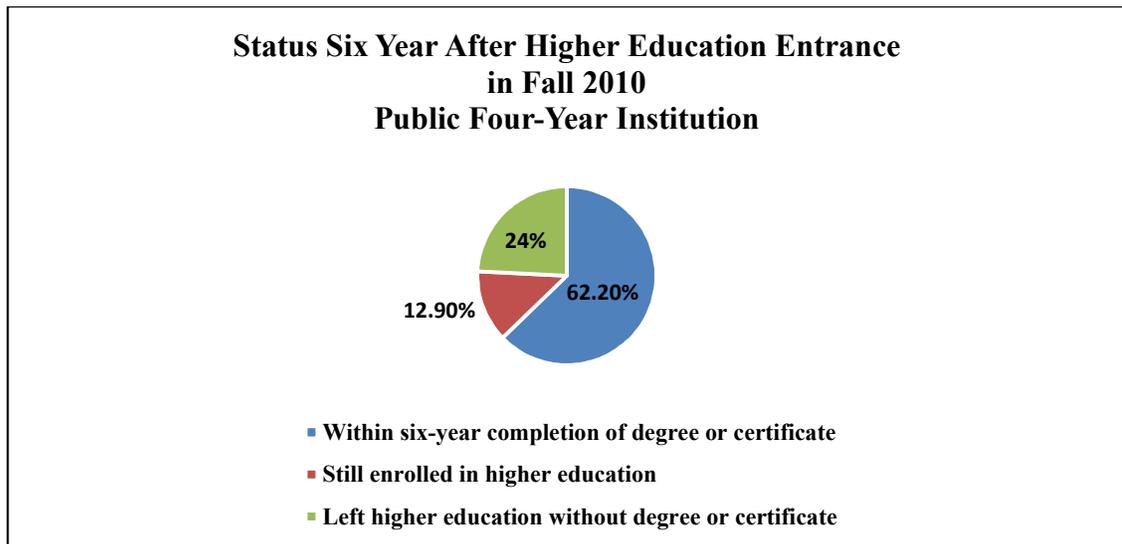
*Status Six Year After Higher Education Entrance in Fall 2010*



*Note.* “Status Six Year After Higher Education Entrance in Fall 2010” Adapted from Shapiro, et al., 2017. *A National View of Student attainment rates - Fall 2010 cohort (Signature Report No. 12b)*. Herndon: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

**Figure 1.2**

*Status Six Year After Higher Education Entrance in Fall 2010*



*Note.* “Status Six Year After Higher Education Entrance in Fall 2010” Adapted from Shapiro, et al., 2017. *A National View of Student attainment rates - Fall 2010 cohort (Signature Report No. 12b)*. Herndon: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Many post-secondary institutions, including community colleges, have invested significant time and money into providing remedial courses and support programs to help their underserved student populations succeed in college. Some community colleges have experimented with institutionally supported learning communities. These programs provide support, including mental health and additional financial resources, to those who need them (Sawhill, 2013). However, without consistent and adequate financial backing these programs tend to fail in the final analysis (Sawhill, 2013).

## **TRIO**

Over the years, the U.S. federal government has provided support for programs intended to address the inequality in the American college education system for first-generation, low-income, and disabled students. TRIO is one such program. TRIO, which takes its name from its initial composition as three programs in the late 1960s, refers to a group of federally funded programs created to help underserved students in institutions of higher education across the United States.

The first TRIO program, Upward Bound, was created within the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 as a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society domestic policy agenda. It was intended to strengthen resources for high school students in higher education by providing financial assistance in post-secondary schools (2018). The second program, Talent Search, was created in 1965 and was aimed at underrepresented middle school and high school students which included the students' families to help decrease drop-out rates from this group. It did so to provide personal, financial, career and academic counseling (2018). The third program, Student Support Services (SSS), was created in 1968 and aimed at assisting underrepresented students' retention and graduation rates in higher education. Five additional programs, Educational

Opportunity Centers (EOC), Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program (McNair), and Upward Bound Math/Science and Veterans Upward Bound, were created in the years thereafter.

### **TRIO SSS**

TRIO SSS was initially called “Special Services for Disadvantaged Students” before being updated as the Student Support Services (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.). This program is awarded to higher education institutions through a federal grant-writing competition and supports more than 200 students at a single institution for a five-year grant cycle (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.). The objectives of TRIO SSS are to encourage students in the program to stay enrolled, maintain good academic standing, and graduate or transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution. TRIO SSS provides academic tutoring and assistance with all college financial aid and grant resources at both two-year and four-year public and private higher education institutions. The program also provides academic, personal, career, financial information, counseling, and workshops (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.). Students involved in the program are also exposed to cultural activities and events.

TRIO SSS programs have contributed to higher retention and graduation rates that similarly disadvantaged students do not achieve at institutions that do not participate in TRIO SSS program (2008). Engle and Tinto (2008) found TRIO SSS to be a vital resource for first-generation, low-income, and disabled students who employ the above-described interventions.

Furthermore, the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study found that TRIO SSS programs had a significant positive impact in helping students succeed in higher education. Studies have shown that within the first year of TRIO SSS, students earn more academic credits by as much as 6% of which 12% are more likely to be retained into their second year. They also

demonstrate a 7% higher GPA as compared to other underrepresented students who did not participate in a TRIO SSS program (NCES, 2019). In 1997, a Westat Report found that students in TRIO SSS programs are likely to remain enrolled in institutions of higher education, accrue more college credits, and earn higher grade point averages (GPAs) (2008) than similar students who were not accepted into the TRIO SSS program. The same study encouraged policymakers to improve opportunities in education for first-generation, low-income, and disabled college students.

Students tend to perform better when they have a reliable support system (2008). TRIO SSS gives students opportunities to develop leadership skills by participating in different committees, meetings, and community-based service projects. When students become leaders, they can organize and influence other students, which, in turn, allows them to be more successful in college. TRIO SSS provides a sense of community for first-generation, low-income, and disabled students. The TRIO SSS students tend to create a community with each other through common experiences; they identify with each other and support one another (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.).

A recent case study found that students attending TRIO SSS financial literacy workshops improved their ability to make their own personal financial decisions (Yang, 2018). TRIO SSS-sponsored financial literacy workshops, within the first year, offer students workshops focused on credit cards, student and private loans, emergency funds, and budgeting (Yang, 2018). The findings showed that TRIO SSS students, when supported by positive enforcement from TRIO professional staff, boosted their financial literacy and developed lifelong financial knowledge. These same efforts can be replicated to increase TRIO SSS students' GPAs and can help students gain employment after graduation (Yang, 2018).

## **TRIO Funding**

Despite being an effective program, federal funding has been unstable. Historically, TRIO has endured financial instability when it comes to securing and retaining future federal funding. During their respective terms, Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush proposed steep cuts to TRIO that were pushed back by Congress (Advocacy, 2018). The President Trump's administration was on the same track. The past Secretary of Education is seeking to eliminate funds for SSS, two other TRIO programs, EOC, and McNair in future project years, with those funds instead "transitioning into" the state block grant (Advocacy, 2018). If this happens, TRIO EOC, McNair, and SSS will be eliminated unless the program's local institutions continue to fund the programs out of their institutions' operating costs. Consequently, there will be no money from the Department of Education, as funds will be funneled to the states (Advocacy, 2018).

Additionally, levels of state funding are not consistent, even at higher education institutions, and, more specifically, in Mississippi. More than \$107 million has been lost to Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) since 2016, with a 13% drop in funding (Rand, 2018). While student enrollment has increased across higher education in Mississippi, IHL has decreased funding by \$2,085 per student (Rand, 2018). If TRIO SSS funding is forced to move to a state formula block grant, it could eventually result in the elimination of TRIO programs across the state of Mississippi.

## **The Case for Holmes Community College**

Holmes Community College (HCC), a public, accredited two-year community college, was founded in 1925 and serves nine counties in central Mississippi with additional campuses in Grenada, Goodman, and Ridgeland (Holmes Community College, 2017). HCC is the only open

enrollment post-secondary institution in the college's service area. HCC offers a total of 46 two-year degree programs and three certificate programs (Holmes Community College, 2017). Enrollment for the fall of 2017 totaled 5,612, making HCC the fifth largest of the 15 community colleges in the state (Holmes Community College, 2017).

As one of the largest community colleges in Mississippi, HCC serves over 5,000 students per year across three campuses and two centers (Holmes Community College, 2017). The original campus, which continues to serve as the main campus in Goodman, is located in Holmes County, and enrolls some 1,200 students per year. It has been home to a TRIO SSS program for over 40 years (Holmes Community College, 2017). Juxtaposed against this is the fact that the HCC Goodman location is in a failing K-12 school district, which has been named the poorest county in the state of Mississippi. Holmes County's unemployment rate is 14.3 percent compared to Mississippi employment rate is 6.7% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Holmes County poverty rate is 33.4% compared to Mississippi poverty rate of 19.6% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Many of the students from HCC's nine-county district area come to the Holmes Goodman Campus unprepared for college-level coursework (Pettus, 2021). The nine-county local school district also lacks resources to assist with college preparation; consequently, HCC Goodman has a high number of graduating high school students enrolled in College Prep curriculum at HCC (Holmes Community College, 2017). The staff and faculty posit that more than half of the HCC student population is eligible for TRIO SSS, due to Goodman's footprint. This is further backed by local demographic data which shows that the median household income is \$21,504 per year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Dr. Jackie Hale, a counselor at HCC Goodman, asserts that HCC students have limited experiences with different groups of people and different cultures. Because of the lack of socio-

cultural experiences, students often misinterpret other students and instructors, and, in turn, are misunderstood by others. Further, HCC students are not exposed to a variety of career options and can be unrealistic about their personal strengths and weaknesses. These same students typically do not research careers nor seek out mentors, role models or advisers, who can help them plan for their futures. Over 70% of SSS students graduate and are tracked through TRIO's Blumen database tracking system. These students often transfer to an accredited university or launch their careers, but on average, only 29% are HCC students (J. Hale, personal communication, February 21, 2018).

Linda Alexander-Jones, the director of TRIO's SSS, said, "in prioritizing school, work, and family, most HCC students place work and family as their two top priorities" (L. Alexander-Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2018). Alexander-Jones added that though many HCC students are striving to attain a degree while working towards advancing their careers, it is imperative that they work simultaneously to support their families. However, due to the challenging job market, several students are forced to work odd-hours jobs that pay minimum wage. These same HCC students often are unaware of financial aid assistance, scholarship opportunities, and how best to navigate the application process. In addition, the parents of HCC students often lack the knowledge about critical resources and how best to seek information to help their college-aged students. These same parents may find the application process difficult to understand and may not comprehend the importance of their role in the process. HCC students may understand they need a certain number of college hours to graduate, but the same students may fail to understand the specific courses required to graduate. HCC students struggle with completing the necessary steps to transfer to a four-year senior college. (L. Alexander-Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2018) These students also often fail to research admission

and course requirements, as well as financial aid, housing, orientation, and tuition information (L. Alexander-Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2018). Many students also do not visit a four-year senior college before applying for admission. The TRIO SSS program helps students, and their parents address all the aforementioned (L. Alexander-Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

Alexander-Jones asserts that the TRIO SSS is the only Student Support Service program that looks at the “whole” student—emotionally, academically, and spiritually—at HCC. In fact, HCC has been working to create a writing center for students who need extra support in English. However, the college department lacks the budget for a tutoring program, except for personal tutors provided for the football team.

TRIO SSS offers tutoring in all college courses for their more than 200 participants which, incidentally, is the maximum number of students who can enroll in TRIO SSS at any given time (L. Alexander-Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2018). The college only has one academic counselor to help approximately 1,000 students, of which 46% are minorities (Holmes Community College, 2017).

HCC’s TRIO SSS staff recruits participants who are first-generation, low-income, and disabled students working toward A.A. or A.A.S. degrees (developmental courses included). These students will often have wide-ranging GPAs from 1.65 to 4.00. Through tutoring sessions and course evaluations that are conducted throughout each semester, there has been an increase in the number of students improving their GPAs (L. Alexander-Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2018). The long-term outcome for the TRIO SSS students is placed on higher graduation and transfer rates (L. Alexander-Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

## **Statement of The Problem**

This research project explores the unmet needs among students at HCC on the Goodman Campus for student support services like those offered to students enrolled in other programs in the TRIO. The assertion is that every student should have access to the necessary tools and resources that help to improve the success of obtaining a college degree. Just over 200 students are accepted into TRIO SSS, a number limited by the current Federal funding mandates, with access provided to a private computer lab with free printing services, tutors in every course offered by HCC, additional scholarships, college transfer trips, and educational and cultural events and trips. TRIO SSS students tend to have higher retention, graduation, and transfer rates compared to the same demographics of 203 students at HCC Goodman that are not accepted into the TRIO SSS program (L. Alexander-Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

## **Positionality**

As a higher education researcher and practitioner, my views and convictions have influenced my problem of practice. As a female first-generation student and past TRIO professional, I have experienced and assist underserved students and their challenges. The participants in this study represent underserved students who received student support services and underserved students who did not receive student support services. The assumptions brought forth in this section are closely tied to my personal, professional, and educational backgrounds along with my future career ambitions, and the implications related to the study.

## **Personal Background**

In August of 1969, my parents, Max and Joan Ray, moved to the city of Calgary, located in the province of Alberta, Canada from their island home in Kingston, Jamaica. This occurred shortly after my father completed an associate degree in agriculture from The School of

Agriculture of Jamaica. Upon his arrival in Canada, my father studied mechanics at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary, where he graduated from the program in April 1971. Simultaneously, my mother pursued secretarial studies in her last year of high school while in Jamaica and was employed as a bank teller for the rest of her working career in Canada. It should also be noted that both my maternal and paternal grandfathers earned associate degrees in agriculture from The School of Agriculture of Jamaica. My paternal grandmother also pursued the secretarial arts her last year of high school in Jamaica and was a successful executive secretary until she retired at the age of 68. My maternal grandmother attended the School of Nursing and Midwives in London England, where she became a registered nurse. Upon her return to Jamaica, she practiced nursing across the island. As evidenced by my own family, people can be successful without having pursued a four-year college degree.

As a young child, my parents were quick to realize that I had problems with reading and writing skills. They provided resources for me by sending me to a language arts specialist throughout my elementary school experience. However, in junior and senior high school, I performed as a “lower than average” student without much academic support. I was unsuccessful in my first year at Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta, and was soon thereafter diagnosed with a form of visual dyslexia. It should be noted that visual dyslexia occurs when people experience problems while reading and writing and is often characterized as the inability to translate printed language symbols into meaning and is most often associated with reading and writing speed. Despite the diagnosis and offers of assistance, I often felt defeated. Like many students who struggle to complete their education, I decided ultimately that there was a place for me in the workforce instead. I was soon able to get a successful job in telecommunications as a member of Administrative Support Personnel at a national investment firm.

## **Professional and Graduate Educational Background**

As I continued to navigate my professional career, I returned to school at the age of 27. It began with a one-year certificate course at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) in Calgary in the field of information technology. This hands-on course was well-suited for me, given my “disability,” as it required little writing, which I perceived as my biggest weakness. After graduation, I received an internship which led to a job with IBM Canada. After several years with IBM in Calgary, I was transferred to the head office in Toronto, Canada. With six successful years on the job, my position was made redundant. Shortly after, I was hired by Lafarge North American for six months until I moved from Canada to the United States to get married. After three months of living in the United States, I was hired by Hewlett Packard; however, in 2008, when the IT market started to move overseas, I was laid off yet again.

I was offered a job as a financial aid advisor at a local community college in Booneville, Miss. This was my first introduction to the difficult challenges that first-generation students experience with no real guidance on how best to navigate challenges.

As a staff member, I took advantage of free tuition and, at the age of 36, I once again enrolled in school as a first-generation, non-traditional, and “disabled” student. It would prove to be a challenging and rewarding year and a half. During that time, I received my associate degree in business technology with a GPA of 3.35. I soon enrolled at the University of Mississippi to pursue general studies with three minors: criminology, sociology, and business. After a year and a half, I earned my bachelor's degree in general studies. I considered myself fortunate to have had minimal writing assignments during my studies so when I did receive the occasional one, I relied on friends to assist me in the writing and editing process. Ironically, though it existed, I was unaware and was never apprised of a SSS program or a writing center at either institution.

I soon developed the confidence to pursue my MBA at the University of North Alabama through their distance learning program. But due to my low GRE scores, I was admitted on a probationary basis. I worked and studied for two months to sit for what I considered one of the hardest exams I had ever taken.

In my MBA program, I was surprised at how very little writing was required. So, without this impediment, I navigated the course with ease. It was during this time that I realized how many non-traditional students were returning to school and continuing their education. Tinto (1993) asserts that the number of non-traditional students is on the rise and will continue to rise in the future. Though this may be true, the resources available to non-traditional students remain inadequate as well as the information for students to navigate service programs. I was certainly unaware of any academic assistance that may have been available to me at another post-secondary institution.

During the process of completing my MBA, my family moved again, and in August 2014, I began working in a TRIO SSS program at HCC in Goodman, Mississippi. Through this organization, I saw the needs of a large population of high school students that the current public educational system was failing before they even went to college. A group of coworkers and I began working to improve not only our students' educational options but also to provide them with a clear path to their future. Given the resources I lacked in pursuit of my own undergraduate degree, it made me realize that I could be an advocate and contribute to a better way forward for the next generation of students.

Through TRIO, I was given membership in various (state and national) organizations like Mississippi Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (MAEOPP), Southeastern States: Southeastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel

(SAEOPP), and the Council of Opportunity in Education. SAEOPP provided excellent workshops to improve TRIO professional skills to better assist our students. TRIO professionals across the country attended these events to discuss our programs' successes, failures, and enhancements to help one another give more to our students. These various TRIO SSS events also helped in our advocacy to federal and state government members, encouraging them to improve policies that provided TRIO SSS students with more resources that would enhance their educational experiences. The clear barrier was that SSS only permitted 200 student participants, and therefore we could not serve the needs of all the students at the University of Mississippi. I soon participated in the interest conference call and then applied for the program. It was the group interview which convinced me that this was the program for me; like-minded, higher-education professionals sharing ideas, theories, and methods for improving higher education and was similar to what I experienced in SSS.

During the summer of 2017, I took two prerequisite courses: educational research and educational statistics. To be fully transparent, educational statistics was very difficult, and writing the final educational research paper was even more challenging. Still, I was determined and worked hard passing the course after having received a B. I, however, grew concerned with my ability to handle writing a Dissertation in Practice (DiP). In the first semester, our class had 31 enrolled students and there appeared to be an abundance of writing. To say I struggled with the class with not an exaggeration. Toward the end of the semester, I decided to enlist the help of the University of Mississippi Graduate Writing Center. It was the assistance that I received at the Writing Center which marked the turning point in my experience in higher education. It had been the first time that I had ever used a student success program to improve my academic standing. With instructors' critiques and numerous appointments with the writing center, my writing

improved and eventually gave me the confidence to continue my DIP path.

### **Practitioner Statement**

Given my own personal experiences in navigating my education and career, I firmly believe I can make a difference in higher education in the United States and across the globe. I am particularly looking forward to breaking the glass ceiling in the American South for women and for those who have similar backgrounds – both from the Caribbean and Canada. I have dedicated the last nine years of my life, through focused hard work, to the American Southern College Education System. I strongly believe that I will continue to make a positive difference in the lives of my students, regardless of their background. I want to help them reach their full potential.

I am a life-long learner and believe I will always be working to further my education while continuing to challenge myself academically to reach my full potential. In the final analysis, this will also help me to develop into a strong leader in service of both my students and my community. I believe the Higher Education program will give me an edge in Higher Education Leadership.

I recently worked at Alabama A&M University, an 1890 land-grant institution, which serves a minority population in a small urban area. I was the Project Coordinator for the College's Upward Bound Program, a five-year federal grant TRIO Program. This program is an academic outreach and student services program designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. This program further serves and assists students who are low-income, first-generation, and students with disabilities to help them graduate from high school and transition to a four-year institution. While this particular TRIO program is zoned for more than 108 participants, it could clearly serve more students.

Currently, I work for Drake State Community and Technology College (Huntsville, Ala.) as the Director of Work Force Development. Together, with Drake's Student Services Department, I want to improve the educational environment and help students reach their full potential. As I was a first-generation, disabled student once upon a time, as I am still today, I am passionate about helping students, especially low-income, first generation and disabled students.

While I love my work environment and my students, I know there is much more to achieve. I am hard-working, patient, and extremely persistent. To continue to help my students now and in the future, I wish to become a more dynamic leader.

The Higher Education Doctoral Program can help me bring higher education into the futures of low-income, first generation and disabled students. My strong background in information technology and higher education will help me bring advanced technology to higher education in the community college environment. Education should be exciting and innovative, while providing discipline and furthering the learning process. This advancement could aid in increasing enrollment to community colleges.

Thus far, my various experiences working in the educational system have been positive. I have helped students maintain good academic standings and assisted them in advancing towards graduation. By identifying students' short- and long-term academic and personal goals, I can provide strategies for students to achieve all their educational goals through tutoring services, workshops, and other activities in a dedicated and supportive climate. Implementation of these strategies promotes student academic success and encourages positive community college experiences. This, in turn, promotes college retention and graduation rates in student success programs; students are successfully transitioning to the next level of higher education. I believe I will foster the development of future intelligent educational leaders.

I anticipate immersing myself in classes like Recent Developments in Educational Practice, Education & Society and Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Leadership. One of my long-term goals is to serve as a Director of the Student Success Program. Student Success Programs are a vital component for increasing retention and graduation rates at post-secondary institutions.

I believe graduating from the Higher Education: Doctor of Education program will help me achieve my ultimate career aspirations. There will be no stopping me from moving forward in serving present and future generations of successful students.

### **Assumptions**

Through my doctoral studies, four years of work experience in the HCC, and my experience at the TRIO SSS program, I have discovered that there is a large demographic of students in higher education in need of more services. I have several assumptions about the TRIO SSS, the academic performance of students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman Campus, and the TRIO-eligible students who applied to participate in the program but were turned away due to capacity constraints and the results it will generate.

First, I assume that there is a higher percentage of the HCC TRIO SSS student population with academic performance in good academic standing than there are HCC TRIO-eligible students, who applied to participate in the program but were turned away due to capacity constraints. Finally, I assume the HCC TRIO SSS students will have a higher GPA average than HCC TRIO-eligible students who applied to participate in the program but were turned away due to capacity constraints and the results it will generate.

## **Development of Assumptions**

My professional career and experience with HCC TRIO SSS have served to guide me in developing my problem of practice. I have learned about the barriers that first-generation, low income, and disabled students face in accomplishing their academic goals. This study has shown me that TRIO SSS makes a difference in the Holmes County District. HCC TRIO SSS provides an environment where students can learn both academic and personal skills in order to be successful in college both at HCC and, once they transfer, at a four-year institution. The skills acquired through TRIO SSS also carry students into careers long after college. In my own case, being a TRIO SSS professional has allowed me the opportunities and experiences to grow through professional development, experience intercultural exchanges, and gain confidence as an employee as well as a student. I now have clear insights into issues that TRIO SSS students face and the federal policies that impact TRIO SSS students' retention and graduation rates at HCC.

### **Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate**

This study was conducted in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements of a doctoral program that adheres to the principles of the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED) of equity, ethics, and social justice (About Us, 2014). This study, conducted through the Department of Higher Education doctoral program at the University of Mississippi, focuses on how SSS improves the lives of first-generation, low income, and disabled students at HCC. SSS offers educational, financial, and social assistance to students and promotes equity, ethics, and social justice (About US, 2014).

There is an assumption at HCC that the TRIO SSS program is only for low-income students enrolled in remedial courses. Typically, remedial courses offered at community colleges have a high percentage of ethnic students. This creates a negative stigma about the TRIO SSS

program, which has a higher retention and graduation rate than HCC's general student retention and graduation rates. If SSS provided a larger group of students with academic support through computer labs with printing access, specialized workshops, available tutoring, and study skills instruction, these additions might help increase HCC's general student retention and graduation rates. This type of support prepares students to become tomorrow's leaders. If SSS programs can provide education services to a larger number of first-generation, low income, and disabled students, they can, in turn, convince their families, which may eventually convince their communities that higher education is worth pursuing (About Us, 2014).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework gives guidance to professionals in their educational research. There are three elements to the conceptual framework for this study that explains the more significant need for unmet academic programs. This study will discuss the Gallup student success model, support services for students, and community colleges.

### **The Gallup Student Success Model**

The Gallup Student Success Model was developed in 2010 and used to identify students' strengths, hopes, engagement, and well-being to promote success among college students, improve overall well-being, and allow their educators to achieve better class attendance, higher GPAs, graduation and job placement rates (Lopez, 2014). The Gallup Student Success Model will show that successful student development outcomes positively affect the students and the institutions they attend.

When using the Gallup Student Success Model, it assists educator to balance personal wellbeing and academic success when developing student strength identifiers. Gallup's first student strength identifies students' positive traits and uses the growth model to develop

students' abilities (Lopez, 2014). Developing these students' strengths identifiers enables students to better achieve their goals and succeed in both their college courses and work. Educational administrators motivate students to establish goals, self-esteem, optimism, and problem-solving abilities (Lopez, 2014). Teaching students to visualize and achieve, despite outside problems and stress, allows students to hope, along with the ability to look at the good that the future can bring. That same hope encourages students to be more engaged in the college's academic and extracurricular activities. Students who have hope and the sense that they can improve their lives, generally do not drop out and instead, complete their education. With hope, students may see the future in a brighter light and believe they have the power to develop a prosperous future through fostered academic success.

Students can work interdependently and independently to develop hope and engagement that increases their overall well-being. When a student feels positive about himself or herself and the future, that student gains a sense of well-being. They see the light at the end of the tunnel positively and perform much better academically. Students who have a high sense of well-being generally have a 10% higher GPA than a student who possesses a lower sense of well-being (Lopez, 2014). There are similar studies that argue that arming community college students with personal services to help encourage them while also offering personal and financial support helps community college students to complete their program of study.

The Gallup Student Success Model shows that when college administrators develop students' strengths, this strength will produce more hope in students, and students will then become more engaged, which will give them a higher sense of well-being and bring an outcome of academic success (Lopez, 2014). The Gallup Student Success Model is the goal for all students at HCC. Student services programs aim to develop students holistically, through

academic and personal counseling, and educational and cultural activities. These tools contribute to students having all the assets of The Gallup Student Success Model.

### **Support Services for Students**

Sedlacek (2012) underscored the importance of students having a strong sense of community on campus, long-range goals, and leadership development opportunities. Support services are programs for students who need academic support to help improve their non-cognitive skills, as do many first-year students. These internal, strong senses of self, include academic behavior, academic mindset, positive self-concept, social and emotional skills, self-appraisal, among other attributes. The development of these non-cognitive skills is critical to their success.

Sedlacek's (2012) study found that students who had realistic self-valuation awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses, long-term goals, strong support, leadership, and a sense of community are statistically more successful in succeeding in and graduating from an institution of higher learning. Support services programs help students realize both their strengths and weaknesses. The tools gained in these programs encourage students to develop a sense of self-discovery and self-development. Long-range goals improve students' visualization of their future success in college and beyond. Support services show students how to understand the effort and input that they must put forth to achieve their goals.

Britto and Rush (2013) revealed how retention and graduation rates could be improved at Lone Star Online College in Houston, Texas with the creation of student support service to support the institutions online programs. Dropout rates for online programs are seven times higher than for in-person courses (2013). Britto and Rush (2013) highlighted the creation of a support service program that emulates a traditional, in-person campus. This program includes an

online orientation, advising, tutoring, readiness assessment, and technical support. The online orientation is offered to help students prepare for online learning technology and to improve their confidence levels. The orientation creates a community for students to connect with their peers, instructors, and administrators alike. The students learn how to schedule classes, apply for financial aid, and purchase books and other materials through this orientation program. The Lone-Star Support Services Program offers online, 24/7 advising with a click of a visible online button, which activates a live text screen so a student can be registered, find course descriptions, read requirements, add, or drop classes, and access transcript information, among other actions.

The Lone Star Student Support Services Program provides 24/7 instructional tutoring, with a Technical Support Help Desk covering subjects such as business, mathematics, sciences, English, and various foreign language courses. Students can connect through a live text box to ask questions, and/or students can make appointments for face-to-face meetings with a tutor at any one of Lone Star's Campuses. Student Support Services use a Smarter Measure Learning Readiness Indicator to give Lone Star students the opportunity and option to self-assess their potential for success in an online course (2013). This assessment is shared with the instructor to let them know that the student may need extra support for a specific class. The Technical Support Help Desk is part of the Support Service Program, and a two-tier level support technician is available for any technical challenges the student may have in navigating the process.

The Lone Star Student Support Service has two main goals: (a) to provide their students with the same services as students who attend a four-year university, while offering the same experiences as an in-person student and (b) to increase the retention and graduation rates for online students (2013).

Students enrolled in brick-and-mortar programs are now requesting online advisors due to the perceived efficacy of Lone Star Student Support Services. As a result, the institution has increased online advising hours by over half.

### **Community Colleges**

Community colleges have a great impact on occupational education, adult education, and remedial education in America. However, community college students are less likely to successfully complete a four-year baccalaureate degree. The baccalaureate gap between first-time enrollees is 70%-degree attainment in a four-year institution compared to a 26%-degree attainment for community college students (Dougherty, 1992). Community college students are traditionally first-generation, low-income, ethnic students from poorly performing school districts. These factors contribute to the baccalaureate gap.

When comparing students from similar socio-economic status with similar personal and high school backgrounds, students who enroll in community colleges prior to four-year institutions, graduate with their baccalaureate degrees 11% to 19% less than students with the same characteristics enrolling straight into a four-year institution (Dougherty, 1992). Community colleges experience higher dropout rates than do four-year colleges. (Dougherty, 1992) Tinto (2012) theorized that students who enter a community college as their first college experience receive inadequate academic and social integration compared to the first-time students entering a four-year institution (Dougherty, 1992). Students are exposed to a more positive admittance process at a four-year post-secondary than at a two-year post-secondary. Students enrolled in community colleges often participate less in college activities and have fewer academic expectations from faculty, less incentives to finish college, and less overall institutional support than students would receive at a four-year university (Dougherty, 1992).

Community college students who do graduate face the challenge of transferring to a new institution to attain a baccalaureate degree. This often creates a transfer gap. Roughly 15% of community college students transfer to a four-year institution (Dougherty, 1992). The transfer gap occurs because community college students have a fear of leaving their community and continuing their education somewhere new (Doughery, 1992). First-time four-year students only have to experience that change once and are most often adjusted to their new college surroundings and expectations by their second or third year of attending college (Doughery, 1992).

It is evident that Community College students who transfer need more academic support and advising on transferring instead of the ready-to-work training that most community programs provide. Community college students need to be provided with more financial support and baccalaureate pathways to transfer to a four-year university. Structural reforms of the community college administration and partnerships with four-year institutions are possible solutions to help community colleges limit the baccalaureate gap between two-year and four-year college students.

Saint-Louis et al., (2015) illustrated how one New York Community College focused on developing and strengthening first-year freshman reading and writing skills. This focus improves retention, graduation, and transfer rates. At this school, it is mandatory that all full-time, first-year students enroll into an official Student Support Services Program that promotes engagement and retention. The community college limited their major and elective offerings so that they would have clear steps to retention, graduation, transfer, and/or employment. To further support students, the college created peer-mentoring and embedded advising through the students' academic progress. There are mandatory seminars, evaluations, summer bridge programs and

research classes to build college-level coursework skills. Florida's College System created a Student Service Program that offers success plans to their community college students in 2013. In the years following this program's establishment, the school's retention rate rose by 9.4% and beat the national rate by 11.1% (2015). Administrators found that providing students with extra student services improves the development of skills and adjustments to college after leaving high school (2015). Making available peer mentors who complement diverse students creates a meaningful synergy that promotes productivity and success in college (2015).

### **Literature Review**

This literature review gives guidance to professionals in their educational research. There are three elements of the literature review for this study that highlight the significant need for Student Support Services programs. This study will discuss TRIO Student Support Services, Self-Authorship, and General Causal Model for Assessing the Effects of Differential College Environments on Student Learning and Cognitive Development.

#### **TRIO Student Support Services**

The objective of TRIO Student Support Services is to maintain students with good academic standing, retention, graduation, and transfer rates of participants from a two-year to a four-year institution. This programs activities and services, carried out by the TRIO Student Support Services at HCC, are equally accessible to all participants. Various studies show that TRIO Student Support Services are vital to first-generation students, low-income students, and students with disabilities. By utilizing services like academic coaching and advising, personal, career, and financial counseling and assistance, and tutoring and transfer guidance, TRIO Student Support Services program participants have higher degree completion rates than similarly disadvantaged peers (2008). Engle and Tinto (2008) assert that TRIO SSS programs

have proven to be effective in retaining underserved students by utilizing services like academic coaching and advising, counseling (personal, career, and financial), tutoring, and transfer guidance.

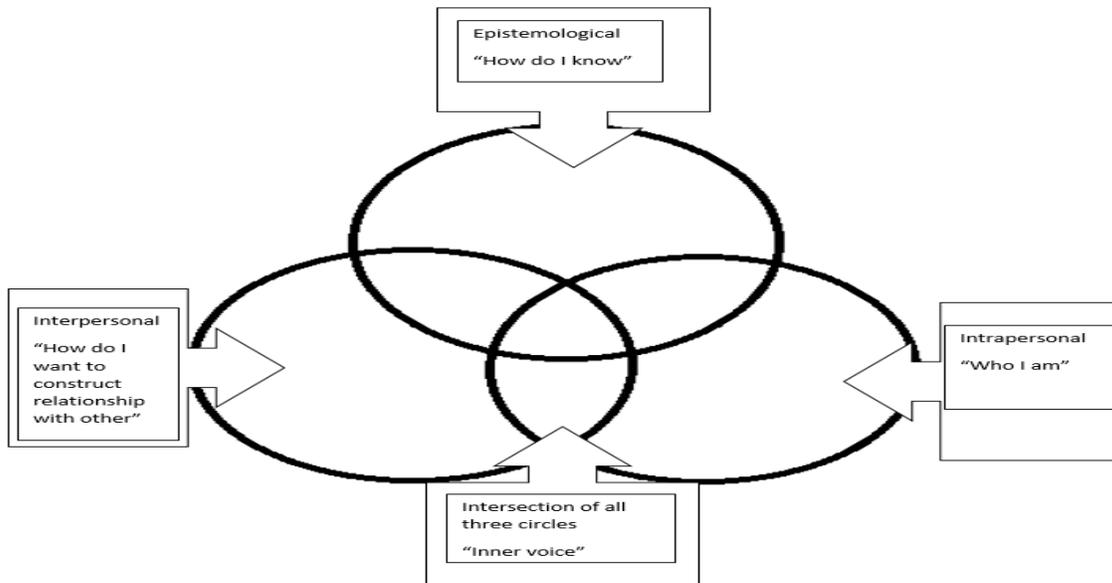
Walsh (2000) affirms the success of a TRIO Student Support program at Kankakee Community College. This TRIO Student Support Service program serves 200 students per academic calendar year and over 80% of their students achieve their educational goals (2000). At Kankakee Community College, the graduation rates, retention, transfer rates, and GPA levels of TRIO Student Support Services students exceed that of other similar students. More than 15% of TRIO Students achieve a 3.0 or higher GPA while enrolled at Kankakee Community College (Walsh, 2000). TRIO students fill positions as work-study tutors, college ambassadors, and find leadership roles in Phi Theta Kappa and student government, and act as academic tutors on various college campus. They often go on to transfer to four-year colleges, graduate, and become productive professionals in society.

### **Self-Authorship**

Self-Authorship is a framework to which author Marcia Baxter Magolda made significant contributions. Her theory identified epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal as intertwined dimensions that develop a student's inner voice (Kiteau, 2010). This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1.3 below. College students are in the transitional state of developing self-authorship, finding personal identity, and building social relationships.

**Figure 1.3**

Inner Voice



*Note.* The Intersection of all Circles is “Inner Voice.” Adapted from Kiteau, A. (2010, October 23). *Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self Authorship*. Retrieved from Exploring College Student Development Theory: <http://collegestudentdeveltheory.blogspot.com/2010/10/baxter-magoldas-theory-of-self.html>

Baxter Magolda discovered four phases of self-authorship: (1) following formulas, (2) crossroads, (3) becoming the author of one’s life, and (4) internal foundation (Kiteau, 2010). Following the formulas relates to letting a college student follow their own personal life plan that they have conceived for themselves. The crossroads refers to when a student's plans change due to external factors and the student needs to adapt and change to accommodate the new plans and make the new plan the focus of development. Becoming the author of one’s life is when the student formulates their own opinions, especially when committed to choices and confronted with opposition. The final phase is internal foundation, which refers to self-confidence and the self-esteem the student brings into their relationships, schoolwork, and future career.

At Bryn Mawr College's campus, Cohen et al. (2013) conducted a study on self-authorship through three student leadership programs offered at the school. These were three nationally-based leadership programs: (a) the Teaching and Learning Initiative (TLI) which was faculty/student mentorship partnership; (b) the Social Justice Partnership Program (SJPP), which is a collaboration of students, staff and faculty who work on diversity community issues on campus together; and (c) the Posse Foundation, which gives scholarships to high school students entering college who have had academic success, shown potential leadership qualities, and are willing to serve as student leaders at Bryn Mawr after participating in the Posse mentor program their first year (2013). These three programs encourage the college's students to motivate themselves by listening to their own inner-voice and reflect on their individual development. The students in the three-leadership programs are also challenged to collaborate with others, especially when addressing conflict and seeking ideas and solutions. The study found that students evolved in these leadership roles, progressed toward self-authorship, and found themselves growing to be stronger individuals. In short, the program allowed them to become serious college students (2013).

As college students are on a journey towards self-authorship, their experiences in higher education help to shape their sense of self-authorship (Baxter, 2014). The goal of student services' aims to be student-centered and works to promote self-authorship successfully through interactions with their students. College students can have a difficult time navigating through their transition to college. Student services professionals are there, not to provide ready-made solutions, but to support students as they develop their own solutions. When advising their students, student services staff listen first and then help with guidance. Student services provides students with the tools and encouragement to develop their own problem-solving skills, critical

thinking methods, and the ability to establish reliable, mature relationships while battling life challenges as a college student.

### **The Pascarella General Causal Model for Assessing the Effects Of Differential College Environments on Student Learning and Cognitive Development**

The final framework used in this study is Pascarella's General Causal Model for Assessing the Effects of Differential College Environments on Student Learning and Cognitive Development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Pascarella created this model from research on students' cognitive outcomes. Pascarella's model compiles variables from five sets of data, which are hypothesized to indirectly and/or directly impact learning and cognitive development.

Pascarella (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) proposes that student backgrounds, pre-college characteristics, and higher educational institutions structural/organizational characteristics create the environment for students at post-secondary institutions. Enrollment, faculty-student ratios, selectivity, and the percentage of students residing on campus are all elements of structural/organizational characteristics of a college institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Aptitude, achievement, personality, aspiration, and ethnicity are part of student background/pre-college traits, Pascarella's (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) model shows that the institutions' structural/organizational characteristics and student background/pre-college characteristics, create an institutional environment that shapes students' interactions with the agents of socialization at that institution. College faculty and students' peers are included in these agents of socialization. These students' interactions, accompanied by the elements of institutional environment, and the student's background all work to influence the quality of effort made by the student in college. This quality of effort made in college, the agents of socialization, and students' pre-college elements have direct effects on how the student learns and develops while

in college. Pascarella and Terenzini's study suggests that institutions that enhance the cognitive growth and development of underprepared students, increases the rates of student success. This study primarily pertains to four-year institutions but is also relevant to community colleges.

Researchers at the Community College Research Center (CCRC) work toward putting in place an effective learning community that helps students with learning and cognitive development (Cooper, 2010). This center seeks to tailor academic advising and development courses in different formats to meet the different learning needs for community college students (Cooper, 2010). They encourage advisors to help the student create an educational-development plan that will assist the student's growth at the college while also helping the student graduate and transfer to a four-year institution, and/or prepare the student for a future career.

Successful student services programs have positive student-faculty interactions which have a positive influence on college students' learning and cognitive growth and development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Student services professionals encourage high levels of interaction between faculty and students to increase student retention and graduation rates. Student services programs stresses to their students that the larger the frequency of contact between faculty and students, the higher the positive outcome related to students' learning, even influencing the quality of effort the student makes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Student services professionals interact with all their community college participants about academic progress, four-year institution transfer plans, career plans, and academic majors that directly relate to student attrition, while also counseling on personal problems and on- and off-campus issues that do have a direct effect on attrition.

## **Methodology**

Quantitative methods will be used in this study. Quantitative research allows one to test objective theories by determining if a relationship exists between variables (Creswell, 2012, p.112). The variables in question can be measured by instruments for data to be analyzed using statistics (Creswell, 2012, p.112). Quantitative research designs are generally pre-established with recognized general processes of guiding steps for work. Quantitative data was chosen because this type of data provides a, “numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2012, p. 155).

### **Data**

I will obtain two pre-existing data set sources through TRIO SSS on the HCC Goodman Campus for this study. The first data will be the comparison of the student population on the Goodman Campus, those who are eligible and applied for TRIO SSS program who have been selected to participate in the 2017-2018 cohort year, and those who are eligible and applied for TRIO SSS who have not been selected in the 2107- 2018 cohort year. The second data set will comprise the GPA comparisons of the student population on the Goodman Campus, who are eligible and the TRIO SSS program applicants and/or participants who have been selected to participate, and the student population who are eligible and applied for TRIO SSS and have not been selected academically.

### **Participants**

This research project targets the eligible student population for one year for TRIO SSS. TRIO SSS will be applications to students for the school academic year of 2017-2018. For the 2017-2018 cohort year, 416 students applied for TRIO SSS, 201 were accepted, 179 students were eligible and not accepted, and 36 students were ineligible. The 380 students selected for

this research study have a full-time schedule of 15 credits or more. This study increases the level of knowledge about how many students qualified for HCC Goodman Campus TRIO SSS program. The quantification categories are low-income and first generation (LIFG), low-income (LI), and first generation (FG).

Students are nominated to participate in HCC TRIO SSS through instructor/staff referrals. Interviews of the nominees are conducted by HCC TRIO professionals with the focus of the interviews being on student drive and commitment to their own success. The scores from these interviews are used to determine which of the eligible students is offered a space in the program.

### **Data Analysis**

This pre-existing data will be analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science software program (version 24) and Microsoft Excel 2016 will store that pre-existing data that was obtained. This study will use the *t* test and the One-way ANOVA, which is a statistical process that will first analyze the difference in the two data sets between participants in the TRIO SSS program and eligible non-participates in the TRIO SSS program.

### **Institutional Review Board**

I submitted this study for approval from the IRB. HCC does not have an IRB approved board, but TRIO SSS has given this study the permission to access data from HCC students which filled out TRIO SSS applications during the fall semester 2017. At the same time, the participants that were not selected to be a TRIO SSS participant will fill out a TRIO SSS Student Needs Survey. This collection of this data will take place under the direction of the TRIO SSS Director, Linda Alexander-Jones. It will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes for each student to fill out the Student Needs Surveys appendix. Through an approved IRB protocol from the

University of Mississippi, letters of approval will be filed as appendix B in a later manuscript.

### **Research Questions**

This study explored the unmet needs for student support services among students at HCC on the Goodman Campus, like those offered to students enrolled in programs in the TRIO SSS, who were not selected as participants in TRIO SSS. TRIO SSS is the only student academic success program at HCC, but only accepts just over 200 participants.

The study's research question are as follows:

**R1.** Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-eligible students who applied, but could not participate in the program due to capacity constraints?

**H1.** There is a significant difference. The students who received academic support services by TRIO fare significantly better academically than the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints.

**R2.** Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of female students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-eligible female students who applied to participate in the program but were not admitted due to capacity constraints?

**H2.** There is a significant difference. The female students who received academic support services through TRIO fare significantly better academically than the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints.

**R3.** Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of male students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-

eligible male students who applied to participate in the program but were not admitted due to capacity constraints?

**H3.** There is a significant difference. The male students who received academic support services through TRIO fare significantly better academically than the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints.

### **Conclusion**

This is the first of three manuscripts related to the study of the unmet need for academic support services amongst TRIO-eligible students at Holmes Community College. This manuscript describes the problem, presents my positionality and assumptions relative to the study, shares a review of literature, describes a conceptual framework, and details the methodology, research questions, and assumptions.

The second manuscript will present the data from the study, and the third will discuss the findings and recommendations for both research and practice related to supporting the success of TRIO-eligible students at Holmes Community College.

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## **APPENDIX**

## **Appendix IRB Approval**

February 4, 2020

This is to inform you that your application to conduct research with human participants, "Unmet Need among Students at HCC on the Goodman Campus for Student Support Services: A Quantitative Study " (Protocol #20x-301), has been approved as Exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(#4).

Please remember that all of The University of Mississippi's human participant research activities, regardless of whether the research is subject to federal regulations, must be guided by the ethical principles in The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.

It is especially important for you to keep these points in mind:

- You must protect the rights and welfare of human research participants.
- Any changes to your approved protocol must be reviewed and approved before initiating those changes.
- You must report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.

- If research is to be conducted during class, the PI must email the instructor and ask if they wish to see the protocol materials (surveys, interview questions, etc.) prior to research beginning.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the IRB at [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

**Miranda L. Core & Mary K. Jourdan**

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**MANUSCRIPT TWO**

## **Manuscript Two**

College students from first-generation, low-income, and disabled backgrounds face substantial barriers to obtaining degrees in higher education. These underrepresented students need to receive more student support services interventions provided by higher education institutions across the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Educational institutions do not currently meet the needs of their students. HCC is one example. Its TRIO program serves students who are low-income/first-generation (LIFG), low-income (LI), first-generation (FG), and disabled, but there is not sufficient funding from the federal government to provide services through TRIO to all eligible students. This manuscript explores the unmet need for student support services among TRIO-eligible students at HCC on Goodman Campus.

### **Methodology**

This quantitative study makes use of two data sets and descriptive and comparative statistic techniques. The first data set includes the students who are qualified, applied and were selected for HCC TRIO SSS in 2017-2018. The second data set is comprised of the students who are qualified, applied, but were not selected for 2017-2018 due to space constraints in the program. A comparison is made between the aggregate academic successes of the two groups as measured by grade point average (GPA) with additional comparisons being made in academic success by gender between the two groups. The decision was made not to compare the participants by race because the student demographics of the study had a large majority of African American students. The low numbers of Caucasian, Asian or Hispanic students would

would not support meaningful data analysis. This research also did not analyze the participants by first-generation, low income, and disabilities because that information was not captured in the HCC database used to inform this study.

### **Participants**

There were 439 applicants from the 2017-2018 school year who applied for the HCC TRIO SSS program. Exactly 403 of these student applicants were eligible to participate in the HCC TRIO SSS program. All HCC student participants have a full-time schedule of 15 credit hours or more. 203 students that were eligible and accepted comprise the first data set. The second data set was composed of 200 students that were eligible and not accepted for HCC Goodman Campus due to 200 participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was delivered in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet from the Director of HCC TRIO SSS Linda Alexander-Jones. Then two data sets were run through the Statistical Package for Social Science software program (SPSS version 24). The Independent *T*-Test and the One-way ANOVA were used to analyze the differences in academic success between 203 eligible participants in the TRIO SSS program and 200 eligible non-participants. The purpose of performing the Independent *T*-Test Model for the study's research question is to compare two independent groups' GPAs (TRIO SSS participants and TRIO eligible SSS nonparticipants). According to the Laerd Statistical website, the Independent Test used "compares the means between two unrelated groups on the same continuous, dependent variable (Lund Research Ltd, 2018)."

## **Institutional Review Board**

This study received IRB approval from the University of Mississippi. There is not an official IRB approval process at HCC. However, this research has received permission from HCC TRIO SSS Director Linda Alexander-Jones.

## **Findings**

This study addressed three research questions. The presentation of the findings is organized around the three questions and their associated hypotheses as shown below:

R1. Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-eligible students who applied, but could not participate in the program but due to capacity constraints?

H1. There is a significant difference. The students who received academic support services by TRIO fare significantly better academically than the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints.

R2. Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of female students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-eligible female students who applied to participate in the program but were not admitted due to capacity constraints?

H2. There is a significant difference. The female students who received academic support services through TRIO fare significantly better academically than the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints.

R3. Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of male students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-

eligible male students who applied to participate in the program but were not admitted due to capacity constraints?

H3. There is a significant difference. The male students who received academic support services through TRIO fare significantly better academically than the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints.

**RQ1: Aggregate Academic Performance**

Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-eligible students who applied to participate in the program but were no admitted due to capacity constraints?

Table 2.1 displays the mean GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS participants and eligible non-participates in HCC TRIO SSS. Table 2.1 indicates the mean end of the year GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS participants in the 2017 – 2018 academic year (SSS) in higher (M = 3.04) than eligible non-participates in HCC TRIO SSS (2) (M = 1.78).

**Table 2.1**

*Mean GPAs For the Participants and Eligible Non-Participates*

	End of 2017 – 2018 Grade Point Average (GPA)
Participants (n= 203)	3.04
Non-participants. (n=200)	1.78

*Note.* The mean GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS participants and eligible non-participates in HCC TRIO SSS.

**Table 2.2***Dispersion of the GPA Data*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
GPA	1	203	3.04	.63	0.44
	2	200	1.78	1.05	0.74

*Note.* The dispersion GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS participants and eligible non-participates in HCC TRIO SSS.

Displayed in Table 2.2, I analyzed 203 (Group 1) HCC TRIO SSS participants' and 201 (Group 2) eligible non-participants in HCC TRIO SSS GPAs. Standard deviation is the measure of disbursement of each data set. Group 1 with the standard deviation of (0.632) mean the GPA was less spread out than group 2 with a standard of deviation of (1.04). The standard error tells you how accurate the mean of GPA of a group is likely to be compared to the true group mean. There is a 95% chance that the population mean is within +/- 1.4 (=2\*0.4437) of the mean (3.04). There is a 95% chance that the population mean is within +/- 1.4 (=2\*0.7421) of the mean (1.78).

**Table 2.3***Testing of Aggregate GPA Data*

		Levene's Test for Equity of Variance				T-Test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std Error Difference
GPA	Equal variance assumed	56.27	.000	14.68	401	.000	1.27	.86
GPA	Equal variance not assumed			14.63	325.72	.000	1.27	.86

\*Alpha level of 0.5%

*Note.* The result of both the Levine's test and the T test for the aggregate.

Table 2.3 noted the Levene Test for Equal Variance's significance values that less than the Alpha level of 0.05% (sig = 0.00). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and equal variance is assumed. The *t*-test's significant value for Equality of Means is higher than the Alpha level of 0.05% (sig = 0.00). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis indicating that end of the year GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS participants are significantly higher (GPA of 3.04) than eligible non-participants (GPA of 1.78) HCC TRIO SSS in 2017 – 2018 academic year. In R1., the hypothesis stated, there is a significant difference, and the students provided educational support services through TRIO fare significantly better academically than do the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints. As our results show, this was true. The TRIO supported students' GPA mean of (3.04), was significantly higher than the GPA of TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraint (1.78). The results of this study indicate HCC TRIO SSS programs have a positive impact on participates

GPA.

**RQ2: Female Academic Performance**

Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-eligible female students who applied to participate in the program but were not admitted due to capacity constraints?

Table 2.4 displays the mean GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS female participants and female eligible non-participants in HCC TRIO SSS. Table 2.4 indicates the mean end of the year GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS female participants in 2017 – 2018 academic year (1) is higher (M = 3.04) than eligible female non-participants in HCC TRIO SSS (2) (M = 1.76).

**Table 2.4**

*Mean GPAs for the Female Participants and Female Eligible Non-Participates*

	End of 2017 – 2018 Grade Point Average (GPA)
Participants (n= 96)	3.04
Non-participants. (n=97)	1.76

*Note.* The mean GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS female participants and female eligible non-participants in HCC TRIO SSS.

**Table 2.5**

*Dispersion of The Female GPA Data*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
GPAs	1	96	3.04	0.67	0.68
	2	97	1.76	1.03	0.10

Note. Shows dispersion of the female GPA data.

As displayed in Table 2.5, I analyzed 96 (Group 1) HCC TRIO SSS participants and 97 (Group 2) eligible non-participants HCC TRIO SSS GPAs. Standard deviation is the measure of disbursement of each data set. The group 1 with the standard deviation of (0.669) mean the GPA were less spread out that group 2 with a standard of deviation of (1.030). The standard error tells you how accurate the mean of GPA of a group is likely to be compared to the true group mean. There is a 95% chance that the population mean is within +/- 1.4 (=2\*0.6832) of the mean (3.04). There is a 95% chance that the population mean is within +/- 1.4 (=2\*0.10465) of the mean (1.76).

**Table 2.6**

*Testing of Female GPA Data*

		Levene's Test for Equity of Variance			T-Test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std Error Difference
GPA	Equal variance assumed	18.0	.000	10.17	191	.000	1.27	1.03
GPA	Equal variance not assumed			10.19	164.99	.000	1.27	1.03

\*Alpha level of 0.5%

*Note.* The results of the Levine's test and the *t*-test for the female GPA data. Table 2.6 noted the significance values for the Levene Test for Equal Variance that is less than the Alpha level of 0.05% (sig = 0.00). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis, and equal variance is assumed. The *t*-test's significant value for Equality of Means is higher than the Alpha level of 0.05% (sig = 0.00). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis indicating that the end of the year GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS female participants is significantly higher (GPA of 3.04) than females eligible non-participates (GPA of 1.76) in HCC TRIO SSS in 2017 – 2018 academic year. In R2., the hypothesis stated there is a significant difference, and the female students provided educational support services through TRIO fare significantly better academically than do the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints. As our result show, this was true. The TRIO supported female student's GPA mean of 3.04, which was significantly higher than the TRIO-eligible female students not admitted into the program due to

capacity constraint GPA of 1.76. The results of this study indicate HCC TRIO SSS programs service are directly positive impacting the TRIO SSS female participates GPAs.

**RQ3: Male Academic Performance**

Is there a significant difference between the academic performance of students served through the TRIO SSS program at HCC Goodman campus and that of the TRIO-eligible male students who applied to participate in the program but were turned away due to capacity constraints?

Table 2.7 displays the mean GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS male participants and male eligible non-participates in HCC TRIO SSS. Table 2.7 indicates the mean end of the year GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS male participants in 2017 – 2018 academic year (1) is higher (M = 3.05) than eligible male non-participates in HCC TRIO SSS (2) (M = 1.79).

**Table 2.7**

*Mean GPAs for the Male Participants and Male Eligible Non-Participates*

	End of 2017 – 2018 Grade Point Average (GPA)
Participants (n= 103)	3.05
Non-participants. (n=107)	1.79

Note The mean GPAs for the male participants and male eligible non-participants

**Table 2.8***Dispersion of the Male GPA Data*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
GPAs	1	107	3.05	0.60	0.06
	2	103	1.79	1.07	0.11

*Note.* Shows dispersion of the male GPA data.

As displayed in Table 2.8, I analyzed 103 (Group 1) HCC TRIO SSS participants' and 107 (Group 2) eligible non-participates' in HCC TRIO SSS GPAs. Standard deviation is the measure of disbursement of each data set. Group 1 with the standard deviation of (0.60) means the GPAs were less spread out than group 2 with a standard of deviation of (1.07). The standard error tells you how accurate the mean of GPA of a group is likely to be compared to the true group mean. There is a 95% chance that the population mean is within +/- 1.4 ( $=2*0.05801$ ) of the mean (3.05). There is a 95% chance that the population mean is within +/- 1.4 ( $=2*0.10560$ ) of the mean (1.79).

**Table 2.9**

*Testing of Male GPA Data*

		Levene's Test for Equity of Variance				T-Test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std Error Difference
GPA	Equal variance assumed	41.25	.000	10.54	208	.000	1.26	.12
GPA	Equal variance not assumed			10.44	158.92	.000	1.26	.12

Alpha level of 0.5%

Note. The results of both the Levine's test and the *t*-test for the male GPA data.

Table 2.9 noted the significance values for the Levene Test for Equal Variance that is less than the Alpha level of 0.05% (sig = 0.00). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis, and equal variance is assumed. The *t*-test's significant value for Equality of Means is higher than the Alpha level of 0.05% (sig = 0.00). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis indicating that end of the year GPAs for the HCC TRIO SSS male participants (GPA of 3.05) is significantly higher than the eligible male non-participants (GPA of 1.79) in HCC TRIO SSS in 2017 – 2018 academic year. In R3., the hypothesis stated, there is a significant difference, and the male students provided educational support services through TRIO fare significantly better academically than do the TRIO-eligible students not admitted into the program due to capacity constraints. As the results show, this was true, the TRIO supported male student's GPA mean of 3.05, which was significantly higher than the TRIO-eligible male students not admitted into the program due to

capacity constraint GPA of 1.79. This finding was surprising that the male GPAs were slight higher than the female GPAs. The results of this study indicate HCC TRIO SSS programs have positive impact on male participants GPAs.

### **Conclusion**

This study explores the unmet need among students at HCC on the Goodman Campus for Student Support Services, and this manuscript presents the data from the research. The data provided by HCC TRIO SSS Director Linda Alexander Jones. Data was collected for the 2017/2018 cohort of 203 students accepted and participating in the HCC TRIO SSS program and the 200 students eligible but not accepted to participate in the HCC TRIO SSS program due to space limitations.

This quantitative data compiled the GPAs of the HCC student participants. The research examined the relationships between students accepted in HCC TRIO SSS and students eligible but not admitted to participate in the program due to program constraints. Findings in the data indicated that the GPAs of the 203 students participating in the HCC TRIO SSS program were more significantly higher than the 200 students eligible but not accepted to participate in the HCC TRIO SSS program significant difference. The research also compared students' GPAs by genders for those accepted and participating in the HCC TRIO SSS program and the students eligible but not admitted to participate. The 96 female students who participated in the HCC TRIO SSS program statistically had a significantly higher GPA than the 97 female students eligible but were not accepted to participate in the HCC TRIO SSS program. Finally, the researcher compared the 107 male students' GPAs that participated in the HCC TRIO SSS program to the 103 male students eligible but not accepted to participate in the HCC TRIO SSS program the GPA of the males in this study statistically significant higher.

The study will discuss the implications of the unmet need among students at HCC on the Goodman Campus for Student Support Services, in the final study manuscript. The research will offer recommendations for the HCC TRIO SSS program of the Goodman Mississippi Campus and other student support service programs can positively impact the unmet need among the institution's underserved students' population.

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**MANUSCRIPT THREE**

### **Manuscript Three**

There are barriers for underrepresented students to graduate from college. There is a strong need for interventional services provided by student support service programs in higher education in institutions across America. However, educational intervention at some institutions currently may not meet the needs of underrepresented student populations. One such example of not meeting the needs of all their underrepresented students is at Holmes Community College which now serves its underrepresented students through a federally funded TRIO SSS invention program. Students who are first-generation/low-income (LIFG), low-income (LI), first-generation (FG), or disabled are eligible and accepted. Currently TRIO SSS at HCC does not accept all eligible students due to funding constraints. This study explores the unmet needs for SSS among TRIO-eligible students at HCC on Goodman Campus for student support services like those offered to students enrolled in programs in the TRIO.

### **Review of The Study**

Using one data set on students' GPAs for TRIO SSS eligible students who were accepted in the program at HCC and eligible student who were not accepted due to funding constraints for the 2017-2018 year, a comparison using an independent *t*-test and One-way ANOVA was employed. The GPAs for the students who were served were notably higher in the aggregate for both female and male students than those for the students who were not served which was significantly lower in every instance.

The conceptual framework of this study included three elements: (1) The Gallup student success model, (2) Support services for students, and (3) Community colleges. The studied

theories in the conceptual framework demonstrate how SSS programs are needed to promote student GPA success for higher educational institutions.

### **Meaning of the Data**

Students who were eligible and accepted into the TRIO SSS program at HCC had GPAs which outperformed the eligible and not accepted students for the TRIO SSS program. The data analysis indicated that both female and male students achieved a higher GPA when an HCC TRIO SSS participant was compared to the eligible non-participates in HCC TRIO SSS.

More importantly, Dougherty (1992) examined the personal characteristics of students and how they play a part in community college students' survival in the first year in college. Students attending community college are about 10 to 18 percent more likely to drop out than students at a four-year institution, even from similar academic and demographic backgrounds. Dougherty points to students who are not integrated academically nor socially into community college and are less involved with academic and extracurricular activities at the student's institution, have poor academic results. This can result in poor decision-making by the student, which is an example of Tinto's 1975 theory of college withdrawal, which states that the less socially and academically involved students are in their institutions, the more likely they are to have lower GPAs and more likely not to complete their degree at a four-year institution - if the community college student transfers (Dougherty, 1992). It is evident that community colleges need to work as an institution to remove obstacles by creating programs that can reduce community colleges' attrition rates.

Student support service programs create learning communities for community college students to assist with that social and academic integration. Tinto (2012) also asserted that learning communities help community college students adapt to the rigorous demands

experienced by academically underprepared students who lack the necessary skills a student needs to succeed in college. He also affirmed that SSS programs intervene by providing students with mentorship, effective study habits, and self-efficacy (Tinto, 2012). Once students participate in these programs, and through the program's support, they gain confidence that contributes to students' academic success. Through support from SSS staff and fellow students, SSS participants are more likely to matriculate through all levels of higher education.

The study's analysis results support Tinto's Action Theory that states when an institution commits to providing effective student services, it puts students' best interests ahead of the colleges' own interests. These students' first actions help them to feel connected to student services support, perform better, and maintain a successful GPA (Tinto, 2012).

Through all three research questions, student participants who were accepted into HCC TRIO SSS had cumulative GPAs that were much higher than the student participants who were eligible, non-participants in HCC TRIO SSS in the same underserved populations. The students who were accepted into the HCC TRIO SSS program were the students gaining and building successful academic habits and were motivated to perform well in their college courses. Tinto indicates that students who enter student services support programs "enhance students' sense of self-efficacy, reduce stress, and in turn increase the likelihood of subsequent success" (Tinto, 2012, p. 27). Through the HCC TRIO SSS program, students can improve essential study skills and integrate into the community through various school activities that HCC TRIO SSS provides. HCC TRIO SSS students not only receive academic support, but also additional financial support, exposure to cultural events, mentoring, career counseling, and 4-year institutional transfer advising. As noted in the data results, the HCC TRIO SSS participants, even when divided into gender, performed better than the students' participants who were eligible,

non-participants in HCC TRIO SSS with higher GPAs.

### **Recommendation for Practices**

The following recommendations for practice build upon the data and the meaning of that data. These recommendations could potentially help student support service programs have the ability support more students. This support will help increase underserved students' GPAs and graduation rates.

### **Institutional Funding**

Using the data from this study, I recommend that HCC college administrators and similar institutions explore reallocating institutional funding to better serve the needs of all students. Full-time tuition at HCC is \$1,605 (Tuition and Fees, 2021). The source of reallocation could be the additional tuition and fee revenue generated from increased retention and persistence to graduation (see the recommendation for further research in the next section).

### **Outside Funding**

Institutions that want to expand their student services program may look for outside funding to provide service to the growing underserved student population. Using the data from the study, I advise that HCC and similar higher education administrations create partnerships with private industries to financially support student support service programs. Industrial partnerships are the future for students receiving a career placement upon graduation. For example, Vulcan Materials has partnered with the University of Alabama Birmingham (UAB) to create the Vulcan Materials Academic Success Center (VMASC). Vulcan Material wanted to help foster student career and graduate competition to help the growing workforce need. This Center focuses on helping students achieve their academic goals on the way to degree completion and was created for any student who has an undeclared major or is interested in

changing college majors. The students in this program have access to personal advisors, success coaches, tutors, and private student labs (The University of Alabama Birmingham, 2021).

Although UAB is a four-year public institution that receives federal and state grants, it is the industrial partnership which provides more financial opportunities for UAB students.

Various community colleges have partnerships based on equipment and technology for the institutions, apprenticeships, internships, work-based learning, and hiring after graduation. I believe that corporate investment in academic institutions brings higher rates of academic success and graduation. Unfortunately, when the unemployment rate is low, the industry will hire technical community college students who have not completed their certificates or degree. When a student obtains or acquires employment without graduating, this invariably lowers the college's attrition and graduation rates which, in turn, may lower government funding. Institutions need to partner with industry and with work-based learning programs that not only pay students a living wage but hire them to full-time positions only after graduation. Consequently, my recommendation is that corporate investment be secured to help ensure that students complete their degrees to provide a promising career after graduation.

### **Increased Governmental Funding**

Currently, state and federal grants and budgets fund many student services support programs. I recommend that college administrators explore any of these single recommendations to create or improve student support service programs on their campuses. College administrators can also blend two or more of these recommendations to ensure that students receive the services needed to improve retention and graduation rates at their collegiate institution.

## **Mississippi ReSkill Program**

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented job loss in the United States beginning in March and April of 2020. As of July 2020, over 132,000 people were still unemployed and seeking work (Wolf, 2020). Through COVID-19 relief funds, federal laws required Mississippi to spend \$55M on ReSkill, a workforce training program through Mississippi Community Colleges, that provides a living wage for low-income Mississippians. (Wolf, 2020).

The Reskill program offers certifications through the community college system free of charge in such subjects as welding, OSHA Safety, Google Classroom, and nursing. This training will help Mississippians earn a living wage without relying heavily on state social programs. Citizens currently not making a living wage will be discussed further in the recommendations in the research section of this study.

## **More TRIO Programs**

Using the data from the study, my recommendation is that HCC and similar institutions should apply to increase their TRIO SSS programs. The increase of TRIO SSS programs would increase the number of student participants that TRIO can serve. TRIO SSS STEM programs are on the same grant cycle and have the same student eligibility as TRIO SSS but are specific to the students who have declared science, technology, engineering, and math majors.

There are other TRIO programs that serve high school students like TRIO Upward Bound and TRIO Upward Bound STEM programs. Upward Bound programs have the same services as TRIO SSS but serve high school students in grades 9-12. Upward Bound and Upward Bound STEM increase high school graduation rates and prepare students to enter college. TRIO Educational Talent Search is focused on high school juniors and seniors to help them matriculate into college. The Educational Talent Search helps student with ACT/SAT prep, financial aid and

scholarship applications. The qualifications for all TRIO programs are the same as TRIO SSS.

The additional TRIO SSS programs would ensure that they provide the same intervention services but for another eligible 200 or more student participants in HCC. The Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search Program could potentially provide services to as many as 500 additional HCC future students.

### **College Navigators**

One recommendation is for institutions to hire campus-wide college “navigators,” who would provide support services for all students at that institution. Presently, fewer than 40% of students earn a certificate or degree at their community college within six years (Bailey et al., 2015). Community college students have a greater dropout rate than those at 4-year institutions. College navigators could improve student intervention across the campus, which could lead to higher GPAs, and higher rates of graduation. Community Colleges are an excellent pathway to a lucrative career.

Added to this, community college students are currently not receiving effective nor adequate advisement within the six years that only 40% of the Community College students graduate. Most orientation sessions have moved to an online platform, and institutions do not have the workforce or time to engage and to help students set their academic goals or paths (Levesque, 2018). Without adequate support program intervention, there is the possibility of students dropping out.

The higher dropout rate is due to the students facing increased socialization challenges in community colleges than those attending four-year college. Tinto’s (1993) research affirmed that dropout rates rise when there is poor academic integration into college. The lack of interaction with teachers and other students can lead to low attendance, poor grades, and eventually

dropping out.

The high dropout rate is why SSS programs should encourage hiring campus-wide navigators. Adding navigators could help college students improve socialization, which could, in turn, lead to higher GPAs, lower dropout rates, and higher graduation rates.

The College navigator could hold workshops for other instructors at the institution, especially remedial classes. A holistic approach to student integration into the classroom could promote student success across the entire institution (Center for Promise, 2019).

Additionally, all subjects should have a tutoring lab run by an instructor (volunteered) or a federal work-study that are run by honors students in different subject matters. These tutor labs could also serve as an Honors Society service project. The institution should request faculty, staff, and community volunteers to run an SSS similar workshop at lunch or at an evening workshop (Center for Promise, 2019). These workshops could be open to the community and used as a student recruitment tool for future candidates.

College navigators could also teach student orientation classes, which are necessary academic and non-academic tools to integrate into college (Stevenson Rodriguez, 2017). College navigators are currently used in the Colorado Community College system. The orientation classes could include taking notes in class, building good study skills, financial literacy, as well as different areas of support on campus (Stevenson Rodriguez, 2017).

An orientation class could increase students' academic success at the institution while helping the well-being of students' socialization into college. Integrating college navigators into the institution could improve student progress, student success, the institution's success, and save institutional funds (Stevenson Rodriguez, 2017). College Navigators have the potential to transform students and families.

It is reasonable to assume that if HCC were to invest in College Navigator, they would retain more students for a second year, and help to increase tuition revenue for the school. The extra tuition revenue could eventually pay for a stand-alone College Navigator student service program (*see the recommendation for research below*).

A laudable example of this course of action is evidenced by the Pearl River Community College (PRCC) whose main campus is located in Poplarville, Miss. and does not have a TRIO SSS program. Instead, the institution created a Student Success Center (SSC) located on both PRCC's Poplarville and Forrest County Campuses. The SSC was created to successfully help all students navigate graduation into a career or transfer to a four-year institution. The SSC provides the following resources (Pearl River Community College, 2017):

- educational support, counseling, and coaching
- supplemental instruction and tutoring
- study and computer labs
- degree evaluation, career development, and university transfer assistance.

The SSC program (Pearl River Community College, 2017) has open enrollments for all students. SSC and teachers can recommend or require students to participate in the program if they are at risk of failing their courses. The program at Pearl River Community College shows that my recommendation of integrating support services into various classes of instruction throughout the college can be successful.

### **Future Data Gathering**

HCC should consider capturing all data relative to student success in its databases. This includes race, gender, age, sexual orientation, Pell-eligibility, first-generation status, first-time student status, and disability.

## **Recommendations for Research**

Three recommendations for future research were identified based on the research process and the analysis of the data. Those recommendations are presented in this section.

### **Replicate Study on the Goodman Campus with a Focus on Additional Student**

#### **Demographics**

As noted in both the methodology recommendations for practice sections, this study was not able to analyze need across some important student demographics. Researching the student demographic variables with the student GPA could also help determine if there is a difference in GPAs when comparing first-generation, low-income and disabled students.

### **Replicate Study on the Goodman Campus with a Focus on Degree Attainment**

The first recommendation for further research is to replicate the current study with a comparison of degree attainment rates for the students enrolled in TRIO Student Support Services on the Goodman campus with those of the TRIO-eligible students for whom space was not available in the TRIO program. Future research should include the graduation rates and four-year institution transfer rates of the students who apply but were not accepted in the TRIO SSS program at HCC.

### **Replicate Study on All Holmes Community College Campuses**

The Grenada and Ridgeland campuses of Holmes Community College do not currently offer TRIO Student Support Services programming for students, but the students enrolled in those campuses are similar in many ways to the students on the Holmes campus. It would be instructive to replicate this study on those campuses by comparing the academic performance of the Goodman TRIO students to similar groups on the other two campuses.

## **Limitations of the Data**

The data collected was sufficient to answer the three research questions; however, the data analyzed had limitations. The data was based on research of students who were accepted or not accepted into HCC TRIO SSS that are HCC TRIO SSS eligible. This data did not account for students who were freshmen or sophomores at the time of this study. As a researcher, I did not consider the status of the student participants including the student's academic standing, if the student was a transfer student from other community colleges or four-year institutions or was a dual-enrolled high school student – all of which could have influenced the study participants' GPAs.

HCC TRIO SSS accepts participants throughout the entire school year, as long they have room and the students are eligible to participate. This year-long open TRIO SSS enrollment at HCC creates an additional challenge. First, the research data states how many semesters of cumulative GPAs were included in the final 2017-2018 studies participants' GPAs. The research did not indicate which semesters or how many semesters were collected from HCC TRIO SSS participants. Second, it took the students' GPAs at different credit progressions. For example, a student's GPA data could be 65 credits or just 15 credits. This open enrollment could have made a difference because some TRIO SSS students with lower GPAs may not have received many or any TRIO SSS services yet. The irregularities in the data could leave gaps in the SPSS output tables represented in the study. The final challenge was the demographic background of the students. Although HCC TRIO SSS does target students by demographics, their HCC TRIO SSS students do have to meet the qualification categories, which are low-income and first-generation (LIFG), low-income (LI), first-generation (FG), and with disabilities. Students with different demographics can have other college challenges, which may affect students' academic

performance at college.

Additionally, the study's data did not consider the high school GPAs of any student. It is conceivable that some students could have taken college prep classes, extra-curricular high school, or college activities, had parental financial, academic, and emotional support while attending college or had been traditional or non-traditional students. Unfortunately, high school education standards can differ in Mississippi among schools, even within a 15-mile radius. Therefore, students from different high schools can come into HCC with the same GPA but perform differently due to pre-college support.

Consequently, there is no accounting for ethno-racial demographics nor any accounting for represented Mississippi high school districts. These factors can potentially play a significant part in the GPA academic performance at HCC in Goodman but was not represented in the study. It is further worth noting that from a professional observation, a high population of the students were African American.

The research focused on “The Unmet Needs Among Students at HCC on the Goodman Campus for Student Support.” The study identifies the academic performances of students served through the TRIO SSS program at the HCC Goodman Campus and that of the TRIO-eligible students. These students applied to participate in the program but were turned away due to capacity constraints. As previously mentioned, the data sample size was through the cumulative GPAs of the HCC TRIO SSS 2017- 2018 application pool, including 203 HCC TRIO SSS participants and 201 eligible non-participants. The research does not distinguish between first-generation freshmen and first-generation sophomores. There would have been an added benefit to further examine these demographics. It is also noteworthy that different significant college challenges affect students who had not been accepted to be a part of the HCC TRIO SSS 2017-

2018 cohort year.

Overall, the data limitation can support further research to help decrease the unmet needs among students at HCC on the Goodman campus for SSS. In addition, additional research could improve the capacity of programs like TRIO SSS on the HCC Goodman campus.

### **COVID-19**

It can be reasonably assumed that the impact of COVID-19 contributed to the widening achievement gap between underserved students and their peers. As higher education institutions shut their doors and moved to virtual instruction, education disparities grew for students from low socio-economic demographics (Aucejo et al. 2020). The pandemic impacted academic course and support service program access for underserved students, as well as employees working from home.

When all students were “sent home,” low-income students had no access to meal plans, personal laptops, and in many cases, Internet access. Some students went home to family members who lost jobs or income. Those students who lived on campus, used it as their haven; pre-pandemic, they would have lived on campus year-round until graduation. Due to the lack of access to services needed to complete assignments, a higher rate of withdrawal and lower GPAs were experienced with the fallout being students extending their time to graduate (Aucejo et al., 2020).

After the online experience in Spring 2020, many students have chosen to opt for Fall 2020 because they do not want to take classes online again. Some students have withdrawn altogether, and some cannot return to college because their GPAs have declined due to an online format during this pandemic and they have now lost their financial aid due to Unsatisfactory Progress (Aucejo et al., 2020). These students may never return to finish their education.

## **Conclusion**

As a researcher I analyzed the benefits and need of the student support service programs that is not being met by all students who need access to services that promote and support students' success for underserved student demographics. The TRIO SSS program at HCC has shown that students who are accepted in the TRIO SSS program and receive services from the program have better GPAs than those who are eligible for the program but not accepted into the program. The GPAs were also higher across indicators such as gender.

Low GPAs can lead to dropping out. It directly impacts the cost of investment for the college, state, and federal government spending. In fact, 43% of the 5,529 students enrolled at HCC are first-time, first-degree seeking students (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2019). According to the National Center of Education Statistics, HCC's overall graduation rate for 2018 was 37%, and the transfer rate was 21% (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2019). Additionally, 67% of HCC students receive a Pell Grant, and 18% received student loans (Data USA, 2018). This data represents the low-income demographic of Holmes Community College.

Pell grants are awarded from a federally funded grant system that provides money to help lower-income students attend college and may provide college access for students who complete the FAFSA application online. The Pell grant will pay 12 terms to attain a baccalaureate degree and only six terms to achieve an Associate degree (Kerr, 2020). With a less than 40% graduation rate within six years at a community college, eventually, students who do not receive SSS will not be able to afford to continue their education and graduate.

Because these students who decide to drop out of community colleges are costly to the nation and the state, many of the students who drop out are federal and state grant recipients, all

funded by tax-paying dollars. Dropouts use taxpayers' dollars and may not gain the skills to contribute back to tax-paying society (Chen, 2020). Many student who decides to dropout are hurting institutions and contribute to poor performance and outcome ratings. Accordingly, institutions' performance and outcomes affect the institution's funding received from the federal and state governments.

The lower the college's performance rate is, the fewer funds the college receives from the federal government. As a result, some students get a job shortly after gaining a skill set from college and never complete their degree (Chen, 2020). Invariably, that student is considered a dropout which negatively affects a college's performance rating.

In the final analysis, community college students who drop out of college cause a negative ripple effect. Many college dropouts received student loans, which must begin to be paid back six months after the student has left school (Whistle, 2019). Many of the students who drop out are more likely to default on their student loans, affecting the students' future credit rating (Whistle, 2019). College dropouts tend to be under-employed or receive unemployment and need more support from the government's social programs, pulling again from taxpayers' dollars (Whistle, 2019). Student support service programs assist students in removing barriers and obstacles for underserved students completing their education.

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before-the-end-of-the-year/

## **APPENDIX**

**Appendix: TRIO Application, Holmes Community College**



**2017-2018 Application for Student Support Services**

**Section 1: Personal Information**

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Social Security Number-Optional \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID Number \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Last First Middle Month/Day/Year

**Mailing Address**

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Street or P.O. Box \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Holmes Email \_\_\_\_\_ ACT Score \_\_\_\_\_

Major \_\_\_\_\_ Classification  Freshman (0-23 hours)  Sophomore (≥24 hours)

**Ethnic Background**

**Marital Status**

**Gender**

Asian

Single

Female

- Black or African American                       Married                       Male  
 Hispanic or Latino                               Separated  
 Native American/Alaskan                       Divorced  
 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander               Widowed  
 White  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent's Education (For research/grant writing purposes)**

Does your mother have a 4-year (Bachelor's) degree?  Yes  No

Does your father have a 4-year degree?  Yes  No

**Citizenship**

Are you a U.S. citizen or permanent resident of the United States?  Yes  No

**Documented Disability**

Do you have a documented physical disability?  Yes  No

Do you have a documented learning disability?  Yes  No

If yes to either of the above, have you registered with the Disability Support Services?

Yes  No

- I certify that all information provided on this application is true.
- I give permission for SSS to obtain any academic or personal information that is necessary for providing assistance to me; including contacting my instructors and the Dean of Students.

**Student Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## Vita

Karen Ray

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Drake State Community & Technical College**

Sept 2021 – Present

*Director of Workforce and Development*

The Director of Workforce Development manages all workforce development programs and functions college-wide, short-term training, training for existing business and industry, and grants for training and workforce development. The Director of Workforce Development has a broad knowledge of technical skills training and education, job fields, community employment personnel, and a commitment to short-term training and its role in economic and workforce development. Perform other work-related responsibilities as assigned by the Dean of Instruction, Dean of Student Services, and/or President. Plan, develop, and implement innovative partnerships with business and industry in the community to foster a supportive economic development environment, including contract and community education. Assess community needs and develop partnerships and other collaborative relationships with business/industry, government agencies, and other entities.

**Drake State Community & Technical College**

April 2020 – September 2021

*Coordinator of Placement and Apprenticeships*

Coordinator of Apprenticeships & Career Placement is responsible for facilitating the industry partner recruitment of students by identifying, locating, and referring eligible students for placement in appropriate apprenticeship experiences. This position will collaborate with instructional and Workforce Development personnel to develop partnerships with business and industry and to assist students with industry apprenticeships, career planning, internships, certification, portfolio development, job placement and college transfer. The position also requires comprehensive documentation of job placement, salary, and transfer information for students. Perform other work-related responsibilities as assigned by the Director of Workforce Development, Dean of Instruction, Dean of Student Services, and/or President.

**Drake State Community & Technical College**

September 2019 – April 2020

*Institutional Data and Career Outcome Specialist*

Responsible for the Coordination of apprenticeships & career placement for facilitating the industry partner recruitment of students by identifying, locating, and referring eligible students for placement in appropriate apprenticeship experiences. Collaborating with instructional and Workforce Development personnel to develop partnerships with business and industry and to assist students with industry apprenticeships, career planning, career pathways, internships, certification, portfolio development, job placement and college transfer. Maintaining comprehensive documentation and databases of job placement, salary, and transfer information for Drake State students and their programs. Serves as the Drake State liaison for several different State and Federal government agencies. Assist in developing apprenticeship training,

career trends, job placement, institutional effectiveness, and institutional research through attending meetings, seminars and conferences. Perform other work-related responsibilities as assigned by the Director of Workforce Development, Dean of Instruction, Dean of Student Services, and/or President.

**Alabama A&M University**

October 2018 – June 2019

*Upward Bound Bluemen IT Specialist – Serving two local School Districts*

Supervise Upward Bound Program participants. Communicate effectively with target school personnel including guidance counselors and principals. Communicate effectively with person in target communities and university personnel. Dialog with program participants' parents/guardians. Assist with documentation of eligibility, academic need, services, activities, attendance, satisfactory progress, and test data. Visit target high schools monthly and target feeder school annually. Conduct workshops for parents/guardians and program participants. Assist with recruitment of eligible program participants. Assist with data entry and maintaining data in the TRIO database. Compile data for the Annual Performance Report and University reports. Track and disseminate follow-up data to all former program participants. Travel to TRIO related conferences and with program participants during each component. Perform other duties as assigned by the Director.

**Holmes Community College**

August 2014 – August 2018

*TRIO Administrative Assistant/Tutor Coordinator/Advisor – Goodman Campus*

Provides administration assistance to the TRIO Student Support Services staff and advisors; by answering, directing, and assisting with incoming calls, along with the coordination and

supervision of Student Support Services tutoring program. Assists staff in scheduling meetings, space, and conference rooms for workshops. Maintains office records, including budget information, purchase orders, statistical information. Prepares correspondence and compiles data for reports; provides information analysis for the Project Director to make necessary changes in project design and services for participants' needs. Processes documents, prepare handouts for presentations, create surveys and proofread materials for mailing. Assists in preparing reports for the institution and the U.S. Dept. of Education to inform about the progress of the project. Maintains accurate, up-to-date student records and database which includes documentation of participant eligibility, academic records, contracts, participation, exit and follow-up information. Prepares student transcripts and records as needed. Serves as liaison between students' work, clinical, supervisors, and faculty. Revises program forms as needed. Trains, works with, and supervises student workers. Assists in preparations of special events, receptions, or ceremonies. Performs other related duties assigned by the Student Support Services Director.

Online Navigator – Goodman Campus

October 2015 – August 2018

Online Navigator works as part of the eLearning team to coordinate support for their developmental online courses. They provide IT direction on navigating through canvas, online textbook, assignments and external resources (MY MATHLAB). To be a support system to reinforce Net Tutor and due dates to help a student successfully complete the online course.

**Northeast Mississippi Community College**

May 2009 – July 2014

Financial Aid Associate – Three different NEMCC Campus

Provide counsel to applicants on their eligibility for financial aid programs. Verify eligibility for

Federal and State financial aid programs including grants, scholarships, and guaranteed student loans. Perform application intake, evaluation, processing and awarding. Assist in the production of financial aid materials for both digital and printed materials. Counsel students on academic standing requirements and appeals process; review appeals for dependency overrides and budget adjustments. Conduct group workshops and represent the financial aid office at various on- and off- campus events. Work in cooperation with the Director in establishing downloads from the Federal Pell Program. Serve as liaison between both on- and off- campus work study supervisors regarding disputes and disciplinary issues. Represent the NEMCC at the University Committee of College Work Study Coordinators.

**VOLT/Hewlett Packard**

February 2007 – February 2008

*Print Network Administrator – Rockwell Colin's, Pfizer and Weyerhaeuser*

As part of the Global Output Delivery Services team, provided end-to-end solutions for various print routing in 24/7 environments. Worked closely with global team members during non-standard hours to ensure flexibility and effective communications. Collaborated with team to engage in the pursuit of subject matter expert (SME), project and transition management; improvement of delivery; support (GAP and normal); modularization of services; delivery of training; and creation of associated documentation.

**Lafarge North America**

March 2006 – October 2006

*Project Coordinator/Network Consultant – Corporate Infrastructure North America Wide*

Implemented comprehensive documentation and procedures for network team by providing recommendations for customer service and technological improvements. Acted as liaison

between technical staff and third-party telco vendors to ensure effective communication and fulfillment of all contractual agreements. Met all budgetary, network scheduling and Cisco equipment goals while minimizing business disruption to North American plants and offices. Served as Lead Network Consultant on Lafarge North American projects. Participated in network solutions design workshops with various third-party project teams to handle all technological and customer service solutions in the best interest of both parties.

**IBM 1999 – 2006**

*Project Coordinator – Project Support Office (Bank of Nova Scotia)(2004 – 2006)*

Created, tracked and monitored schedule of multiple technical projects including payments and change orders with third party vendors ensuring compliance standards were met. Tracked financial forecasting, management of customer purchase orders and project profitability. Acted as liaison between technical staff and other IBM groups to ensure effective communication. Served as Lead Project Co-Ordinator on all of the Bank of Scotia steady-state and rollout IMAC projects countrywide, which included ABM, Branches, Wealth Management, Distributed and Mobile Workforce. Participated in solution design workshops with various project teams on building, implementing and documenting new business support models. Trained and coached four new coordinators on major accounts as a result of expertise on the accounts and responsibility for leading them.

*Deskside Support Representative/Project Lead – Bank of Nova Scotia Account (2002 – 2004)*

Served as Second Line, Remote Technical Support and Project Lead in a highly charged Windows and Lotus environment at various locations. Provided day-to-day support of desktops, laptops and local LAN connectivity by responding to calls. Tested standardized configurations

and formulated requisite recommendations. Investigated, analyzed and repaired system failures, including software and hardware problems. Worked to resolve customer satisfaction issues and coordinated and led conference calls and e-meetings with internal and external customers.

Voluntarily and successfully streamlined processes on BNS IMAC Coordination Team while meeting service level targets, while filling in for an absent Coordinator. Shared information with other Coordinators which significantly reduced overtime. Built positive client and peer relationships by developing an understanding of clients and their project needs.

*Deskside Support Representative – National Internal Team (2000 – 2002)*

Provided deskside technical support for IBM's National Office which supported Windows and Lotus operating systems. Supported and authorized equipment (POS equipment, Printers, Scanners, PDAs) on various operating systems but primarily on Windows 2000. *Deskside*

*Support Representative – TransCanada Pipeline (1999 – 2000)*

Served as entry level technical support for an IBM External Customer. Focused primarily on installation, updating, maintenance and troubleshooting of HP, Compaq, Apple and IBM computers and software. Provided support to users in an efficient and effective manner with minimal disruption or downtime.

## **EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND**

**UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI** – Oxford, Mississippi

*Anticipating Graduation Summer 2021*

College of Education - Higher Education: Doctor of Education

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA** – Florence, Alabama

*Graduated Dec 2015*

College of Business – MBA Concentration in Information Technology/Project Management/ERP  
Systems using SAP

**UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI** – Booneville, Mississippi

*Graduated May 2013*

General Studies Bachelors - Minors in Business Administration, Criminology and Sociology

**NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY COLLEGE** – Booneville, Mississippi

*Graduated Dec. 2011*

Business Information Technical Associates – Phi Theta Kappa – Dean’s List